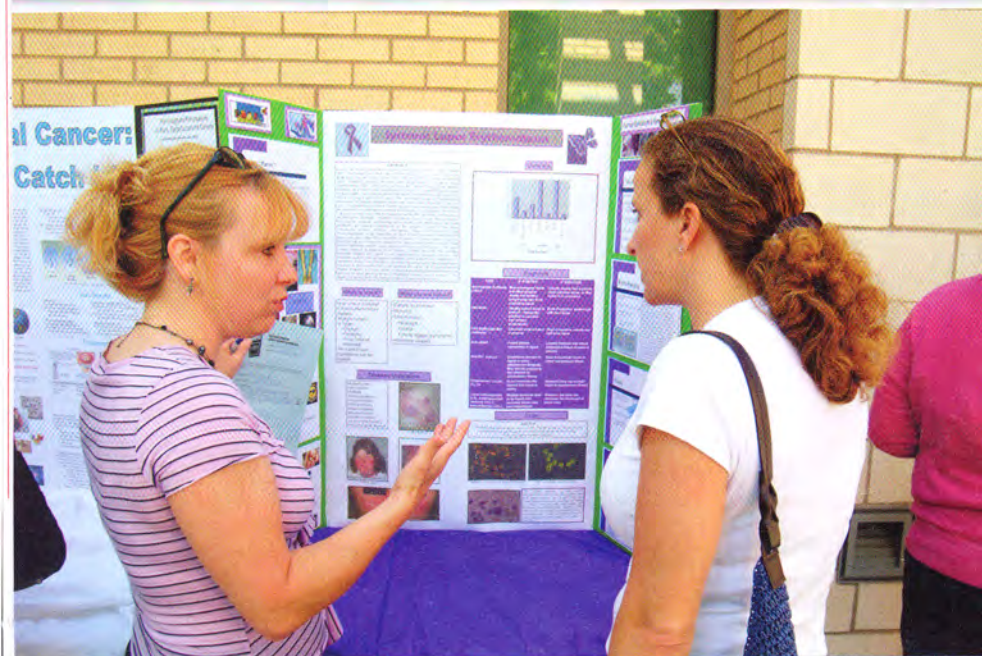


READY... SET... RESEARCH

by Holly HARVEY



Collecting data, analyzing samples and researching is usually what takes place in a cold, sterile lab. At the Cultivating Scholars Conference at Collin College, all the research and analyzation is presented in an accessible format that invites community members, staff and students to learn more about dozens of topics, ranging from insights into literature to microbiology projects.

"This conference is a vehicle for students to understand the importance of research and of presenting research for future studies and personal growth," said Cultivating Scholars Co-Director and Biology Professor Amy Helms. "The event simulates actual academic research conferences and gives students the opportunity to present their projects, field questions and defend their project."

To prepare for the conference, students spend months coming up with a topic, researching it and preparing to present.

"For some students, this may be the deepest they've ever delved into scientific literature and research," Helms explains. "For the conference, it's not acceptable to just complete a project that any high school student could do. All students are expected to look at the latest developments and research and go from there to create the best project possible."

The conference hosts more than 300 attendees comprised of students, faculty and community residents that come to see the latest research. Students often

take real-life examples from classes to work on.

In the past, biology and microbiology students have presented on Alzheimer's disease and even controversial subjects such as cloning, stem cells and biofuels. Engineering students have even brought prototypes of potential designs.

In addition to painstakingly researching and creating projects, students must present their work. Professors and other students often will ask questions about a project or the research methodology.

"A lot of students are very scared at first, but learning to present information and yourself is such a huge part of the academic process, as well as a life skill," Helms said. "This prepares them for the real world. I know I wish I had more of this type of experience when I was in college."

To present their work, students create and design posters for their projects. Attendees are invited to walk around the conference center and stop at each table to ask questions and learn more about a project.

In addition to student presentations, the conference also has a keynote speaker. This year's speaker is Texas-guitarist-turned-cancer-activist Rhett Butler. Originally a musician, Butler became a patient advocate after his brother Ashley was diagnosed with cancer.

"With our main speakers, we focus on someone who's engaging and relatable," Helms said. "Our speaker this year is inspiring, and I think people will hear him speak about going back to medical school and doing his own research and think, 'Wow, he's researching and working on things just like me. I can do this and I want to learn more.'"

For more information about the Collin College Cultivating Scholars Conference, visit <http://www.collin.edu/cultivatingscholars/>.