



HEATHER ACHESON/POST-RECORD

Helen Baller Elementary School third-graders Martin Knysh (left) and Sammy Burnett (right) have the launch distance of their gummy bear measured on Saturday during the Elementary Science Olympiad at Clark College. The "Gummy Bear Long Jump" was one of five competitive events held during the educational event, which was attended by nearly 300 students from schools around Clark County.

# Gummy bears go airborne at Science Olympiad

Camas and Washougal students attend the event at Clark College

BY HEATHER ACHESON

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**M**onty Scott, Amie Beld, and Hailey Vail huddle at one end of the circular table, hovering over the small, makeshift catapult constructed with a few pieces of wood and a plastic spoon that holds the tiny, chewy, sweet smelling gummy bear.

The Lacamas Heights Elementary

School fourth- and fifth-graders talk quickly, bouncing around ideas for how to launch the tiny treat so that it hits just the right spot on the target. They may not always agree, but that's what science is all about: trial and error, until the desired result is accomplished.

One after another, they launch and measure. Launch and measure. On one of their first practice attempts, the spoon breaks. Back to the drawing board.

The trio was among nearly 300 young scientists from schools around Clark County who gathered on Saturday morning at Clark College for the annual Elementary Science Olympiad.

Along with the "Gummy Bear Long Jump," Saturday's events also included:

- "Leaf and Tree Finder," where youngsters identified trees by using a key and leaf and tree part samples.

- "Mystery Architecture," during which students were given a bag of materials to build a freestanding tower as high as they could, but so that it could support a tennis ball.

- In "Pondering Powders," participants made observations and identified common white household powders.

- "Chopper Challenge" had

**See Science, page A9**



Continued from page A1

the aspiring scientists build and test two "choppers," built by using only pencils, a straight edge, paper clips and scissors.

In her third trip to the event, Lacamas Heights Elementary fifth-grade teacher and Science Olympiad coach Nancy Schaeffer led 14 kids to the Clark College event.

"We spend five weeks preparing, getting ready for everything," she said. "That's a process."

The Olympiad isn't just about science. The inquiry-based, hands-on program also covers areas including technology, engineering and math. Students from the Camas and Washougal school district joined others from Battle Ground, Hockinson, Ridgefield and Vancouver.

In addition to Lacamas Heights, competing in the list of five events were youngsters from local schools including Cape Horn-Skye Elementary in Washougal, and Dorothy Fox, Grass Valley, Helen Baller, and Prune Hill elementary schools in Camas.

Within the Camas School District, students were selected to attend the event based on the results of a mini science tournament held Nov. 10 at Helen Baller. One hundred thirty students from the five Camas elementary schools participated. Eighty-five of them were at Clark on Saturday.

Monty's mom, Kathleen Scott, said her son was thrilled to be selected.

"He was really excited," she said as she watched her goggle-wearing son perform tricks with the heavy metal tape measure in-between events. "I think we'll consider the day a success if nobody gets hurt."

She said Monty has displayed an interest in science. From cooking, to visiting OMSI in Portland and attending science events at the Camas Public Library, the fourth-grader is all about exploring the world in new and interesting ways.

"He loves to experiment," Scott said. "Sometimes he just does it to see what will happen."

Heidi Echeverio is a fourth-grade teacher and Science Olympiad coach at Helen Baller. She has been a teacher at the Camas school for seven years, and this the third year she has led a group of students to the elementary Science Olympiad.

She said Camas High School Science Olympiad teacher Ron Wright got the elementary program started four years ago.

"It's grown tremendously in the four years since it was started in 2006," she said. "Back then, we went to a tournament like this in Battle Ground — there were maybe 50 kids total, and this



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is what it has evolved to."

The goal of the program is to provide an opportunity for students to have fun, while also increasing their knowledge of science and developing their interest in science-related careers.

"I think it's a very educa-

tional experience for them" Echeverio said of the Elementary Science Olympiad. "They have a lot of fun and are learning so much. They are having to explore and figure out things on their own. It helps them realize science is fun."

A Dorothy Fox student joins other youngsters in participating in the "Chopper Challenge" at the Elementary Science Olympiad on Saturday, at Clark College. The event had students building and then dropping paper "choppers" from an upstairs lobby to the floor below inside Gaiser Hall.