

EDUCATION

MVTHS students take top state honors at SkillsUSA conference

BY DAVID BELCHER

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SPRINGFIELD — Mt. Vernon Township High School rules in 3-D design and animation.

MVTHS's Kolten McCulley and Austan Skidmore won the Illinois SkillsUSA state championship in 3-D design and animation at the Illinois Association of SkillsUSA Leadership and Skills Conference recently at the Prairie Capital Convention Center in Springfield.

This marks the fourth straight year a MVTHS team has won the 3-D design and animation state title — Alex Bahn and Amanda Mack captured the championship in 2005 and 2006 and Adrian Krehler and Emily Sweetin won the crown in 2007. The school also has a third-place finish to its credit.

MVTHS has only had a 3-D design and animation class, which provides students with fundamental knowledge of 3-D drawing, for six years — meaning MVTHS has placed in the top three statewide in five of the six years it has been eligible to compete.

In Springfield, McCulley and Skidmore had three hours to construct a 3-D commercial with a theme of "100 years of celebration of a city." The men said they had to build their commercial within such specifications as commercial length, how many frames per second and type of animation they could use. Their commercial animation was based on a mythical community on a waterway and featured a boat sailing out of the harbor.

"We thank God we got first," Skidmore said.

Gary Hatfield, MVTHS vocational drafting teacher, said there are three parts of teaching 3-D design and animation. He begins with modeling, creating types of design using geometry and modifying methods to creators.

"They are a very good team," Hatfield said of McCulley and Skidmore. "They both have very good creative minds. They tend to be very meticulous in set-up. They are very disciplined not only in their creativity, but also working within the set time they have to prepare their configuration. They were so successful because they work well together. They both have a strange sense of humor."

By virtue of winning the state title, McCulley and Skidmore will advance to the SkillsUSA national championship June 23 to 27 in Kansas City, Mo.



Sentinel Photo/DAVID BELCHER

CHAMPIONS — Mt. Vernon Township High School's Kolten McCulley, LEFT, and Austan Skidmore won the Illinois SkillsUSA state championship in 3-D design and animation at the Illinois Association of SkillsUSA Leadership and Skills Conference recently in Springfield. This marks the fourth straight year a MVTHS team has won the 3-D design and animation state title.

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MVTHS VOCATIONAL DRAFTING TEACHER

The MVTHS seniors said they are not sure about their specific plans next year. They both said they plan to pursue careers in the animation world.

In explaining the school's success over the years, Hatfield praised the school administration for "standing behind the program." Further, he said he has received support "from a lot of parents" over the years.

The school's first 3-D class has 12 students. There will be more than 20 students in each of the class' two sections next year, according to Hatfield.

Hatfield does not claim to be an easy teacher. "I make the kids work. I tell them there are no free rides. I live up to my responsibility to teach them there is a certain amount of good discipline in this and I think they like that."

By providing his students with demanding tests, he said that prepares them to study for demanding tests.

Hatfield said he tries to do in class projects similar to what is done in the "real world." Yet, he said he also tries to give the students "enough room to be creative."

He said 3-D design acumen may lead to careers in such

fields as animation, movie production or video game production.

"3-D is really big on the East and West Coast[s], much more than in the Midwest," according to Hatfield.

Hatfield said what makes the quintet of state championships even more impressive is that when competing in Springfield, Mt. Vernon teams consistently go up against Chicago-area schools with substantially larger enrollments. The only non-Chicago area school McCulley and Skidmore faced at the state contest was Triad of St. Jacob.

"SkillsUSA is an applied method of instruction for preparing America's high-performance workers in public career and technical programs," according to a SkillsUSA statement. More than 285,000 students and instructors join SkillsUSA annually, which is organized in more than 15,000 sections and 54 state and territorial associations with more than 9.3 million members.

According to the organization's Web site, "SkillsUSA programs also help to establish industry standards for job skill training in the lab and classroom, and promote community service. SkillsUSA is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and is cited as a 'successful model of employer-driven youth development training program' by the U.S. Department of Labor."