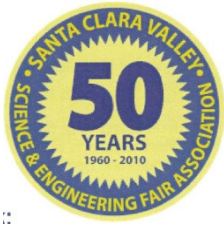


Short History



The Santa Clara Valley Science and Engineering Fair Association (SCVSEFA) will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2010.

FIFTY YEARS!

In the words of early board members:

"The major benefits to youth participating are recognition for their work, contact with others interested in science, and the opening of doors to industry or other outlets for their talents." – Richard J. Castronovo (1966-67)

"The Fair was founded to encourage students and recognize them for work done in science and to promote their interests in scientific vocations." – Dr. Oreon Keesler

"Science Fair is one of the most effective ways of providing recognition and incentive to responsible young students who are concerned about our problems and are willing to work to solve them."
– Everett H. Layne (1965-1971)

The board's Mission statement is "To awaken more students to the wonder and power of science and engineering."

This is accomplished by holding an annual regional Science and Engineering Fair, with the concomitant planning, publicity, recruitment of volunteers, securing of financial support, arranging for venues, and many other tasks. Participation is usually 700 to 900 students.

In the early days, the Fair was held at the County Fairgrounds – in Pavilion Hall, then Fiesta Hall, and in 1980 moved to Exposition Hall for more space. The Awards Ceremony was there, too, and in those more leisurely times there were days for school field trips to see the projects, and public viewing. At one time students in grades 1-5 could enter, but since the late 1990's, it's been limited to any Santa Clara County student in 6th to 12th grades – public school, private, parochial, or home-schooled.

The Fair moved to Parkside Hall in San Jose in the 1990's, and then to the Convention Center proper in 2000, with the infusion of major funding from the Synopsys Outreach Foundation. After the Fairgrounds, the Awards Ceremonies were moved to the Foothill College Theater, then to West Valley Junior College's multi-purpose room for a year, then to NASA, and then to Great America, which has provided theater space and park tickets as an in-kind donation since 2000.

Until 1995, the judging was done without the students present. Since then, a project is never judged without talking to the student – the awards are based on the students' explanations and defenses of their work, and the displays are accessory to that. Incidentally, we have had students visiting our Fair from Russia, with their projects, since 2001, a unique educational experience for them and for us! (the projects are displayed, but not 'officially' judged).

Team projects were added, subtracted, then included again – many such changes occurred based on what the International Science Fair, ISEF, was doing. Categories were added and changed over the years, also. Vertebrate animals were permitted as part of the displays until 1970. Then invertebrate animals had to be left at home, then plants – pictures were encouraged in their place. Federal and state laws create some of the limits, the ISEF rules and practicality (size, noise) limit the displays further. Rules also have to be modified as technical developments occur (like lasers).



Short History continued

Tech papers were added in 1980, optional entries in addition to the physical projects they were based on. NASA judges read the tech papers, which became so numerous they were limited in recent years to only high school students. About the same time, “product-comparison projects” were limited to lower grades.

In 1984, the logo was “modernized” by artists at NASA, and now it looks like a jagged lightning bolt, but is actually a representation of a computer chip, without all its leads.

The Board began presenting fall Student Clinics in 1975, brainstorm of board member Pat Pizzo. They provide hints about how to select a project and what makes a good display, besides clarifying rules and answering general questions. These are aimed at potential student participants, parents, and teachers. We also have Teacher Workshops now, to help navigate the paperwork and to provide resources, practical advice, and encouragement.

The first computer database was created by Peter Castro, in 1980, for the 1981 Fair, while he was still a high-school student, because the data volume had become too great to handle manually. He rewrote the code, in improving computer languages, until he left for college. Kathy Gannon of HP took it over until Peter graduated, returned to the area, joined the Board, and carried on. Participation certificates were hand-typed and hand-signed until the late 1990’s. A committee of board members created our first web site, around 1995.

Since 1977, our Grand Prize winners go on to the ISEF. (We must provide funding, chaperones, logistics.) Until 2000, this was always two high school students – the individuals with the best project in the Biological Sciences and the best in the Physical

Sciences categories. Since then, we’ve had more affiliations with ISEF, and have been able to send up to six individual projects and three team projects each year.

We have also been sending students on to the CSSF (California State Science Fair) since 1974. Sponsored students are the Grand Prize Alternates, and the Isabelle Stone Award winners (best 6th, 7th, and 8th grade projects in the Biological Sciences) and the Castro Family Award winners (same in the Physical Sciences.)

Our Championship Board of Director’s awards are the Horace Lucich Outstanding Teacher Awards, the Callahan Tech Paper Awards, and the Schonert Award (for a high school project in marine biology or environmental science.) Special Awards from corporate and governmental agencies are numerous and varied including summer work-fellowships. We appreciate the organizations which present them for their interest in supporting youth science.

Why do we keep doing this? As long-term member Dick Schonert once said: “I am a science educator, I love kids, and the board members are one of the nicest groups of people I’ve ever worked with.” We continue to support science education and provide the venue for science students to shine.

