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Science Olympiad nationals come to Colorado State University, where 2 Fort Collins schools will compete on home turf

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Elizabeth Bloemen remembers spending hours in the Poudre High School gym working to make the perfect balsa wood and tissue paper airplane. She took one of those planes to a Science

Olympiad competition 10 years ago in Washington, D.C.

It rained hard that day. The ceiling leaked. She and her partner were nervous the plane would get wet and their hard work would be all for naught. But the plane flew the best it ever had that day.

Bloemen, now a fourth year medical student, and her husband, Noosa engineer Bryan Graves, will volunteer at the Science Olympiad National Competition at Colorado State University on Friday and Saturday, when two Fort Collins teams will compete. It's the first time nationals will take place in Fort Collins.

Fort Collins' own Preston Middle School and Fossil Ridge High School will represent Colorado this year. Each 15-student team will compete in 23 events. They'll compete against more than 120 teams from across the nation.

Bloemen and Graves, who met while they were Science Olympiad teammates, volunteer for regional and state competitions each year, usually judging, writing tests and helping run the program.



Bryan Graves and Elizabeth Bloemen invited their Science Olympiad team to their wedding.
(Photo: Courtesy photo)

continued on page 2



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About 2,000 students will compete throughout the weekend in a variety of categories, including anatomy and physiology, chemistry, experimental design, forensics, herpetology, thermodynamics and more.

Kids will stay in the dorms at CSU and attend several workshops. The competition, as well as the opening and closing ceremonies, will be open to the public.

“These are the kids who are going to make the next round of major scientific discoveries,” said Steven Lovaas, president of the Colorado Science Olympiad and CSU’s information security officer. “The more we can expose them to a breadth of disciplines and get them to work together in teams for a common goal, the better we can prepare them to be those agents of change.”

The competition is a fun way for students to show their stuff. It also helps build work ethic and teamwork, Graves said. Through Science Olympiad, he learned how to utilize the strength of the whole team and pull his own weight.

Most of his and Bloemen's team have since gone off to do cool, science-based jobs, Graves said.

“The working world carryover is the dedication,” Graves said.

“Once you’re part of the team, it helps motivate you because others are working on their parts of the project.”

The competition gives kids a chance to build a social network around their passions, Bloemen said, much like a sports team would. Those friendships often run deep.

“We invited a lot of our team to our wedding,” Graves said.