

USU's Physics Day brings fun, learning together for students

By Cassidy Hansen

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FARMINGTON — Middle and high school students attempted to shield their science projects, robots and model roller coasters from the rain Friday as they waited to enter Lagoon amusement park for Utah State University's annual Physics Day.

"Physics is fun, but we are all geeks here," said JR Dennison, a USU physics professor and the event's organizer.

"When I was in school, we learned about potential and kinetic energy by rolling a ball down a ramp. Really, roller coasters use the same type of physics as the ball and ramp do — but on a larger and more exciting scale," Dennison said.

As part of Physics Day, the nearly 9,000 students in attendance were invited to complete workbooks that featured problems about a Lagoon roller



coaster. This year, the problems were heavily based on using measurements such as height and acceleration of the new Cannibal coaster.

One of the most popular activities at the event was the Sky Drop, which allowed students to test the effectiveness of their containers at protecting an egg from breaking when being dropped from a high altitude.

"My container has a lot of duct tape around it, and on the inside," said Robert Lytle of DaVinci Academy, holding up a plastic jar covered in adhesive tape. "The tape forms a trampoline in the middle, so the egg doesn't hit the side and break."

But there was a twist to the competition: Not only did the egg have to remain intact, but students themselves had to drop their containers and hit an Aggie target while riding the Sky Ride to get a prize.

The first few students to drop their eggs missed the target entirely.

"My teacher told me to wait before I dropped my container, but I didn't listen," Ally Carlin of Utah Military Academy said with a laugh.

Lytle was the first to hit the center of the target, waiting much longer than previous students to drop his container.

Another area in Lagoon that was transformed into a science hub for the day was the Davis Pavillion. Inside, students displayed science projects on a variety of topics.

For example, Hannah Yarrington from Idaho Falls High School displayed her findings when she measured how long ice cream flavors with varying fat contents would take to melt, finding that fattier ice cream takes longer to melt.

High school students were also able to compete for a USU scholarship in the Physics Bowl. Questions for the preliminary qualification round included topics such as the twin paradox — the difference in ages if one twin were to travel at the speed of light to the moon, while another remained on earth — and total amounts of force in hypothetical situations.

Ultimately, the most dedicated supporters of the event were the parents and teachers chaperoning, as they corralled their students for photos next to projects and avoided the rain as much as possible.

"They are the ones who are working the hardest out there. I'm glad that they do it," Dennison said.

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—JR Dennison, event organizer