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Victor Cervantes, a Pajaro Valley High senior, throws his balsa wood plane into the air at the MESA Day preliminary competition at UC Santa Cruz on Saturday.

Students' imaginations soar

Math, engineering and science competition draws hundreds

By **JENNIFER SQUIRES**

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SANTA CRUZ — Before Saturday, Soledad High School freshmen Abdul Mohamed and Eric Chavez had test-driven their mousetrap-powered car at least 100 times.

The balsa wood vehicle with CDs for wheels needed to travel exactly 5 meters in the competition at the Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement Schools Program at UC Santa Cruz on Saturday, but the boys had to do more than get the right balance of weight and speed.

"It broke so many times," said Mohamed, who even had to repair the shoebox-sized vehicle Friday night.

Still, the boys hoped to finish second or third in the contest, one of many hands-on events that more than 300 middle school and high school students from across the Central Coast participated in.

The students put in months of work to perfect their airplane glider, weight-bearing balsa wood bridges and windmills for the Windmill Energy Challenge.

"They put in a lot of work," said Curt Anderson,



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Mauricio Yescas of Soledad High works on his robot Optimus Gribas, named after his biology teacher and MESA adviser Joe Gribas.

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