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**Middle-School Students from Myrtle Beach Win Top Award:  
The \$25,000 Columbus Foundation Community Grant in  
National Science/Community Service Competition  
Held at Walt Disney World®**

***Students develop website, warning system to alert community of abandoned boats.***

AUBURN, N.Y.—June 24, 2011—Bright ideas, solid research and teamwork won three students from Myrtle Beach, S.C., the top prize in the Christopher Columbus Awards, a nationwide program that challenges middle-school students to explore opportunities for positive change in their communities.

Sixth-graders MaKayla Arteaga, Christian Hanna, and Bethany Slayton, and their coach, Michelle Ruthenberg, Director of Education of Ripley's Aquarium in Myrtle Beach, made it to the finals last month, and now are winners of the grand prize—the **\$25,000 Columbus Foundation Community Grant**.

Known as "The River Rangers," the team lives in an area surrounded by water. The Atlantic Ocean, the Intracoastal Waterway, and the Waccamaw River are all prominent geographical features that give the area its beauty; provide food, water, and transportation; and help draw about 14 million vacationers a year. So a problem that affects the water affects everyone, by hurting both the environment and the local economy. A growing concern in the Myrtle Beach region is the issue of pleasure boats being abandoned in these waters. The boats crowd the waterways, creating an unsafe situation for fishermen, boaters, and swimmers, while leaking fuel and other materials that contaminate the water, threatening wildlife and humans in the area.

Through research, the students learned that the slumping economy and high unemployment have resulted in many boat-owners' struggling to make payments and to afford fuel and dock fees. Unable to sell their boats in an overcrowded market, many feel they have no other option but to abandon them. Though the students realized they couldn't physically remove the boats themselves, they could make the community aware of the issue. The team launched a website at [www.scriverrangers.com](http://www.scriverrangers.com) to serve as a hub for local residents to report abandoned boats and receive warnings about boats sighted in the area.

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**FEATURING THE COLUMBUS FOUNDATION COMMUNITY GRANT**

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A panel of community leaders, scientists and experts in science education selected this idea as one of the top eight entries in the U.S. More than 735 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 15th year and has attracted more than 19,000 students from diverse backgrounds all across the U.S. The program is sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation ([www.columbusfdn.org](http://www.columbusfdn.org)) and is endorsed by the National Middle School Association.

Past winners have included a team from San Diego that has secured a provisional patent for a specialized seat cushion design that uses sensory feedback to train people to maintain a healthy posture while sitting at a computer, and a group of students from Illinois who developed a multifaceted recycling awareness campaign that has increased recycling in their community by 60% in just four months.

### **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 nearly a 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, innovative ideas of America’s youth, and honor teachers. These programs include the *Agriscience Awards*, *Christopher Columbus Awards*, *Homeland Security Awards* and the *Life Sciences Awards*.

For more information, call 1-800-291-6020 or visit [www.christophercolumbusawards.com](http://www.christophercolumbusawards.com).

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