

# Science fair draws both young, old

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noon," Langan said. "He sat there for three hours."

LaShelle Lyman, 23, a 1996 UNL graduate with a geology major, gave demonstrations explaining the cause of earthquakes and the use of seismographs to measure their power.

She said even though many children enjoyed the hands-on experience, she thought attendance was low.

"It's just too bad that more people don't know that this is here," she said. "It doesn't help that it's a beautiful day outside and no one wants to go in a museum."

That was, of course, the opposite problem the Prairie Astronomy Club had April 12 when a blizzard forced the rescheduling of UNL's events for National Astronomy Day.

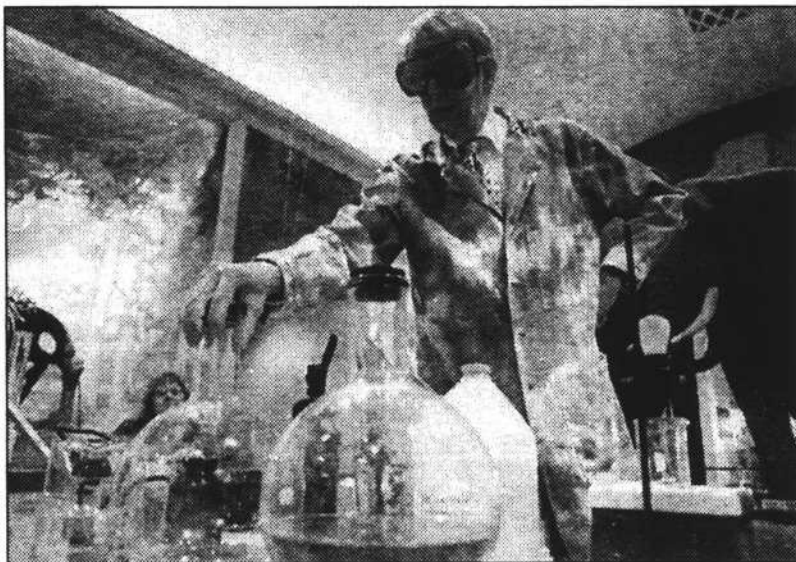
Mark Dahmke, 40, a club member, said Astronomy Day was rescheduled to coincide with National Science and Technology Week.

The astronomy club used computers to show the latest in Hale-Bopp comet photography, map the constellations and show the surface of Mars in 3-D.

"We're showing people what we do," Dahmke said, "what astronomy is all about."

Sophomore geography major Rose Ryan said the demonstrations were interesting and easily understood.

"It's too simple for college students," she said. "It's geared more to-



**UNL CHEMISTRY PROFESSOR JIM CARR performs chemistry experiments for visitors at the "Science is Everywhere" day at the UNL State Museum in Merrill Hall. The event was in celebration of Astronomy Day and National Science and Technology Week.**

RICK TOWNLEY/DN

ward grade school."

Lyman agreed. "Most of them [the demonstrations] are geared at getting kids interested in science," she said.

Corrine Kolm, 16, a Lincoln High School student, demonstrated the importance of seat belts using clay dummies tied to miniature cars with shoestrings.

"We're just trying to show kids that physics has a part in everyday life," she said.

Josh Bivins, a sixth-grader at Dawes Middle School, demonstrated the strengths of various materials against radiation. His project, which he had on display, earned him a purple ribbon in the district science fair.

"I'm honored to be here," he said, "that they would actually ask me because I'm a kid."

The highlight of the afternoon, however, was geared toward visitors

of all ages.

David Watkins and Mary Anne Holmes of the UNL Geology Department presented their recent findings that a meteorite or comet 10 miles across and weighing 10 million megatons collided with the Earth 65 million years ago.

According to their findings, it created the Chicxulb Crater in the Yucatan Peninsula and caused the extinction of almost all life in the Mesozoic Era, including the dinosaurs.

"The Earth itself would have been thrown up into harmonic waves 20 to 30 feet tall," Watkins said about the strength of the collision.

The lecture, titled "Apocalypse Past: The Asteroid Impact that Ended the Age of Dinosaurs," chronicled the Holmes and Watkins' research off the eastern coast of Florida where they dug 309 meters below the sea floor to find remnants of the disaster.

# Undergraduate research students discover meaning in tedious tasks

By JIM GOODWIN  
Staff Reporter

Nick Pleskac spent dozens of hours this semester in a laboratory handling thousands of sunflower heads.

He measured their diameters and documented the effects of moths on them, all for the good of his professor.

The tedious, labor-intensive research wasn't necessarily the most interesting undertaking for a junior biology major planning to someday conduct similar projects of his own.

It did, however, expose him to scientific methods outside the lecture hall.

"Getting involved with the actual logistics of the research project was very helpful," Pleskac said. "I can now see how each step of the process works."

Undergraduate research like Pleskac's is an integral part of a sci-

ence education, said Vicki Fisher, an academic adviser in the School of Biological Sciences.

Participating in a hands-on project gives future biologists and others a foundation on which they may build their careers.

It also offers the opportunity for more practical, comprehensive study and makes students more attractive to graduate schools, Fisher said.

"Most graduate schools do look to see if students have some experience with research," Fisher said. "Often our students also get published. These are both ways that a student may stand out in applying for graduate school."

The benefits of undergraduate research also reach beyond the experiments and educational experiences of students.

Professors, whose schedules are strained with teaching and research responsibilities of their own, also benefit.

Diana Pilson, an assistance profes-

sor of biological sciences, said undergraduate research allowed her the opportunity to better know her students and mentor those who might develop projects of their own.


Pilson, whose sunflower experiment Pleskac collected data for, said her research would take much longer without the help from student researchers.

"This (project) just takes hours and hours and hours of work," Pilson said. "There's no way I could do this without help."

For Pleskac, the effects of his research are far-reaching. Not only has his role in Pilson's project given him a fuller perspective on his studies, he also has met practicing scientists who are interested in his future and are willing to advise him on it, he said.

"The main benefit is that you get to meet and talk with professors about anything you want," Pleskac said. "You get to meet people you might not otherwise be able to."

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