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## Senior Odyssey team putting what it has learned to test

By Paul Wood

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URBANA – Less than six months after these seniors started a project to sharpen their minds, they're about to take on another set of seniors, those still in college.

"This group, one of nine in our study, is going to a state tournament outside the program, the only ones in their age group," said MaryTerese Campbell, the assistant program coordinator for Senior Odyssey.

Senior Odyssey is a University of Illinois study headed up by Elizabeth A.L. Stine-Morrow, a professor in education psychology. The program is based on the international problem-solving program, Odyssey of the Mind, and is finishing the second year of a five-year National Institute on Aging grant.

Team members must be 60 years or older and do 15 hours a week of regular volunteer or paid work. The program has 16 weekly sessions before the spring tournament.

Current participants include Steve Palmer of Champaign, Peggy Yeazel of St. Joseph, Robert Lewis of Champaign, Ken Schuele of Loda, Helen Miron of Urbana and Charlene McQueen of Urbana.

The program begins with participants taking cognitive tests; they're paid for their time.

Then they're set to tasks, from word games to extensive projects.

Last Thursday at Lincoln Square Village in Urbana, they prepared for the state Odyssey of the Mind Tournament.

The Shockin' Seniors, as the team is called, has designed a balsawood structure that can survive a heavy load. (No secrets shall be revealed here.)

The shock part of the name comes from this year's Odyssey of the Mind problem, called "Shockwave," which is to design and build a small structure out of balsawood and glue that will balance and support as much weight as possible, while absorbing shock waves.

The "crusher," the Lincoln Square homemade test machine, is made up of "all the weights we could get" from weightlifting equipment, Palmer said. So far, the structure has withstood 577 pounds.

"This program has very specific requirements for the structure. Part of the work is testing to see what works and what doesn't," Campbell said.

Schuele, a Harry Potter fan, said there's also an element of magic in the structure.

Lewis, who joined the program on the recommendation of his wife, said word games and sudoku puzzles have challenged



Robin Scholz

Peggy Yeazel of St. Joseph gives a drumroll on a pot as, from left, Robert Lewis of Champaign, Ken Schuele of Loda and Steve Palmer of Champaign, all members of the Shockin' Seniors team, put weights on an object they made from balsawood as they practice for the Odyssey of the Mind State Tournament.

him, but not as much as the engineering behind the balsa structure.

"It's getting me to think outside of the box," he said. "Every time you show up (at Lincoln Square), it's a challenge, but when you think outside the box in this competition, the more outrageous it is, the better it is."

McQueen said the socializing is also an important part of the program.

"I can carry all my family members' birthdays in my mind, but when it comes to learning new names, that's difficult. Senior Odyssey has really helped with that," she said.

The team also will present its solutions in a Senior Odyssey Tournament at the University of Illinois' Beckman Institute from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 4.

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