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## Zippity Do It!

By Cathy Dausman



From left, Riley Breul and Cooper Davis, who decorated their faces rather than their Rube Goldberg Machine Contest entry.

Photos Cathy Dausman

Fourteen Stanley Middle School student groups recently had fun not getting to the point. Rube Goldberg Machines are never designed to be quick. Students sported T-shirts proclaiming “I don’t do simple” and invented machines, using an assortment of items – bells, magnets, pulleys, marbles, xylophones, smart phones, gears, and recycled materials – to complete a simple task. Whether or not each machine worked perfectly, the groups all managed to hit their audience (200 family members and friends) squarely on the funny bone.

The Rube Goldberg Machine Contest was named in honor of a San Francisco-born Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist, sculptor, engineer and author. As a cartoonist, Goldberg dreamed up complex, comical “inventions” to solve simple problems. The contest is now 60 years old, and allows a new generation of students from middle school through college to appreciate Goldberg’s ingenuity.

Sixth grade science teacher Mike Meneghetti introduced the contest to Stanley 14 years ago. It ran annually for three years before becoming an every-other-year event, with 2014 marking their ninth contest.

Tasks in past years included popping a balloon, assembling a hamburger, raising a flag, and peeling an apple. This year’s contestants had two attempts to zip up a zipper, using at least 11 steps.

Participation was optional, but Meneghetti said the competition attracted “problem solvers who like to build stuff.” As a teacher, he consulted with contestants ahead of time,

but didn’t help them build their machines. The students were bound to learn.

Parent Stri Zulch said her daughter’s team (Nicki Zulch, with Lizzy Follmer, Shannon McVay, Sammy Martin and Cailey McVay) learned to use power tools while “the project lived in my house for two months.” Students were judged by a panel of four; two adults, and two high school students who competed when they attended Stanley. Lengthy run times and a “hands off” execution (no nudging from contestants) earned high scores. Entrants also decorated their project to reflect a theme, unless you were Riley Breul and Cooper Davis. Those students taped zipper goatees to their chins. “We didn’t want to design our project,” Davis explained, “so we designed ourselves.”

Meneghetti said 2014 was an amazing year for the Rube Goldberg contest, and he was really pleased with the number of contestants who stuck with the process, start to finish. After weeks of hard work, it was over in a matter of seconds. Winners included: Group 1 (Vasya Tremsin and David Ji); Group 2 (Sophia Browne and Lynn Wolfe); and Group 7 (Bianca Chao and Emily Sverak). Honorable mention for their contraption “Zipping through Time” went to Group 13 (Jeremy Ridge, Christophe Maiden and Jeremy Hathaway).

The disassembly took mere minutes, and although the Rube Goldberg contest was over, the laughter lingered. As one team’s project headline so aptly put it: “Zip, zip hooray!”



From left, parent judges David Osborn and Dave Bricetti evaluate Bianca Chao and Emily Sverak’s entry, one of three winners.

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