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Winners at Montana Science Fair

University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations

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It seems safe to predict that the winners of the two grand prizes at the 10th Montana Science Fair at Montana State University next Friday and Saturday will be launched on careers in science 10 years from now. Yet, the same prediction about the winners of the top awards at the first Montana fair in 1956 would have been dead wrong.

Sandra Lee Orr, a junior at Park County High School, Livingston, captured the grand prize for girls in 1956 with a botany exhibit on "Plant Nutrition." Gail A. Owen, a Missoula County High School senior, paced the boys with an exhibit on "The Halogens," an entry in the chemistry category.

After proving their prowess in science, both of them turned to the study of history, thereby fooling the prognosticators and demonstrating that Montanans are adventurous types ready at the drop of a test tube to follow new trails in search of fresh fields to conquer.

Sandra Lee entered MSU on a scholarship in 1957 and went on to earn a B. A. in history and political science, with honors, in 1961. As an undergraduate she won membership in Phi Kappa Phi scholastic honorary and Phi Alpha Theta history honorary. Since graduation she has been an analyst with a federal agency in Washington, D. C.

Gail did follow his scientific bent long enough to take a B. S. degree in naval architecture and marine engineering at Webb Institute of Naval Architecture, New York, in 1960. After spending the better part of a year practising his new profession at sea, he returned to Missoula to earn the equivalent of a B. A. at MSU.

(more)

He was then awarded a National Defense Education Act fellowship for three years of graduate study in history at the University of Nebraska. He has received an M. A., is nearing completion of requirements for a Ph. D., and appears headed for a career as a history professor.

By switching from natural to social science, Gail and Sandra Lee ran counter to a national trend. Dr. R. A. Diettert, director of the Montana Science Fair, an affiliate of the National Science Fair, recalls a survey showing that over 90 per cent of the 2,190 participants in the first 12 national fairs chose careers in some aspect of science and engineering.

Still, it is no great surprise to find that boys and girls who win awards in science fairs become men and women who are successful in any endeavor to which they turn their talents.

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