The state compete in programming challenges

t's Terminal

Erica Shaffer
Staff Writer

The K-State Union ballroom may not have been the war room in Dr. Strange love, but there certainly was enough hardware—and enough talent—to cause some havoc Wednesday. Fortunately, the occasion was more benign. More than 40 teams of bright, talented high school students gathered for the fourth annual High School Programming Contest, sponsored by the K-State department of computing and information sciences. Several area schools participated, including Wamego, Wabaunsee, Junction City High schools.

Schools could field up to three teams of no more than four students. Students were allowed to compete at either a beginning or advanced level. They also had to bring their own hardware, software and power strips. Any programming language could be used in the competition.

The contest consisted of six rounds.

"We give the students a problem and we give them 25 minutes to solve the problem," said Rodney Howell, one of the contest organizers. "They get bonus points for any time left in the round." A typical programming problem could be writing a program to find the square root of a number, without having the benefit of a button on a calculator that will figure it out for you.

Contest officials projected the time remaining onto a screen set up over the stage. They only had two opportunities to solve the problems for points. Once the programmers got the cue to begin, nothing could break their concentration, not even a rowdy, impromptu performance by the cast of "Hair" in the courtyard one floor below.

"Generally we don't have teams that color graphics. One game put the player behind a gun that, when it came upon unsuspecting bad guys, blasted them to Kingdom Come in a spray of blood. The students really enjoyed this game.

But when time came for the next round to begin, students made a mad dash for their stations.

The contest wasn't just an opportunity for the students to show off their programming stuff. Competitors were treated to lunch and a tour of the Nichols Hall. Not a bad recruiting tool.

"A number of the students that have competed in the contest end up coming to K-State and majoring in something within the College of Engineering," Howell said.

The students can see what the university has to offer in the way of facilities and interact with faculty they may be learning a few tricks from in the future.

When the contest ended, team Raider 2 from Shawnee Mission South captured first place in the advanced division by scoring points in all the rounds. Team CR from Olathe East High School took first place in the beginner category.

Cousins Charlie and William Killian, both 17, Asher Morts, 15, and Tegan Teske and William Killian of Wamego wait to line out if they have the correct answer.

Ben Voight from Smokey Hill reacts after Eric Schmidt reveals that he has the incorrect answer. Voight, 14, was the only one-man team at the competition.

See No. 1, Page E6