

## **Cairns' Role to Change In Science Olympiad**

There comes a time in each person's life when it is important to take more of a very scarce resource, time, for family, friends, and other avocations. I am nearing that period.

I love the Science Olympiad and all the students, teachers, coaches, event supervisors, state directors, parents, and all the others that I have had to opportunity to work with over the past 20+ years. It has been quite a ride! To give you some incite into my reasoning for my change in role, I am going to reprint a couple of articles that I wrote over the past few years for the DTS (Delaware Teachers of Science) Newsletter

The column is known as "Cairns Corner". Some of the material concerns Delawareans only, but I believe the column will give the reader some insight into my world over the past few years. But before I do that I should forewarn the unsuspecting of you that I love puns. When doing literally thousands of workshops in my home state, I always preceded each section of each one with one or more puns. So it is with my column(s) in the DTS Newsletter.

### ***Cairns Corner #5***

I was talking to a friend recently who had just returned from Salt Lake City. He had been out to enjoy the recent Olympic games. He told me an interesting story that I thought might be of interest to science teachers. It seems that Bo Johnson won first prize in the

decathlon. As is the custom, his wife Judy Johnson was asked to present the wreath to the victor. It was Bo's first time at the Olympics. He didn't know what to do with the wreath, so he hung it over his arm. Immediately a voice from the stands shouted, "Judy's garland goes somewhere over the brain Bo!"

I've often been asked about the origin and early history of the Science Olympiad in Delaware. It all started serendipitously! It all began back in the early to mid 70's. A college in North Carolina (St. Andrew's Presbyterian) began sending out information to high schools in this region. The flyers concerned their Olympiad project. Each spring students from nearby states were invited to send competitive teams to North Carolina to have fun, learn science, learn about the college and earn medals and trophies.

I had been fascinated with the concept since I first got the info in the early 70's. I had always been interested in using games as a method of teaching science. In any case I had no money, and more importantly no time with three young kids running around the house. I really had no time to investigate!

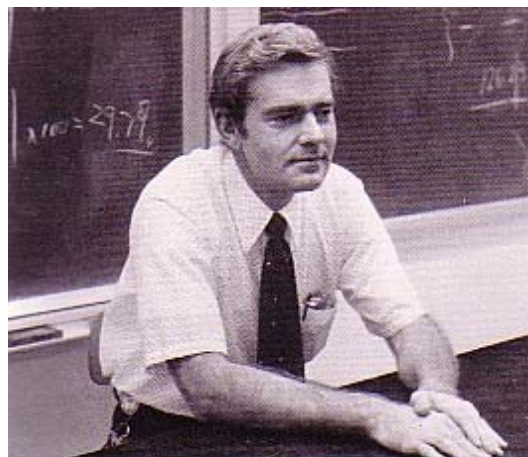
The Science Supervisor with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) was visiting Dover High School one day in late spring of 1975 and asked if he could do anything for me! I took advantage of the offer and as they say the rest is history. (Throughout it's early years, from the late 50's to the early 90's, the supervisors of various curricular areas at DPI/DOE were required to visit Delaware schools at least 4 days a week while they were in session.)

The State Science Supervisor, Dr. Douglas R. Mac Beth, visited St. Andrews the following spring and was most impressed with the operation. It was great fun for the competitors, a great opportunity for DPI to play an important role in the education of our children, and a great opportunity for a small college to showcase itself. In short it was a win, win, win situation!

In the late spring of 1976, Doug appointed me to the steering committee to organize an Olympiad in Delaware. The committee was made up of the following people:

Carolyn Haas	Physics Teacher, Brandywine H.S.
Jack Cairns	Chemistry Teacher, Dover H. S.
Jim O'Neill	Biology Teacher, Lake Forest H.S.
John Shwed	Plant Mgr., DuPont Nylon
H.R. Williams	Delaware State College
Emil Sammack	Research Dir., Playtex Intl.

The committee remained intact and oversaw the Delaware Science Olympiad's from 1976-1979 until Doug left Delaware for a job as assistant superintendent of schools in southeastern Pennsylvania. However some significant changes took place. Carolyn left Brandywine for Salem Community College in South Jersey; Jim left Lake Forest to run Parks and Recreation for Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), while I replaced Doug as State Science Supervisor at DPI.



John Cairns

(From 1977 Dover High School Yearbook)

But I digress. The committee decided to hold our first Olympiad at Delaware State College in the spring of 1977. At that time only high schools were eligible. There were 12 events and only 21 schools attended.

Events at the first Senior High Olympiad were:

Science Bowl (4)	Rocks to Riches (1)
Qualitative Analysis (2)	Titration Race (1)
Clay Boats (1)	Estimating (1)
Scavenger Hunt (1)	Name Organism (1)
Periodic Table Quiz (1)	Glass Working (1)
Quick Calculator (1)	Obstacle Course (4)

The numbers in parenthesis after the name of the event are the value of the event in scoring. Five points were awarded every first place, 3 points for each second place and 1 point for each third place. To determine the real point value you must multiply the place number by the value of the event. Thus a first place in Science Bowl or Obstacle Course was  $5 \times 4$  or 20 points, a third place in Qualitative Analysis would earn  $1 \times 2$  or 2 points towards team score. Team points were awarded only for the first three places.

Teams attending the first Olympiad were:

A. I. DuPont	Brandywine	Caesar Rodney
Cape Henlopen	De La Warr	Delcastle
Delmar	Dover	Dover A. F. Base
Glasgow	Lake Forest	Laurel
Mt. Pleasant	Newark	P. S. duPont
Seaford	Smyrna	Sussex Central
McKean	William Penn	Wilmington

Dover took the 1<sup>st</sup> place trophy with 49 points; Caesar Rodney took 2<sup>nd</sup> place with 32 points and A. I. DuPont took 3<sup>rd</sup> place also with 32 points. C. R. took second place in a tiebreaker calculated by the value factor as defined above.

Each student got an Olympic style medal similar to those in use today for first through third place. In fact, the same company produces the current Science Olympiad medals and trophies. Students in first place also received a small trophy. A traveling cup was awarded the first place team. However each school also received \$50 for each first place finish! The schools could use it for the purchase of lab materials.

The saga will continue next edition, but I needed to tell you something important... Two prawns, in the tropical waters of the Caribbean, were swimming around in the sea. Justin and Christian were very happy except that larger fish that patrolled the reef were constantly harassing them.

One day Justin announced that he wished that he was a shark; then they wouldn't have to be concerned about being eaten. As Justin had it firmly in his mind to become a predator, a mysterious cod appears and says, "Your wish is granted," and lo and behold, Justin turned into a shark. Horrified, Christian

immediately swam away afraid if being eaten by his old mate.

Time went on and Justin found himself becoming bored and lonely as a shark. All his old mates simply swam away when Justin came close to them. Justin didn't realize that his new menacing appearance was the cause of his sad plight. While swimming alone one day, he sees the mysterious cod again and can't believe his luck. Justin figured that the fish could change him back into a prawn.

He begs the cod to change him back so, lo and behold; he is turned into a tiny prawn again. With tears of joy in his tiny little eyes, Justin swam back to his friends and brought them all a cocktail. Looking around the old reef, he searched for his old pal.

"Where's Christian," he asked. "He's at home, distraught that his old friend changed sides to the enemy and became a shark," was the reply.

Eager to put things right again and end the mutual pain and torture, he set off to Christian's house. As he opened the coral gate, memories came flooding back.

He banged on the door and shouted, "It's me Justin, your old pal, come out and see me again."

Christian replied, "No way man, you'll eat me. You're a shark, the enemy, and I'll not; be tricked."

Justin cried back, "No, I'm not. That was the old me. I've changed. I've found Cod, I'm a prawn again, Christian!"

## *Cairns Corner # 6*

Scientists at MIT have reportedly announced that they have discovered a new species of weevil that feeds solely on cotton fibers found in men's shorts. The researchers have no idea where the species originated, and are appealing to the general public, as well as the rest of the scientific community for any information that would help to identify the insect. They are anxious to identify that weevil that lurks in the shorts of men!

I do need to tell you a short story about "how" the Science Olympiad helped me and others at Dover High School do a little traveling. During the fall of 1976, I had asked my principal and a good friend, Pat Lynn, for money to attend a Chem. Ed conference that was to be held at the University of Waterloo in the summer of 1977. I wanted to give him plenty of time to squirrel the money away.

With a very sad face he informed me that there was no money and there would be no money from the school district for travel. Budgets were tight and he had already had a 10% cut and was expecting another round of cuts. I asked him to keep me in mind should anything open up. He agreed, but was not very positive!

That might have been the end of the story except for the fact that I walked into the teachers lounge in March and another friend was describing a wild weekend that he had just had in Atlantic City. (This was long before gambling in AC.) He had just returned from a basketball clinic. He bragged that he

had not attended one session, but that he had been to every bar and strip joint in town and wasn't sober until he returned home. I was outraged and charged down to the principal's office in a flash. I walked by the secretary and into his private office and slammed the door. I wanted an explanation! He, matter of factly, said "that it was school district policy that coaches who put their reputation on the line every Tuesday and Friday are special people and further coaches of all other sports get similar opportunities to travel on district funds to attend clinics." He also said, "what they do when they get to the clinic is none of my business". I was asked to leave his office! I did, but I really resented the situation.

I now fast forward to the last Saturday in April of 1977. That was the date of the first Science Olympiad. As fate would have it I did not have my car at Del State that day. My wife had dropped me off early that morning. Thus I had to ask one of my students if they would give me a lift home. We won the 1<sup>st</sup> annual Delaware High School Science Olympiad.

I mentioned that we might want to make a stop on the way home from the Olympiad for I was sure that Mr. Lynn would like to see the trophy! As it turned out the kids were more excited about winning the state championship than I was and they all jumped into cars and we had a caravan of students and parents tooting their horns and generally celebrating being number one! The trophy was a large silver cup that said, "State of Delaware Science Champions".

The principal knew something was happening long before he saw us. He



Jack is congratulated by Harry Camper, President of the Capital School District Board of Education for winning the first State Championship ever won by a Dover School in any competition.

was working in the yard and heard the horns. We pulled up and he walked to the street. The students handed him the trophy. He congratulated the kids, shook hands with excited parents, and then said to me, “ I guess that you’ll be wanting to talk about that trip to the chemistry conference. I’ll be in my office by 7:15AM on Monday morning. Bring me an estimate of the cost.”

I’m told that the Board of Education changed their policy” to include any teacher/coach that put their reputation on the line” would be entitled to attend a workshop, clinic, or staff development project at district expense. The policy is

in effect as far as I know twenty-five years later!

But I digress...

Doug Macbeth led the first two Science Olympiads in Delaware. Doug left DPI in the fall of 1978 for an assistant superintendent of school’s job in Hamburg, PA. The next spring I took his place at the Department and I led the Olympiad for the next 12-14 years. When it began, all the money to run the competition came from donations that Doug got primarily, from DuPont. You may recall that in addition to medals, trophies were awarded to first place in each event and a traveling trophy was given to the winning team. Also cash awards were made to the school science department for equipment and supplies for placing first in each of our events.

The Science Olympiad was sold to the State Board of Education as a public high school competition. However the leadership at DPI was never “happy” with Doug’s solicitation of state businesses. After Doug left; no more soliciting was permitted by DPI; but they did provide funds from a high school funding line in the State budget. State money cannot be expended except in specific ways. It took several years to convince the State Board of Education to allow the Olympiad to charge a registration fee. The fee permitted us to obey the law and permitted the addition of non-public high schools. It also permitted us to begin to plan an Olympiad competition for Junior High School students.

The first Junior High School Science Olympiad was held on March 26, 1983. It was not called Science Olympiad but rather it was known as the Science Olympics. It held that name until 1985 when the national tournament was organized. For the first several years, we did things quite differently from how it is done today. The organization for 1983 was:

**Ninth Grade only**

Science Bowl (4)  
 Obstacle Course (4)  
 Password (2)  
 Measurement (2)  
 Super Magnet (2)  
 Glurch (2)  
 Periodic Table (2)  
 Bottle Music (5)  
 Each grade level competed separately!

**Eighth Grade only**

Science Bowl (4)  
 Obstacle Course (4)  
 Password (2)  
 Measurement (2)  
 Crystal Growing (2)  
 Rocks to Riches (2)  
 Kite Flying (5)  
 Map Making (2)

**Seventh Grade only**

Science Bowl (4)  
 Obstacle Course (4)  
 Password (2)  
 Measurement (2)  
 Name Organism(2)  
 Biomass (2)  
 Barge (2)  
 Finger Printing (2)

We added the following competitions for 1984.

Safety Poster (2)  
 Black Box (2)  
 Electricity (2)  
 Puzzler (1)

Tea Making (2)  
 Facts in Five (1)  
 Astronomy (1)  
 Puzzler (1)

Bones (1)  
 Scavenger Hunt (2)  
 Using a Key (2)  
 Biotrivia (2)

The numbers in parenthesis are the number of students required for each competition. Science Bowl and Password were played three times with different competitors for each round. Thus your four Science Bowl ninth grade competitors would be tied up from 8:30 AM until 10:00 AM. Scores for these two events were summed to determine the winners. The Science Bowl supervisors thus would be tied up all day with three rounds for 9<sup>th</sup> grade, three rounds for 8<sup>th</sup> grade and three rounds for 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

No overall winning team was named in the first year! In year two we added a school trophy for 1<sup>st</sup> place in New Castle County, 1<sup>st</sup> place in Kent County, and 1<sup>st</sup> place in Sussex County. (Editor's note. Delaware has only three counties and we decided to give first place trophies to the best school in each county.)

Registration fees were \$20 and \$25 in each of the first two years respectively. Junior High Schools were permitted one team only. The following teams participated during the first year:

**New Castle County**

Talley  
 Gauger  
 George Read  
 Middletown  
 Conrad  
 Skyline  
 H.B. DuPont  
 Ogletown  
 Hanby  
 Shue

**Kent County**

Central Dover  
 William Henry  
 Chipman  
 C.R.

**Sussex County**

Laurel  
 Selbyville  
 Lewes  
 Milford  
 Seaford

Each and every junior high school got at least one set of medals. Many thought that one team might take all the medals. This was not true. The medals were well distributed across all three counties and across the schools within the counties. We did a count of medals at the time. We did not take into consideration whether they were for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> place. So in terms of total medals Gauger garnered the most with 29, followed by George Read with 23, and Lewes had 20.

Once upon a time the son of a hard working woodcutter announced that he would like to attend his first village fair. His father agreed that he could go, but as the young man was leaving on his donkey, he called after him, “Whatever you do, do not take the shortcut through the Magic Forest!”

Pedro had a wonderful time at the fair. Unfortunately, it was very late when the singing and dancing ended and despite his father’s warning, he did start back through the Magic Forest. Midway along the path a gnome appeared and shook his fist at Pedro.

“How dare you trespass on our property after midnight”, the gnome cried! “Just for that, I am changing your donkey into a dragon!” And with a snap of his little fingers, he did.

Pedro was startled to find himself riding on a dragon. However, the beast behaved himself well and they finally made it home. The youth’s father was waiting up when the exhausted son crept into the house.

“Are you alright”, the woodcutter asked anxiously?

“Oh yes, father”, Pedro replied. “I had a wonderful time! But I have to confess one thing: “my ass is a dragon!”

I think that this pun is most appropriate! I have been creating, running and supervising Science Olympiads since 1976. It is, was and has been a very important part of my life. My children competed in the Olympiad and later acted in the role of event supervisor. I am hoping to get my grandchildren involved. In fact one of those other things I want to do is to help organize an Olympiad in Prince William County, Virginia since my oldest grandchild will be in the sixth grade this year in that school district. I want him to have the opportunity to feel the excitement of working toward a goal of excellence science and the excitement of working as a member of a team.

So I really won’t really be leaving Science Olympiad, but rather placing the emphasis in another direction. It was a gas and I’ll miss the summer workshops, the NSTA conventions, the Hammond clinic, and all the wonderful people that have become a part of my life along this voyage. Bon Voyage!