

# Odyssey

## More than 200 area kids use mind power to solve problems

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI  
SPECIAL WRITER

Fifth-grader Matt Lachowski summed up the purpose of Odyssey of the Mind during a practice session of the international competition Saturday when he said: "Before I wasn't that good at working with other people and now I'm better."

Like the other 200 Farmington students involved in OM, the Beechview Elementary School student will go on to the next step, the regional level in March. The winners of that competition will go on to the state level at Central Michigan University and finally the world competition in Tennessee.

There are 26 teams from Farmington Public Schools, as well as Our Lady of Sorrows and St. Fabian Catholic schools.

### Mind sport

Referring to the program as an aerobic mind sport, Diane Matous, OM parent coordinator, explained: "They're developing creative problem-solving skills and teamwork — just like in the workplace. Everyone has to work together and give different ideas. It's going beyond the obvious and thinking of something original."

The halls of Farmington High School were filled 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday as students — separated by age groups from kindergarten through 12th grade — performed their skits and solved problems verbally, as well as silently. Teams identified their strengths and weaknesses during this practice session.

■ **'If you got into a fight, have a snack.'**

**Leonard Garbou**  
St. Fabian third-grader

One problem, for example, involved designing and building a vehicle that visits three countries. While in each country the vehicle must initiate one cultural event, as well as collect souvenirs. Meanwhile, each team is asked to change the mode of propulsion and cross different terrain, including a team-designed mountain.

"The team members do all the work, writing the scripts and making props," Matous said.

### Secrets of success

In the spontaneous portion of the program students are forced to think quickly. For example, the teams were asked to blindfold one member while the others use sounds to indicate direction.

After her team captured many of the circles, Our Lady of Sorrows fifth-grader Christina Geromotta explained the secret of their success: "You have to be a good listener."

Her teammate Liana Maffezzoli, also a fifth-grader at Our Lady of Sorrows, said she enjoyed working on the program, because she made new friends "and you learn how to compromise and solve things creatively."

Katie Markey, a sixth-grader, added: "If you want to be good, you have to work with your team."

Anne Argiroff, a coach for a kindergarten through second-grade team from Wooddale Ele-



**Guidance sought:** Chetana Venkataram, a second-grader from Gill, looks to her coach for direction as she assembles the set.

mentary, was pleased to learn that her team was able to quickly adapt to the unexpected.

"A prop (during a skit) was missing and they handled it perfectly," said Argiroff, explaining that the children continued their performance and pretended everything was as they planned.

"From starting out with 12 kids running around the room, they really pulled together," Argiroff said.

Paul Oleszkowicz, an Our Lady of Sorrows team coach, said keeping a hands off approach is difficult for the adults, but necessary.

"The hardest thing as a coach is letting them do it on their own," Oleszkowicz said. "They can do it."

### Problem solving

In the process, the students learn strategies for creative problem solving; to take on new challenges; develop team spirit and strive for creative and original solutions.

"The competition factor makes them try harder, do more than what is required and give attention to details," Matous said.

Organizers find that the teams go beyond what is asked.

"A lot of them have told me over the years that they like OM, because no one can tell them how to do it," Matous said. "It's theirs."

Full of excitement and vigor before a competition Saturday, Katie Hess and her best friend, Nina Dikani, both second-grade Wooddale students, said they enjoyed working on their skit, because they're creating a fantasy.

Nicole Bober and Katie Matous, Mercy High School students, have been involved in the program for 10 years. Acting as judges this year during the practice competition, Katie Matous said, the program has helped her to think in abstract and understand how to get along with different personalities.

Spoken like a future executive, Bober added: "It's shown me how to manage situations under pressure."

Leonard Garbou, a St. Fabian third-grader, had a simple solution for conflict resolution: "If you get into a fight, have a snack."

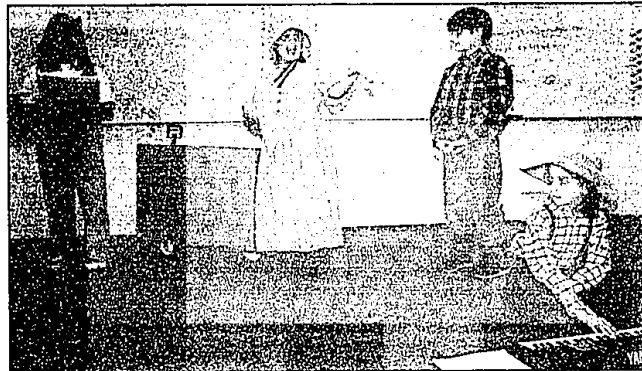
His teammate Ajay Venkataram, a fifth-grader said: "You learn to think on your feet. And I have new friends now."

"I learned you can't fight, because if you fight, it gets you nowhere," said Michelle Oleszkowicz, a fifth-grader at Our Lady of Sorrows.

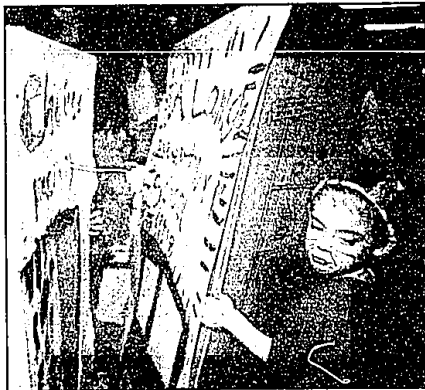
Keep it simple, is the advice of another Our Lady of Sorrows teammate, Ashley Buckley, who said: "You have to be creative and if you think about it, you don't have to make it that hard. Make it simple and it's easier."



**Q&A:** Our Lady of Sorrows Elementary third-graders answer questions asked by judges on how they created their play. Left to right are David Perry, Alexa Buckley, Mary Malaney, Alyssa Ciapala, Kelsey Maxwell. Non-performing participants were George Strathearn and Brock Hixon.



**To be wed:** Loren Evola plays keyboard as she and her fellow Hillside Elementary School friends perform a play in which there was a proposal of marriage on the Oregon Trail. From left are Laura Miller, Meghan Carter, Alex Goldberg. Also on the team are Daniel Kruper and Julianne Allemang.



**Lugging the props:** Kindergartner Alex Doyle moves part of the set after performing with kids from Lanigan Elementary.

## Police seek armed hammer robbers

Farmington Hills police are looking for two men who've robbed two convenience stores and one gas station by using a hammer to threaten clerks.

At 3 a.m. Tuesday, the pair robbed the 7-Eleven on Orchard Lake and 13 Mile, emptying the cash drawer. They also stole lottery tickets and a bottle of Absolut vodka. No one was injured.

On Jan. 27, masked men held up the 7-Eleven on Middlebelt and 10 Mile, making off with cash and cigarettes. A Shell gas station was robbed when two men — this time using an ice scraper — threatened a clerk and

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empty a cash drawer on Jan. 6. "We believe they are related," Assistant Chief Chuck Nobus said. "The (methods used) are so distinct."

Police are exchanging information with Madison Heights and Ferndale departments on similar

robberies there.

In the Shell robbery, someone saw a light blue 1997 or '98 Ford Probe or Taurus at the scene.

Anyone with information is asked to phone Farmington Hills police at 473-9660.

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