EDUCATION

North Park science students heading to national fair

SABRINA BURRELL
For The Expositor

Two North Park Collegiate students who wondered about the health effects of cell-phone use wound up winning regional science fair awards as a result of their curiosity, and will be heading to the nationals in May.

Grade 12 students Ream Elbadri and Emma Jennings entered a project titled "Magnetic Fields: Health Tools, or Health Hazards? in the 51st Bay Area Science and Engineering Fair at Mohawk College in Hamilton. The purpose of the gold merit award-winning experiment was to determine whether exposure to magnetic fields could damage cell growth, said Jennings.

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>
> *North Park student Emma Jennings*

"My mom is always telling my brother not to use his cell phone so much because it's going to kill off his brain cells," she said. "So I decided to see how much of an impact magnetic fields had on our health."

Students from across the Hamilton, Halton, Haldimand, Norfolk and Brant County areas put their thinking caps on for the science fair. Over 300 students in Grades 7 through 12, from 51 different schools, attended the event, which was held March 26. Exhibits ranged across five categories: biotechnology, Earth and environmental science, engineering and computing science, health science, life science and physical and mathematical sciences. BASEF awarded almost $140,000 in cash, prizes and scholarships to winners.

Elbadri said that she and Jennings used planarian (a type of flatworm that can re-grow parts that have been cut off) to check whether the magnetic fields would affect their re-growth.

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North Park teacher Richard Humpartzoomian stands with students Ream Elbadri (centre) and Emma Jennings, both in Grade 12, in front of their science project. The girls are heading to a Canada-wide science fair in Toronto in May.

They used three different levels of magnetism, measured by a Gauss meter, over seven days. The girls then recorded their findings and mapped the differences using a computer program to find which group had the highest re-growth and which group had the lowest.

"In the highest Gauss-level group, it had the most negative effect on the health, as well as on the regeneration of the planarian," Elbadri said.

In addition to the gold merit award, the two also won the Dr. M. Doyle Award for best biology exhibit, the Hidden Science Award and the OCRiT-SCCRI Regenerative Medicine Award. The pair will be moving on to the Canada-wide science fair in Toronto, May 14-21.

This was Jennings'a first science fair, but Elbadri has been competing since Grade 10.

"There were a lot of really, really well done science projects there, especially in the younger grades," said Jennings.

"We weren't expecting (to win)," said Elbadri. "We were very happy, actually."

Richard Humpartzoomian, teacher supervisor, said that the girls "took the ball and rolled with it" once they got their idea and the design for the experiment.

He said the girls were "humble" when they learned they had won.

The girls are now looking forward to the science fair in May.

After that, they will focus on their post-secondary education. Elbadri plans to attend university for health or biomedical sciences, while Jennings will study anthropology at the University of Waterloo.

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