

High school students go 'head-to-head' at brain bee competition

LAFAYETTE - What do the letters GABA stand for?"

With the answer, "gamma-amino butyric acid," Ridgewood High School senior Pam Freed won the third annual state Brain Bee competition at Schering-Plough Corporation's Lafayette research facility.

Two Sussex County students completed the winner's circle in an international competition that tests the neuroscience knowledge of high school students. Ashlee Cary, a junior at Newton High School, the second place winner, will attend the national competition in Baltimore should the winner be unable to participate. Third place was taken by Sparta High School junior Michael Sobin.

Sussex County was well represented with more than half of those participating being local students.

Science Supervisor Tom Costello chaperoned his High Point honors biology students Anna Cassell, Josh DeGroat, Allison Ruggiero, and Emily Vroegindewey to the event.

"I think I will do it again. I will be back next year, and I want to come in first," said freshman Will Porter, participating for the first time.

Hillary Craddock and Robert Zenzian, juniors at Newton and veterans of the contest, made it into the semi-final round. For practice, the students get together and "have fun trying to stump each other."

Ashlee Cary, also from Newton, demonstrated that being smart doesn't mean being dull. The night before the competition, she had participated in her school's Prom Expo. John Trotta, a senior at Sussex County Technical School and second-time entrant in the bee, is headed for



John Trotta, left, represented Sussex County Tech at the Brain Bee Competition. At right, the team from Newton.

a career in medicine after graduation. Michael Sobin has his sights on programming computer games.

Rounding out the Sussex County contingent was a sister-and-brother team from Vernon, Sabrina and Teddy Moran, and Grace Wilson, a sophomore from Pope John.

The competition consists of a written test in round one, with the surviving competitors participating in a live question-and-answer contest on brain-related trivia, focusing on topics such as intelligence, memory, emotions, sensations, movement, stress, aging, sleep, and

addiction. Registered students were sent a study guide called "Brain Facts" from the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiative, upon which all the questions were based.

The International Brain Bee Competition is sponsored by the Society for Neuroscience and by the Dana Alliance, a philanthropic foundation dedicated to informing decision makers about the importance of brain research.

The goal of the competition is to motivate young people to learn about the brain and to pursue careers in the field of biomedical brain research.