

# UT hosts state science contest to boost interest in science, mathematics

By Mitch Moore

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**T**his spring, the University of Tennessee's population of young, bright minds will temporarily increase by more than 700 when it hosts the annual Tennessee Science Olympiad State Tournament.

On April 5, 2008, 36 middle school and high school Science Olympiad teams will converge on the campus and compete for the right to advance to the national Olympiad in Washington, D.C., in late May.

The teams coming to Knoxville will represent the top finishers among the state's eight regional Olympiad competitions, to be held in February and March.

Dr. Jon Levin, professor of physics, the new director of the Tennessee Science Olympiad State Tournament, is enthusiastic about hosting the tournament for the first time.

"The university is working to do its part in meeting the greatest educational challenge in the United States and in Tennessee: producing more well-prepared students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or the STEM disciplines. I accepted the directorship of this program because the Science Olympiad encourages student interest and abilities in these areas. It is a way I can make a contribution to this important effort."

On the day of the state tournament, 18 teams in each of the two age divisions will face off in 23 different academic events. Each team will consist of 15 students.

Teams are based in schools throughout the state and are nurtured at the grass-roots level by teachers interested in promoting interest in STEM subjects.

"The Olympiad experience benefits all participants – students, teachers and



**Bearden Middle School students Angela Kirkpatrick, Lynsey Jones and Tor Vorhees load a pulley in preparation for the Simple Machines event at the annual Science Olympiad tournament.**

parents. The students experience intellectual growth, the teachers who coach the teams experience professional growth, and parents benefit as they learn more in STEM disciplinary areas through supporting the participation of their own children and the school's team," observes Dr. Lynn Champion, director of academic outreach and

communications for the College of Arts and Sciences, administrative home of the Olympiad tournament.

Realizing the broad influence of Science Olympiad programs, the supporting partners at UT Knoxville are encouraging the development of more teams in the state by underwriting tournament registration fees for 30 new

teams this year and publishing a brochure to recruit new teams.

Event subject areas range from anatomy, meteorology and food science to astronomy, oceanography and crime science. Specific events involve students in hands-on skills, showing them that science is about more than just taking tests.

For example, in an event called Scrambler, teams design and build a mechanical device that uses the energy from a falling mass to transport an uncooked chicken egg along a straight track.

In the Remote Sensing event, students use maps and remote-sensing technology to explain human land-use patterns and the relationship of a region's physical environment to its cultural landscape.

The Olympiad is administered by the College of Arts and Sciences, working in partnership with the UT/ORNL Science Alliance and the colleges of Engineering, Veterinary Medicine, Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and Education, Health, and Human Sciences.

The UT/ORNL Science Alliance contributes generously to the operating funds, and each of the supporting college partners contributes funds. In addition, each college provides facilities for the tournament events as well as faculty and graduate students to coordinate the events.

Headquarters for the Olympiad will be at the University Center, although individual events will take place at a number of different locations. UT Knoxville has served as the host site of the state tournament since 1994.

The competitions will take place throughout the day, culminating in an awards ceremony later that afternoon, when winners in the B and C divisions will receive trophies and the top middle school and high school will receive cash awards to help fund their trip to compete in the national tournament.