Team from Midlakes 'solves' 48-Hour Challenge

6/29/07

The five-member team from Midlakes High School, Clifton Springs, came up with the best solution to Alfred University's Fourth Annual 48-Hour Challenge problem - "Great Balls of Ice!" Besting 17 other high school teams, Kevan Donlon, Matt Haintz, Daniel Jones, Sam Latch, and Kaitlin Vander Weide took first-place honors in the twoday competition (June 25-27) by presenting the best explanation for the appearance of "large pieces of ice" which "plummeted" to earth in Alfred in late spring. Their Midlakes faculty adviser/mentor is Sharon Backus. The team from Dryden, (near Ithaca) NY Central School placed second, while students from South Side, Rockville Centre, Long Island, came in third. The winning team took home \$2,500 for its school and \$500 for each member. The second-place team received \$1,250 for its school and \$250 for each member, while the third-place finishers each earned \$100 and \$1,000 for their school.Additional participating schools included Alfred-Almond; Arkport; Cairo (NY)-Durham; Dansville; James A. Garfield, Garrettsville, Ohio; Geneva; Gilmour Academy, Gates Mills, Ohio; Hornell; Livonia; MATES Academy, Manahawkin, NJ; Nardin Academy, Buffalo; North Warren, Chestertown; Northwestern-Lehigh, New Tripoli, PA; Sacred Heart Academy, Hamden, CT; and South Lewis, Turin. The five-member teams are freshmen, sophomores, or juniors in high school. Participants were asked to suspend disbelief throughout the competition, said Dr. David Toot, AU professor of physics, director of the Stull Observatory, and director of the Institute for Science, Mathematics and Technology, which sponsors the 48-Hour Challenge. During the past few months, students had been fed clues of their challenge through the Alfred University Web site, but it wasn't until they arrived on campus that they learned the complete challenge ahead of them. They know ahead of time that the challenge will test knowledge of chemistry, physics and math with laboratory work required. After simulating the sample retrieval process and compiling an action plan, students were asked to analyze the specimen to determine its origin. Conclusions and procedures used were presented in a poster session. Teams were judged by the thoroughness of the investigation, the quality of the evidence presented the clarity of the explanations and the logic used for conclusions. In addition to laboratory space on campus, teams had access to the Scholes/Herrick libraries materials and the Internet.In addition to Toot, AU faculty assisting in the 48-Hour Challenge were Dr. Jalal Baghdadchi, associate professor of electrical engineering; Dr. Alexis Clare, professor of glass science; Dr. Andre G. Eklund, assistant professor of chemistry; Dr. Matthew Hall, assistant professor of biomaterials and glass science; Justine Grigg, instructor of geographical information systems; Dr. Eric Gaze, associate professor of mathematics; and Dr. Cherald L. Emmons, assistant professor of biology.