

LOCAL



TED BRELLISFORD, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Mays Ali, left, was the brainiest at McMaster's Brain Bee, with runner-up Ayan Dey, centre, and Jennie Pouget, who took third place.

Brainstorming competition

Stimulating Brain Bee attracts bright students to McMaster

BY JOHN BURMAN

B is for brain, the three-plus pounds of grey matter between our ears most of us know so little about.

And a Brain Bee is a competition of bright young minds testing themselves on their knowledge of what goes on in their heads at McMaster University's Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour yesterday.

Twenty-three top high school students from around Southern Ontario faced off in the fourth annual Brain Bee for brainy prizes like computers, monitors and printers and a chance to compete in the International Brain Bee in Baltimore, Md., next month.

Mays Ali, 17, of Centennial Collegiate Vocational Institute in Guelph, took first place.

She's wanted to be a neurosurgeon since she was in Grade 3 and hasn't changed her plans yet.

"I was fascinated with how the brain works," she said. "I can't work at a desk, I want to be moving, learning and be challenged."

Ayan Dey and Jennie Pouget, both 17 and both from Westmount Secondary in Hamilton, took second and third place respectively.

Dr. Judy Shedden, who brought the Brain Bee to McMaster four years ago and has organized it since, says the idea is simple: attract bright young minds interested in psychology, neuroscience

Brain teasers

Try your brain on some of these questions used in Brain Bee competition.

1. Approximately how many neurons does the brain contain?
2. Stargazer mice are experimental models for which type of epilepsy?
3. Prozac relieves symptoms of depression by affecting what neurotransmitter?
4. The Greek word for the branches of a tree gives us the name of what part of a neuron?
5. The biological clock is located in what part of the brain?

or behaviour and give them a sense of what it is all about.

"It is a way to reach out to these students, parents, teachers and schools to learn more about the science, see what we have and consider doing their undergrad at McMaster."

The competition is broken up into several rounds of questions of escalating difficulty.

The first rounds were written answers, scribbled on a notepad in the 30 seconds allowed. Answers were then tabulated, points awarded and the

6. Name a brain disorder named after a famous baseball player.
7. Name the peptide that accumulates in the senile plaques of brains of Alzheimer's patients.
8. What is the leading preventable cause of mental retardation?

Answers:

1. 100 billion
2. Petit mal epilepsy
3. Serotonin
4. Dendrites.
5. Hypothalamus
6. Lou Gehrig's disease
7. Beta-Amyloid
8. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

six top students moved into the oral elimination.

This is where the tension gets high. The questions continue, with students stepping off stage until there were only two remaining.

Each student then answered questions in turn until one got one wrong or couldn't answer.

Ali won an all-expense paid trip to the international competition in Baltimore.

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City sheds light on repair contract

BY ROB FAULKNER

Will the street lights stay on?

Councillors asked that this week as they learned of a new street light repair contract that Councillor Sam Merulla calls "too good to be true."

Eyebrows rose as bids on a three-year contract varied by a huge margin: the high bid of \$11.1 million was about seven times pricier than the low, and winning, bid of \$1.6 million.

It left some wondering if the successful bidder, Ancaster's R.J. Cramm Electric (1999) Limited, was bidding on the same work as high bidder AGI Traffic Technologies, a branch of Aecon which helped build Highway 407.

Merulla doubted it would work out. Councillor Chad Collins questioned if Cramm can keep the city lights on.

Councillor Bob Bratina was "surprised" by the wide margin in the bids. Councillor Lloyd Ferguson said they'd be "foolish" not to accept a low bid, but questioned the need for more city staff to manage the street light system.

Hart Solomon, city manager of traffic engineering and operations, told the public works committee that Cramm is an experienced firm that can do the job for less because they are small, local and keep their equipment in the Hamilton area.

R.J. Cramm could not return a call by press time.

"It's not something we spend a lot of time talking about, but it's important," Solomon later said. He said due to underfunding, the city doesn't even know if its current rate of burnouts is average or extraordinary for a city.

"If we had more staff and some time to step back, we'd be able to do a more aggressive job of managing this asset."

In slide after slide, he revealed a need for repair: poles were missing chunks of concrete; shattered lamps had been used for target practice; exposed wiring snaked out of the base of poles; poles leaned sharply over a road; others were held only by their inner skeleton of thin, steel rods.

There is no replacement program in place for Hamilton's 12,000 poles.

The city's 40,000 lights, 12,000 poles and supporting cables and fuses are worth about \$50 million. Previously, repair was outsourced, most of it to Horizon Utilities Corporation. Cramm has worked in local rural areas for years.

But in 2005, city council approved a report calling for changes, such as



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

Bids for the street light repair program ranged from \$1.6 million to \$11.1 million. R.J. Cramm Electric won the deal.

establishing a standard of service, and possibly tendering the work if the city couldn't do it in-house.

The new contract has a defined level of service, with possible penalties. City staff say Hamilton must do a better job than it has since amalgamation, in part to ensure that contracted workers are meeting health and safety standards.

Solomon said Hamilton has an over-abundance of burnouts because it has delayed repair as it awaits a new contractor. Cramm will start in the next four to six weeks, he adds.

Solomon says the affordable low bid will let the city fix lights faster, keep more lights on and hire two city staff to oversee the street light network.

He told councillors the department "wouldn't survive an audit" because staff can't check to see if bills submitted for work done are actually correct.

Burnt out street lights — and there are about 3,000 of them per year — will be dealt with within five days. City staff say in nearly every case they'll be fixed this fast, and every light in the city will now be inspected once a month.

Solomon said Cramm's low bid will let the city save \$495,000 from its proposed 2007 budget for street light maintenance. The public works committee approved the contract.

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Anti-idling bylaw hits roadblock again

BY ERIC MCGUINNESS

An anti-idling bylaw backed by Mayor Fred Eisenberger is having a tough time getting through council's economic development and planning committee, which stalled action yesterday for the second month in a row.

Committee chair Dave Mitchell made it clear he's no fan, and Ancaster Councillor Lloyd Ferguson announced there's no way he will support the law.

"I hate authoritarian stuff," Ferguson said, "especially when it's unenforceable ... I will vote against too much government."

The committee held up the proposed bylaw last month to hear from the agricultural and rural affairs advisory committee about exemptions for farm machinery.

Members voted yesterday to table it until March 20 so staff can provide more information on enforcement, fines and exemptions.

Members also decided to hold at least one evening meeting to hear from the public before the bylaw goes to the full council for approval.

It's not clear how yesterday's tabling will affect the staff request for \$35,000 in startup costs and \$80,000 to employ one officer, considering that council is scheduled to wind up its 2007 budget deliberations the week of March 5.

Council directed staff to draft a bylaw almost two years ago, then refused to budget anything for enforcement last year, choosing instead to proceed only with an education campaign.

But Eisenberger wants the city to show leadership on environmental initiatives and said early this year it's time to put an anti-idling law into effect. He also called for a ban on cosmetic use of pesticides.

The matter was tabled yesterday partly because of unanswered questions and disagreement, but also because the meeting had already gone on more than seven hours and dozens of citizens were still waiting to hear rezoning applications discussed.

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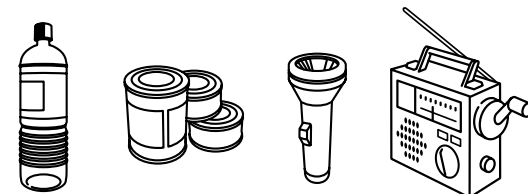


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