

Better to be safe when deciding on snow days

It didn't rival "Man bites dog," but the page one headline on the Feb. 3 story by my friend and former colleague George Basler came close: "Schools defend 'snow day'."

O temporal! Who'd a thunk it would come to this? It took no effort to imagine members of the Geezer Legion, of which I am a member, expressing their amazement at that head, starting with the words, "Why, when I was a lad," and continuing with recollections (some of them factual) of wading through navel-deep snow to get to school on a chill and distant February morning.

In more recent times, the outrage has been directed the other way — at school superintendents inspired perhaps by the likes of Patton or Henry V, who had refused to declare a snow day when conditions (and legions of school kids snug abed) demanded it.

For what it's worth, it says here that regional school chiefs who erred on the side of caution — if indeed they had erred — had done the right thing the previous day. Weather forecasts on radio and television for hours and days had predicted snow, sleet, freezing rain, driven by "clippers" — whatever they are — of epic proportions. In fact, school officials in western New York didn't even wait for that Wednesday to dawn. Based on what they were told was coming, they ran up the white flags the night before.

Good for them. When I inched my way down a treacherous driveway to fetch the morning paper, a good hour past the time school buses and teachers would have been making their way to Academe, I found my truck coated with a quarter inch of ice, the doors welded shut. I went back to bed. Retirement does have its perks.

All right. So that was as bad as it got. In fact, things got better as the day wore on and the terrible storm that had been predicted for our little swath of paradise didn't materialize.

So what else is new? "We can't control the weather," said Binghamton's school superintendent. "We only deal with the information we have and make the best decision, what's best for the safety of the kids."

And suppose they had gone the other way. And suppose one bus somewhere had skidded off the road and no one was injured except perhaps for little Waldo, who required an emergency visit to his orthodontist. Imagine the second-guessing that would have followed, especially if a photographer had happened upon the scene.

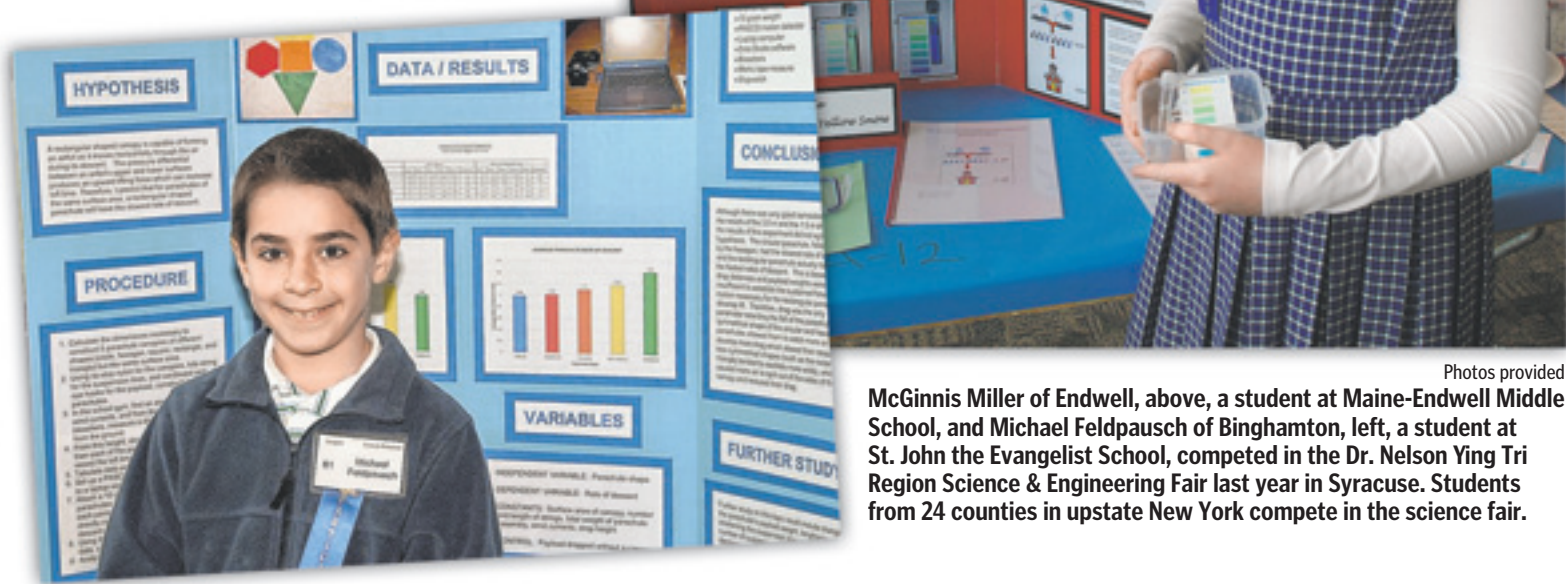
But they didn't. They done good, it says here, for better or worse, and ungrammatically. Kids got to sleep in, as did more than a few teachers, much to the dismay of the doom-shouters who see our little bairns slipping academically behind their cousins in Luxembourg and Osaka.

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DAVID ROSSIE
Commentary

KIDS + SCIENCE = SUCCESS



Photos provided
McGinnis Miller of Endwell, above, a student at Maine-Endwell Middle School, and Michael Feldpausch of Binghamton, left, a student at St. John the Evangelist School, competed in the Dr. Nelson Ying Tri Region Science & Engineering Fair last year in Syracuse. Students from 24 counties in upstate New York compete in the science fair.

Students learn to build successful path to 'STEM' careers

By Mary Eileen Wood

Last month in his State of the Union address, President Barack Obama applauded science fairs:

"Maintaining our leadership in research and technology is crucial to America's success. But if we want to win the future — if we want innovation to produce jobs in America and not overseas — then we also have to win the race to educate our kids. ... We need to teach our kids that it's not just the winner of the Super Bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair."

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Watching and listening near first lady Michelle Obama was Amy Chyao, winner of the 2010 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair. How did she get there?

Amy began in local fairs operated by people dedicated to helping youth thrive and build a successful path to a future in science and technology. There she met other eager youth powered by curiosity, enthusiasm and determination. Science fair judges asked about all she had done on her project, listened carefully and encouraged her. As she got older, mentors became role models and provided even richer experiences. Through all of this, she learned about her own drive to attempt, to learn and to achieve.

Every middle and high school student in the Southern Tier has exactly the chance Amy had to "try on" a new career every year — a network of science fairs. Local fairs and families send students to Broome Community College for its Southern Tier Scholastic Science Fair. In turn, the STSSF advances students to the 24-county Dr. Nelson Ying Tri Region Science and Engineering Fair in Syracuse.

Students gain reasons to explore their worlds and to seek mentors to guide them. These fairs offer days of fun, and gather judges and awards for encouragement. Caring adults applaud. Every skilled trade union and tech company can send judges and awards for Fair Day; the entire community helps these youth win the future.

"Over the past 16 years, I have seen thousands of children and teens celebrate Science Fair Day and talk knowledgeably about such a range of topics it takes my breath away. Whether they're 11-year-olds or soon-to-graduate seniors, these rising experts give me an abiding hope for the future."

MARY EILEEN WOOD

Every Project Lead the Way student and 4-H member already has great topics ready to share in a poster. And for research projects, kids can build machines in the garage, test snow in the schoolyard, get a radio merit badge at Scouts, explore kitchen chemistry or work in an actual laboratory with researchers. Each project samples a real-life career.

Why is that important? Because it gives meaning to what they learn in school, gives purpose to the tools their teachers provide and gives reality to the need to learn. The students of today will forge the future; they need to be prepared. Science fair experience empowers them to win the future. Citizens in the "STEM" fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics can and will continue to drive economic growth for this region and the entire nation. The next generation is vitally needed.

Over the past 16 years, I have seen thousands of children and teens celebrate Science Fair Day and talk knowledgeably about such a range of topics it takes my breath away. Whether they're 11-year-olds or soon-to-graduate seniors, these rising experts give me an abiding hope for the future. Share my hope; meet some of these young folks:

► Sarah from Ross Corners Christian Academy, one of our very first Senior Level students, advanced from STSSF and earned regional honors for her investigation of DNA.

► Broome County Science Champions Ryan and Kurt re-engineered spike insertion for racing flats. Will Adidas or Nike snatch up these two designers?

► McGinnis from Maine-Endwell Middle School received the coveted Stockholm Junior Water Regional Prize for tracing changes in the pH of water in its path from rain to tap water.

► Michael from St. John the Evangelist School explored the physics of forms' movement through air. The Hancox Engineering Award went home with him because of his meticulous technical work.

► Clarissa from Jennie F. Snapp Middle School tried on a medical research career with her work on which mouthwash kills the most bacteria. The Air Force commended her effort.

What do these students have in common? People like you. People who make sure kids get to the library for the book about ... well, about whatever fascinates them. People who drive them to each science fair so they have a chance to discover their talents. People who serve as judges and fair volunteers to create a rich experience for students.

Please, make sure every child with an ounce of curiosity is at BCC on March 12 for the STSSF, and in Syracuse the following weekend for the Ying TRSEF's two-day science festival. Basketball and computer games are not the only things kids can love. There is a world they ache to know. Through a science fair, they can do exactly that. With easy tools such as www.sciencebuddies.org, it's not brain science.

Wait a minute — let me take that back. It is brain science. It is each student taking the brain he or she was born with and using it to ask questions and go find the answers. Combine that brain with the important tools provided in classrooms every day and youth can do the real-world work of exploring and learning and preparing for apprenticeships, college and careers.

Kids have the brains. The Southern Tier has the science fairs. So, let's win the future.

Wood is director of the Dr. Nelson Ying Tri Region Science and Engineering Fair.

Bush and Obama are a pair of true believers

Presidents Obama and Bush the Younger have one striking similarity: self-assurance. After speaking with both men recently, I am firmly convinced that they are convinced their policies are/were right for the nation.

Let's take Bush first. The Iraq War has cost America more than \$750 billion since it began in March 2003. So far, more than 4,400 Americans have been killed in that country, in addition to the approximately 32,000 who have been wounded. Many of those wounds are life-altering. Yet Bush thinks the great sacrifice was worth it because Saddam Hussein is dead and Iraq is on the road to democracy. There is not an argument in the world that could dissuade Bush

from this belief.

It is likewise with Obama. He sincerely believes the country was on the verge of another Great Depression when he took office, and that the massive federal spending he has championed prevented economic catastrophe. Again, there is no way anyone is going to persuade the president otherwise.



BILL O'REILLY
Commentary

Strong leadership requires a sense of certainty. In order to motivate folks to support your vision, you must demonstrate bold conviction. Gen. George Patton, for example, convinced his troops that they were better than the German "Huns." His confidence was contagious, and victories

emerged.

But what happens when a person's conviction is wrong? There is no question that Hussein could have been destroyed by other means. Surely, the world is a better place without him. But would most Americans support the Iraq invasion if we could do it all over? I don't think so. In hindsight, the Iraq situation should have been handled by the Air Force and the Navy. Hussein's regime could have been strangled without so much American blood.

Things are a bit murkier on the economic front. Since the Obama administration has been in power, the feds have spent an astounding \$7 trillion. This has left the United States vulnerable in the world marketplace because we need to borrow so much money from nations like China. The

massive \$14 trillion debt has now become as big a threat as the economic meltdown of three years ago. No matter how you frame the issue, federal spending must be cut back, and Obama has to know this. But, like Bush, the president does not regret his controversial policies.

Presidents Obama and Bush are true believers. Bush says he did his best, and that's the end of the story. Because Obama's story continues to unfold, he must continue to sell his policies as wise and effective. The problem is problems. Sometimes they are so overwhelming that people, even presidents, simply cannot solve them.

Even if they believe they can.

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