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**Wheatland Middle School Students Named as One of Six Finalist Teams
in National Science/Community Service Competition,
Win Trip to Walt Disney World®**

***Students develop early warning system to alert drivers of the possibility of
big game animals in the roadway***

AUBURN, N.Y.—April 30, 2012—Bright ideas, solid research and teamwork won four students from Wheatland Middle School, Wheatland, WY, 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 Mikenzi Loyd, Kaylee Bloom, Elizabeth Pino, Viviana Hollister, and their coach, Miken Harnish, 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.

Because the mothers of two team members were involved in car accidents with large game animals, each hit a mule deer, the students became aware of the safety risks posed by large game (over 125 lb.) on the roads. They learned from a local Wyoming Highway Patrolman that there were three additional accidents involving a deer and two elk near their hometown within the same week of their mother's accidents.

Using information gathered from the Wyoming Department of Transportation, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Highway Department as well as insurance companies and sources in Arizona and California, the team identified animal migration patterns, current safety methods being implemented along with their costs, and statistics on animal and human fatalities caused by large game automobile accidents to formulate their solution.

Through trial and error, the team developed infrared light sensors, that connect to standard flashing caution signs to indicate there is a big game animal near the road.

The team remarked, "As we were searching for information, we saw that the best way to grab the attention of drivers and warn them of possible wildlife danger on the highway was to use infrared technology. There would be less fatalities and less property damage."

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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*.

For more information, call 1-800-291-6020 or visit www.christophercolumbusawards.com.

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