**SJHS student captures silver at national event**

**by Sandra Davis - Sunday, June 5, 2005**


David Nickerson photo/Telegraph-Journal

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A conversation among family about why yawning seems to be contagious spurred a 15-year-old Saint John High School student to enter a science fair that has won her a silver medal at a Canada-wide event for students Grades 7 to 12.

The mimicking phenomenon so piqued the interest of Jordan LeBouthillier that she decided to take it a step further, convincing 125 friends and acquaintances - age 10 to 80 - to participate in what she said was a memory test.

But as she purportedly read her subjects the test's instructions, she was actually conducting an experiment that she hoped would shed some light on the power of subliminal messaging.

"I'd do things like cross my legs, scratch my arm, yawn, and check to see if they mimicked the things I was doing," she said.

A hidden camera videotaped the sessions so she could review them and provide visual proof to send to science-fair judges.

She tried to control variables in the room, like lighting and other distractions, to create a level playing field and set a base for measuring her results by testing 20 of her subjects without accompanying actions to see how many would scratch or yawn without her influence.

She found that, when she performed the actions, her subjects responded in kind up to 40 per cent of the time with the biggest increase in mimicking among girls her own age.

The Grade 9 student picks up $700 for her efforts in the competition's health-sciences category and has been offered a $1,500 scholarship at an Ontario university, should she decide to attend when she graduates in three years.

But Ms. LeBouthillier's success in Vancouver last month doesn't mean she suddenly sees herself as a budding scientist, even though she beat out 56 other projects at the Fundy Regional Science Fair, which enabled her to attend and represent New Brunswick. "I do moderately okay in science," said the young woman.

More than the win, she said her experience has taught her many valuable lessons, one of which is New Brunswickers shouldn't sell themselves short. "People don't know what they can do. They should become more aware and get involved. I'm not extraordinary. I just wish everyone could have the experience I have had."

Jordan is a daughter of Jodie and Lisa LeBouthillier of Grand Bay-Westfield. Mackenzie Lister of St. Stephen High School won a bronze medal for her entry in the mathematics and physical science division.

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