



Contact: Stephen Kubricki
All Saints Regional Catholic School
609-597-3800
kubricki@verizon.net

Or: Stephanie Hallman
Christopher Columbus Awards
800-291-6020
shallman@mmseducation.com

Project Developed by Manahawkin Students to Protect Endangered Species Wins Gold Medal in National Science/Community Service Competition Held at Walt Disney World®

Students develop and pursue initiatives to preserve endangered species in their community.

AUBURN, N.Y.—June 19, 2009—Bright ideas, solid research and teamwork won four students from All Saints Regional Catholic School, in Manahawkin, N.J., a Gold Medal and a \$2,000 Savings Bond in the Christopher Columbus Awards, a nationwide program that challenges middle-school students to explore opportunities for positive change in their communities.

Eighth-graders Rachel Altman, Emily Bruinooge, Donovan Fifield, and Aidan Ryan, and their coach, Stephen Kubricki, made it to the finals last month by identifying local species endangered by human activity and developing a multifaceted plan to foster awareness of their plight in an effort to halt their eradication.

An article in a hometown newspaper about the plight of the Diamondback Terrapin turtle and the efforts being made to preserve its habitat was the catalyst that spurred the students to examine more closely the issue of endangered species. They quickly discovered that every creature plays a unique role in the web of life. Thus, ensuring the continued survival of all species, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, is central to the survival of all living beings, including humans.

The students conducted research and consulted with numerous experts in wildlife science to expand their understanding of biodiversity, gauge the extent of the problem in their community, and identify the plants and animals most jeopardized by habitat destruction and other hazards. Based on their findings, they developed a four-pronged plan that employs action, outreach, education, and political initiatives to protect not only the Diamondback Terrapin turtle but also the Piping Plover, Red Knot, Swamp Pink, Horseshoe crab, and bat populations.

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FEATURING THE STEPHEN J. MOSES COMMUNITY GRANT

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A panel of community leaders, scientists and experts in science education judged this idea as one of the top eight entries in the U.S. More than 600 students and coaches participated nationwide.

Team Wins a Trip to Walt Disney World®

The team and their coach won an all-expense-paid trip to the *Walt Disney World®* Resort, where they competed in the **Christopher Columbus Awards' National Championship Week**, and participated in the **Christopher Columbus Academy**, a custom-designed educational program conducted by scientists, engineers and educators, the program reveals the science and technology behind the thrills and excitement of *Epcot®* and the *Magic Kingdom®*.

Positive Community Change

The Christopher Columbus Awards challenge teams of middle-school students to explore and discover opportunities for positive change in their communities using science and technology. The program is now in its 13th year and has attracted nearly 16,000 students from diverse backgrounds all across the U.S. The program is sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation (www.columbusfdn.org), a Federal government agency, and is endorsed by the National Middle School Association.

Past winners have included: a group of Ohio students who developed a plan to use methane gas produced at landfills as an alternative source of energy; a group of Native American girls who built a study hall out of straw on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana; and a group of students from Pennsylvania who developed a video/motion sensor device for school buses that deters motorists from trying to pass illegally.

Strong Participation from Girls, Minorities

The program attracts many students who may not typically enter a science competition. More than half of the entrants are girls, and more than one-fourth are from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, statistics that are higher than those of most science competitions. The Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation believes the teamwork aspect and community focus draw a broader range of students to enter.

About the Sponsor

The Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation is an independent Federal government agency created by Congress in 1992 to encourage and support research, study and labor designed to produce new discoveries in all fields of endeavor for the benefit of mankind. The Foundation has established *Frontiers of Discovery—Work in Progress* and *Discover the Future*, programs that recognize “cutting edge” innovations and innovative ideas of America’s youth, and honor teachers. These programs include *Life Sciences Awards*, the *\$25,000 Homeland Security Award*, *Christopher Columbus Awards*, and the *\$10,000 Freida J. Riley Teacher Award*.

For more information on the Christopher Columbus Awards, call 1-800-291-6020 or visit www.christophercolumbusawards.com.

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