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

***Students tackle homeless shelter low-cost alternative for Lubbock's Tent City***

AUBURN, N.Y.—April 30, 2012—Bright ideas, solid research and teamwork won four students from Whiteface Science Rocks U in Whiteface, TX, 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-grader Kayla Mendoza, Sixth-graders Brody Henry, Christian Mata, Jaime Mendoza, and their coach, Laura Wilbanks, 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 team considers "homelessness to be the most pressing social issue in the nation and it is not going away". According to estimates from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, "Each night in America, anywhere from 700,000 to 2 million people are homeless and 30% are families with young children." There are 265,000 homeless in Texas, and they have a particularly hard time due to cold winter winds and extremely high temperatures and high winds during the summer. In 2011, Lubbock had 107 days of temperatures over 100 degrees, the hottest summer on record for any state since weather has been recorded.

The results of the team's interviews with professionals in construction, engineering, counseling, city management, as well as a CalTrans civil engineer from Fresno, CA were that the shelters were overflowing and there is a lack of privacy and respect of personal space. Weather is also an issue, as it can often be harsh and cruel - too hot or too cold for outdoor living in most areas. The team researched building individual shelters using adobe, polystyrene, wood, and chose 'earthbags' (recycled feedbags filled with local sand) as the ideal material. The *Mi Casa es Su Casa* team designed a low-cost alternative to the tents currently being used in Tent City -- a safe place for the homeless to spend the night when all the local shelters are full.

The team remarked, "Ever heard of a house for sale that was dirt cheap? Well, that's what *Mi Casa es Su Casa* wants for the replacement of Tent City -- houses made of dirt - literally. The team has created a solution using local materials to erect tiny homes made of earthbags. Since we live in an agricultural environment, we recycled polypropylene grain bags and filled them with local soil. The homes are inexpensive and could be built by the very people who will live in them. The homes are also cozy, warm and private; places they can sleep soundly in and call their own."  
-more-

**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 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](http://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](http://www.christophercolumbusawards.com).

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