Solar Powered Boats Get Ready to Make a Splash

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Students from three local high schools, sponsored by Western Municipal Water District, have been working hard the past seven months to build and prep their solar-powered boats for Metropolitan Water District’s annual Solar Cup competition at Lake Skinner this Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Arlington High School, cosponsored with Riverside Public Utilities; Elsinore High School, an Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District partnered team; and Murrieta Mesa High School, with support from Rancho California Water District, are the three teams. Students first applied for sponsorships last fall, then spent months attending workshops, designing and building their boats and now are anxiously looking forward to race weekend.

“This project gives students an opportunity to learn about alternative resources. Solar energy may be one of the ways water is delivered to Southern California,” said Western’s Director of Engineering Derek Kawaii.

While each boat hull is required to be built with the same design, each of Western’s teams make unique variations in attempts to make them faster or more buoyant. Boat artwork is optional; however, most teams paint their boat in school colors with correlation to their mascots. Each team varies in the number of students who work on the boat and participate in the competition weekend.

Arlington High School in Riverside
The Arlington HS team, while considered a veteran school with Linda Jirsa as their experienced advisor, is in fact comprised of all rookie students, including a rookie teacher. While some of their boat materials are recycled from the previous year’s boat, they purchased a new motor and the shaft housing is a special piece donated by Corona Marine. The concept of the shaft housing is like any other; however, the piece came from a company who made only a few boats with the designed piece and with a particular coating on it. Since February, Arlington’s team has worked on the boat every Friday after school, on weekends, during spring break and takes advantage of early release days to test and improve the boat’s inter-workings.

Elsinore High School in Lake Elsinore
Elsinore’s team is made up of 125 learning disabled students who have strong building and tactile skills. Veteran advisor Rick Wolter is back to assist once again. Their boat is stored in a small garage on the school campus and students rotate for turns to participate in building the boat throughout the school day. Twenty of the most dedicated students are chosen to attend the race weekend festivities and participate as the school’s team. The boat was recently tested by Elsinore’s school Principal Dr. Jon Hurst at the school’s pool and it’s ready for race weekend. Thanks to the donation of a boat trailer, courtesy of Elsinore Valley MWD, the team has been able to transport the boat to various community events in previous months.

Murrieta Mesa High School in Murrieta
Murrieta Mesa’s team is led by advisor Pete Matus and comprised of engineering students, which has met every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon during the school-year, has prior experience building solar-powered machines. In addition to participating in Solar Cup in the past, last year they built a solar-powered vehicle. They’ve been using their knowledge and past experiences to make this year’s boat faster and more efficient.

This year’s Solar Cup race, hosted by Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, will take place from May 17 to 19 at Lake Skinner.

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Western Municipal Water District provides water supply, wastewater disposal and water resource management to the public in a safe, reliable, environmentally sensitive and financially responsible manner.

14205 Meridian Parkway, Riverside, CA 92518  Main No. 951.571.7100  wmwd.com