MTHS senior takes first place in science fair

Written by Carole Mattessich
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Oysters on ice earn William Schroer honor

MIDDLE TOWNSHIP – Middle Township High School senior William Schroer, a resident of the township’s High Beach section, won first place in the Jersey Shore Science Fair 2011 held at Stockton College earlier this month.

Competitors included sixth through 12th grade students from schools throughout Cape May, Atlantic, Ocean and Monmouth counties.

Schroer won in the upper level of a category known as “Medicine and Health,” with a project titled “To ice or not to ice: How does icing oysters after harvest affect amounts of vibrioaceae bacteria?”

Er, vibrioaceae bacteria?

“The easiest way to describe it is as a family of bacteria that is very common in marine and aquatic centers around the world,” Schroer explained Monday.

“There are many types. Not all are dangerous, but a few strains are pathogenic, and those are the ones that are a concern to the seafood industry.”

Asked how much time he devoted to the project, Schroer said “quite a bit.”

He worked under the guidance of Dr. David Bushek and Iris Burke of the Haskin Shellfish Research Lab, Schroer said, and he was grateful for their advice.

“He worked very hard,” Schroer’s mother, Betsy Haskin, said of her son. “He wrestled with a number of ideas of what to do, but once he figured it out, he really went for it.”

Schroer was interested in science ever since he was little boy, Haskin said, noting the “Bill Nye the Science Guy” was the household’s favorite television personality.

Science involves a lot of trial and effort, and a lot of testing, but it was all worth the effort, Schroer said.

“I feel good about it,” he said of his winning project. “It was a lot of hard work, but I really enjoyed it. I enjoy learning stuff and discovering things.”

As a first place winner, Schroer now automatically qualifies for entry in the Delaware Valley Science Fair being held at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center April 5-7, and affiliated with Drexel University.

Schroer is off to Allegheny College in Pennsylvania this September. He plans to major in biology, he said, and ultimately would like to do graduate work in marine biology.

Oh, and as for whether icing affects those little critters subjected to Schroer’s microscope?
You bet your bivalves.

"Yes, it does affect the bacteria," Schroer said. "I found that the bacteria grew rapidly after harvest, especially when oysters are left out in the heat. But if they are put on ice, even after being in the heat, the level of bacteria dropped way back down to the zero hour level."