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MEDIA RELEASE

30 June 2009

Annual Science and Engineering Challenge inspires budding engineers and scientists

Parents of local year nine and ten high school students may have some help in persuading their kids to do their maths homework, thanks to a unique programme that is inspiring the next generation of Upper Hunter scientists and engineers.

Local school students are gearing up for the annual Upper Hunter Science and Engineering Challenge which will be held on 3 July. This year the popular event will also include a Primary School Discovery for younger students on 2 July.

The Coal & Allied Community Development Fund is again supporting the event, pledging \$28,000 to continue the programme for another three years.

Run by University of Newcastle, the challenge involves more than 300 students from Singleton, Muswellbrook, Scone, Merriwa and Aberdeen high schools competing in lateral thinking activities such as designing motorised crafts, building bridges and cracking codes.

Challenge Coordinator, Bob Nelson, thanked Coal & Allied for its ongoing support of the event.

“This year will be the ninth time we have held the Upper Hunter Science Challenge and every year it is helping get more and more students excited about maths, science and engineering subjects,” Mr Nelson said.

“Trained staff and students from the University of Newcastle will be running the competition activities on 3 July, with the winner and runner-up then going to represent the Upper Hunter at the Newcastle Zone Challenge in Newcastle during late August.”

“A Primary School Discovery will be conducted the day before aimed at giving the younger members of our community the opportunity to gain an insight into what it is like to be a scientist or engineer.

“Without the support of the Coal & Allied Community Fund local students would have to travel considerable distances to compete in the event.”

Coal & Allied Community Development Fund Executive Officer, Stephen Sneddon, said Coal & Allied was pleased to partner with the Muswellbrook Rotary Club and the University of Newcastle to bring the event to the Upper Hunter.

“The Upper Hunter Science and Engineering Challenge programme is only one of the partnerships the Coal & Allied Community Development Fund has which continues to improve education and employment outcomes for young people living in the Upper Hunter,” Mr Sneddon said.

“It’s part of our approach to building sustainability, where we aim to improve the social, environmental and economic well being of the communities where we operate, enabling a sustainable post-mining future.

“We are especially proud of fostering innovation in the science and engineering disciplines

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because in our constant search for ways to improve our business we rely heavily on the skills, abilities and innovative ideas of our employees.

“Perhaps some of the participants in this year’s event will become tomorrow’s engineers that our business and others in the region will need.”

“We wish all the participants the very best for the challenge and I look forward to hearing success stories from our next generation of budding engineers and scientists.”

A recent survey conducted by the University of Newcastle found the Challenge inspired 40 per cent of previous participants to enrol in physics, advanced mathematics and chemistry subjects for their Higher School Certificate.

“The survey asked students who had participated in the Challenge 15 or 20 months earlier to share their experiences. Ninety two per cent recalled their experience as positive and beneficial and 80 per cent said the experience had assisted with their career choices,” Mr Nelson said.

“Most importantly, 40 per cent said the experience helped them choose to study physics, chemistry and advanced mathematics subjects for their Higher School Certificate.

“By sparking their interest students may even be encouraged to pursue science courses at TAFE or University.”

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