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Gahanna, OH and Mont Vernon, NH Middle School Students Named as One of Six Finalist Teams in National Science/Community Service Competition, Win Trip to Walt Disney World®

Students develop a grocery conveyor belt sanitizing system to safely eliminate food contamination from grocery store checkout belts

AUBURN, N.Y.—April 30, 2012—Bright ideas, solid research and teamwork won three students from Gahanna Middle School, Gahanna, OH and one student from Mont Vernon Middle School, Mont Vernon, NH, a spot as finalists in the Christopher Columbus Awards, a nationwide program that challenges middle-school students to explore opportunities for positive change in their communities. Eighth-graders Savannah Cofer, Wayne Stegner, Varun Vallabhaneni, Rylee Noorda, and their coach, Haruna Cofer, made it to the semifinals earlier this month, and are now one of six finalist teams in the country to compete for Gold Medals and U.S. Savings Bonds.

The Ohio team members met Rylee during the 2011 Christopher Columbus Awards National Championship Week in Orlando, FL, and became friends. They have now collaborated on their new project, "The Incrediveyor". The students identified food contamination from unsanitary grocery belts as a significant problem and began researching ways to solve it. Their research showed that checkout belts at the grocery store have just as much bacteria as the package around leaky raw meat, including strains of Bacillus, Staphylococcus and Yeast. This bacteria is easily transferred from the checkout belt to food purchases, especially fruits and vegetables, and could make many people sick.

The team collected bacteria samples at a local grocery store, conducted surveys of shoppers and checkout clerks, interviewed a grocery store manager, and a corporate food safety manager. They also interviewed two microbiologists and shared their research samples. Their solution is The Incrediveyor! This new checkout belt is made of hydrophobic, Teflon-coated glass fabric that is continuously sanitized underneath using a water jet to remove residue; an air knife to dry the belt and UV-C light to kill bacteria on the conveyor belt. The Teflon-coated belt material is more effective in repelling liquids than the Neoprene rubber belts currently used.

The team remarked that they "hope the Incrediveyor system will one day replace the current unsanitary grocery store conveyor belts. In addition, this system could be used on airport security conveyor belts, handrails on escalators and moving walkways. It could spark technologies that will make our community and world a cleaner and safer environment.

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A panel of community leaders, scientists and experts in science education selected this idea as one of the top six entries in the U.S. More than 800 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 will compete in the **Christopher Columbus Awards National Championship Week**, June 10-15, 2012, plus a \$200 grant to further develop their project.

Each member of two Gold Medal winning teams will receive a \$2,000 U.S. Savings Bond.

The finalists will also attend 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 the *Magic Kingdom®* and *Disney's Hollywood Studios*.

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 16th 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) and is endorsed by the Association of Middle Level Education. 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 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*, *Homeland Security Award*, *Life Sciences Awards* and *Christopher Columbus Awards*.

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