

NRCS Employee Shines as Science Bowl Volunteer Coordinator

By: Joanna Pope, State Volunteer Coordinator

Last February over 100 volunteers gave up their Saturday to provide the opportunity for 400 high school and middle school students to compete in the Nebraska Science Bowl. This competition encourages top science and math students from across Nebraska to showcase their knowledge, network with other science students, and to excel in these areas of academics.

Arlis Plummer, hydraulic engineer at the Nebraska NRCS state office in Lincoln, Neb., has been a dedicated volunteer for the Nebraska Science Bowl competitions for 14 years – since the very beginning of the competition. She has served as the lead volunteer recruiter for the Science Bowl for at least half that long. You could say that she has gotten this duty down to a “science”!

The principal component to the success of the Science Bowl is its NRCS Earth Team volunteers. Volunteers are working professionals, retired scientists, students, former contestants and citizens who share an interest in promoting science and math education in Nebraska. Arlis works hard to recruit and train volunteers each year.

These volunteers expose students, professors, and the general public to NRCS, its’ mission and opportunities and to the Earth Team program. The students, their coaches/teachers and parents leave the competition with compliments on the high quality of the Earth Team volunteers, and have a very favorable impression of NRCS and the Earth Team.

Arlis continues working to increase the amount of partners involved with the Science Bowl. She has formed a partnership with University of Nebraska-Lincoln to advertise for volunteers on campus. Arlis also worked with Upward Bound, which is a group of minority high school students that are facing some sort of barrier and are less likely to go to college. She wanted to seek out these students who may not be exposed to professionals in science careers. The competition now has now had Upward Bound students volunteer while some have formed teams to compete.

Arlis not only recruits volunteers, she has made it a family affair. Her entire family volunteers for the competitions. When Arlis’ youngest, Ian, was too young to volunteer, she brought him for the day anyway, and he would play under the official’s table while she did her volunteer duties. He now is a volunteer for the competition.



Arlis Plummer, NRCS hydraulic engineer at the Lincoln state office has volunteered to serve as the state’s Science Bowl competition volunteer coordinator since the competitions began 14 years ago. This NRCS-sponsored event is ran completely by volunteers - most of which were recruited by Arlis.

Both of Arlis' children have gone full circle with the Science Bowl. They served as volunteers, went on to compete in High School, and then came back to volunteer for the event as a college students. Following their mom's example, they recruit volunteers from their colleges to help out at the Science Bowl.

This is a very large event that takes a huge amount of volunteer support to pull off. Without Arlis' support and dedication to the Science Bowl it may not have grown into one of the premier competitions in the state. Every year it's a challenge to get enough volunteers. Somehow Arlis always makes it work! ♦

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