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Tam students capture physics on film

By Chris Rooney
Mill Valley Herald

It's hard enough to grasp many of the concepts of scholastic physics, but to capture them on film is even trickier. Students at Tamalpais High School not only grasped the theories, but were able to display them on film and earn international recognition in the process.



A dozen physics students from Tam High wound up in the top 100 at this year's High School Physics Photo Contest, an international competition sponsored by the American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT). One photo took the top prize and another took third place.

"It was exciting," said David Lapp, the physics teacher in charge of Tam High's involvement in the competition. "Last year we had a third place and an honorable mention, and that was the first time we'd won prizes. So, we're very, very happy."

Lapp explained that the program involves asking physics students, about 100 of them, to go out and take photos that represent their studies in the real world. Out of about 1,000 photos, he had to pick 15 to send in to the competition.

"If the photos aren't very good, we tell them so and tell them to try again," Lapp said. "Their work gets steadily better through the semester."

In this case, some of the work got a lot better. Lapp said that the students who fared well in the competition were not seriously rooted in photography as a hobby, which was especially exciting.

"None of them were 'photographers,' but just physics students," he said.

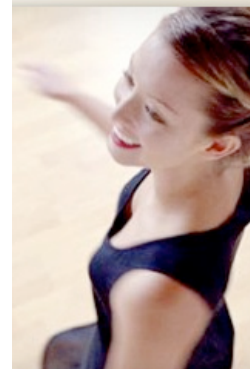
More than 700 students worldwide in grades 9-12 submitted entries and the top 100 finalists were voted upon by hundreds of physics teachers attending the annual AAPT meeting this summer in Greensboro, N.C.

The winning photos were selected for best illustrating a physics concept in either of two categories: "Natural," which means things seen in everyday life, and "Contrived," where the students can stage a photo based on physics lessons.

Annacy Wilson and Abby Rose won first place in the Natural category for their photo "A Cornea Acting as a Convex Mirror." Alex Kithas and Jeremy

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Ruskin received third place honors in the Contrived category for "Balanced Torques Demonstrated."

Other Tamalpais students with photos finishing as a top-100 finalist were Kara Erickson and Aoife Duffy, Noah Hopton and Paul Koch, Daniela Kretchmer and Travis Winter, and Taylor Chapman and Brice Tuttle.

One handicap to the competition is that the Tam program teams up students, but the competition demands that only one photographer be listed as the competitor. Lapp said he had to ask each pair who took the photo so he could fill out the paperwork.

"This is the strongest showing of any Tam High physics class ever," said Lapp in a prepared statement. "These talented students demonstrated their understanding of physics concepts in their everyday environment and showed tremendous creativity in composing the photos."

Students were required to shoot the photos and complete the essay descriptions themselves.

There is a cash reward from the competition. The first-place shot earns \$750, split three ways (among the class, teacher and student, who would split that share with his/her partner. The third-place winner earns \$150, also split among the participants.

Winning photos will be available as postcards and be featured in the 2008 AAPT Physics Photo Contest Calendar as well as a 2007 Physics Photo Contest Poster. All the winning photos can be viewed online at the website aapt.org/contests/pc07.cfm.

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