

School's odyssey includes big wins

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

If your vehicle were to suddenly break down, could you ever imagine something good emerging from that mishap? Doubtful.

That is, unless you belong to the seven-member Odyssey of the Mind team from St. Louis School in Pittsford. This group of fifth-graders has proven that optimism and quick thinking can turn around a potentially disastrous event. In fact, the end result was a state championship that earned St. Louis School the right to soon compete for a world title.

Odyssey of the Mind involves different interpretations of the same situation by participating teams. At the start of this school year, St. Louis School was required to select anything in the world and base a project around it. Team members created a model of a dying rain forest, which they attempt to save from their perch at an international space station. By growing flowers and animals not commonly found on earth, and using technology such as DNA sampling and cloning, the students transport these items back to earth — and, in doing so, bring the rain forest back to life.

This served as the long-term segment of Odyssey of the Mind; there are also spontaneous exercises during competitions. St. Louis School presented its project during regional competition March 1 in Canandaigua. Students were required to set up, execute and explain their project — all within a few minutes' time. St. Louis earned first



Courtney Rosenberger (standing), Ben Zeiss and Victoria Battle work on creating props for the Odyssey of the Mind competition.



place over 18 other teams in Division 1, and in doing so advanced to the state finals March 15 in Binghamton.

Which brings us back to the broken-down vehicle. While St. Louis was making its presentation at the state competition, the spaceship that transports items back to earth malfunctioned. But the students didn't panic, said Michael Geen, 11. "Nobody was getting down on each other," he recalled. The team simply made the busted spaceship a part of the skit, as if it were planned all along.

Later that day judges selected St. Louis as the champion of Division I, which included 17 other schools. When the team's name was announced, an emotional celebration broke out.

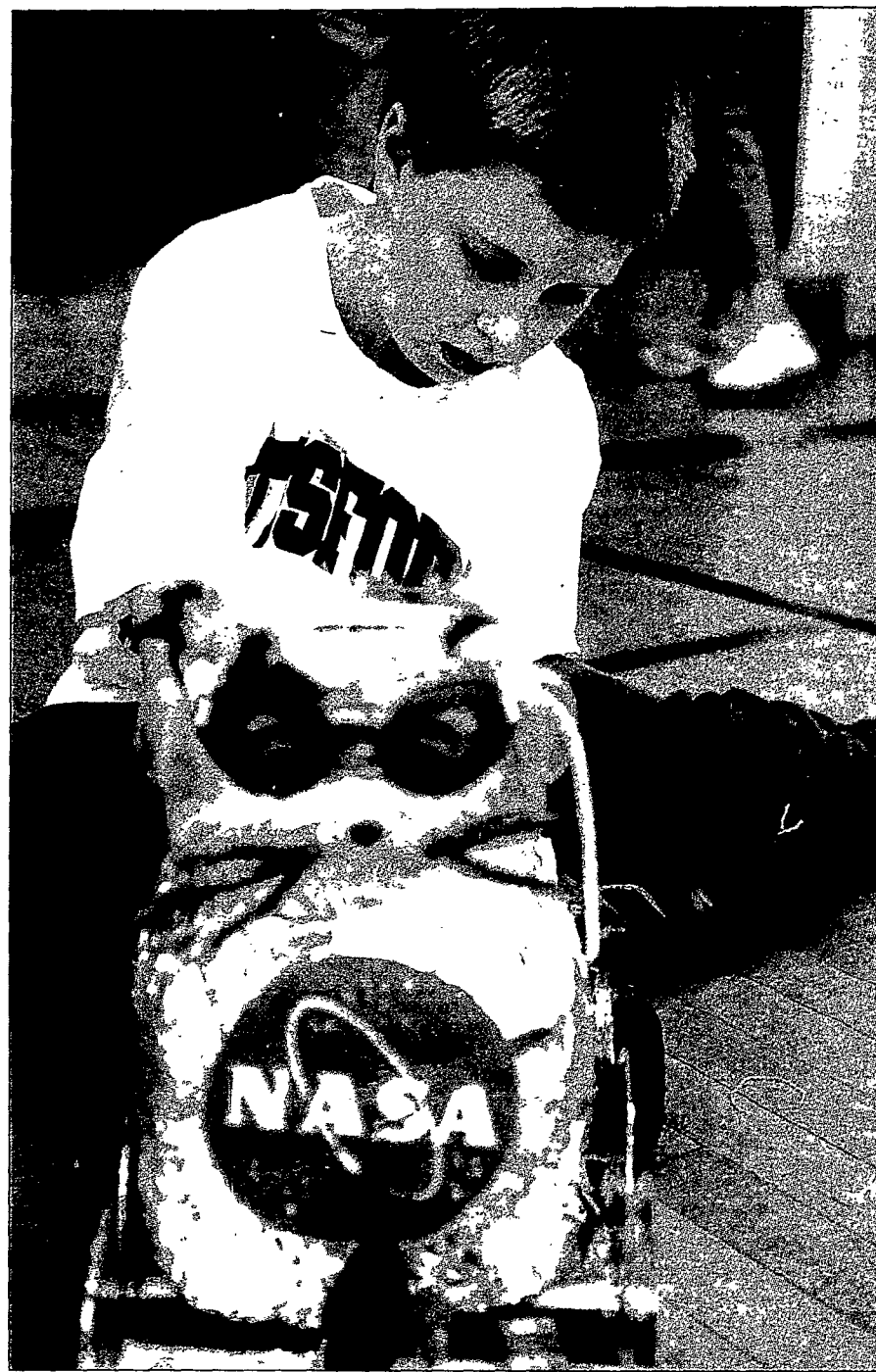
"My mom's crying and everyone's going 'Oh my gosh, oh my gosh,'" said Kyle Steenberge, 12.

Ben Zeiss, 11, admitted to being caught off guard when he heard St. Louis named as the champ. "We thought we had messed up a few times," he said.

The Odyssey of the Mind program is only in its second year at St. Louis School, and this was the first year of competing in states. So the first-place finish surprised the team's coordinator, Julie Reed, as well.

"We were trying to place, not necessarily win," said Reed, a computer instructor at St. Louis. Reed coaches the team along with two parents, Kathy Maguire-Zeiss and Sarah Ledy. Remaining team members are Tyler Reed, Victoria Battle, Cameron Held and Courtney Rosenberger.

— St. Louis' next step is a big one. The team now advances to Iowa



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

A team of fifth-graders from St. Louis School in Pittsford will compete for the world Odyssey of the Mind title at Iowa State University May 28-June 1. Team member Ben Zeiss works on a vehicle at the school April 27, which will be used in a skit the students created for the contest.

State University May 28-June 1 to compete against approximately 125 countries in the world finals.

"I'm excited about meeting people," said Tyler, 11, noting that he'll get to exchange Odyssey of the Mind pins with youths from other countries.

Win or lose at the worlds, team members are proud of their accomplishments and glad for their involvement in Odyssey of the Mind competitions.

"They make us think out of the box," Tyler said. "It's not like school — just sitting down and learning," Ben added. Odyssey of the Mind, Michael agreed, offers the chance "to be yourself, to ad-lib."

Ad-libbing is a valuable asset in the spontaneous segment of Odyssey of the Mind, where stu-

dents may be asked to name words or expressions with a certain word in them. For example, St. Louis team members said, they took the word "can" and came up with toucan, can of beans, "I think I can," and so on.

Creativity was also evident in the long-term project. The students selected a space station because Pam Melroy, an astronaut, is a graduate of St. Louis School. And, they devised interesting names for the characters they created: Neil Headstrong, a takeoff on astronaut Neil Armstrong; Dr. Leif Green; and Dr. Katy Did.

The opportunity to combine practical knowledge with humor and performing skills is a perfect fit for the St. Louis gang, Ben said.

"We're all pretty dramatic," he remarked.

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