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Ferris team places second in national Rube Goldberg Contest

BIG RAPIDS – A Ferris State University team has finished as runner-up in the national Rube Goldberg Machine Contest for the second consecutive year.

The Ferris entry, a country carnival-themed machine, placed second in the People’s Choice award category to one entered by students from Purdue University, which won the contest for the third straight year. The University of Texas was third, followed by entries from the University of Arizona, University of Michigan, Michigan State University and University of Toledo.

“We would have liked to have won, but Purdue did a great job,” said Tom Hollen, Ferris assistant professor of mechanical engineering technology, who accompanied the team to the competition Saturday at the Purdue Armory on the university’s West Lafayette, IN, campus. “It might be the first time in history, though, that Ferris has beaten Michigan and Michigan State on the same day,” added Hollen.

This year’s contest required teams to create machines that would replace batteries in a flashlight and turn it on using a minimum of 20 steps that employed principles of engineering and physics. While all of the teams used more than required, the winning machine’s 125 steps were by far the most. The Ferris machine took 56 steps.

Ferris’ carnival entry had a Ferris wheel, log slide, merry-go-round, swing and roller coaster. The story line was to have the manager come to work and check each ride before turning on the spotlight and opening the carnival.

Ferris student participants were Steve Bar of Nunica, Matt Battaglia of Wellston, Jason Cook of Sand Lake, James Johnson of Filion, Chris McKay of Ionia, Justin Terrien of Rochester Hills, Scott Tompsett of Hudsonville and Tom Sybrandy of Lansing. In addition to Hollen, fellow advisor Dan Wanink, associate professor of computer aided design drafting/tool design, also accompanied the team on its trip.

The teams received votes for the People’s Choice Award from more than 400 audience members. The contest paid homage to the late cartoonist Goldberg, whose drawings displayed whimsical machines with complex mechanisms to perform simple tasks.

The contest was organized by the Phi Chapter of Theta Tau Fraternity at Purdue. That school’s winning machine, built by students from the Purdue Society of Professional Engineers, simulated a rocket launch and a meteor impact on Earth that started a fire. While the mock fire was extinguished, the rocket turned on the flashlight to shine back down on Earth.