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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Eastern Idaho students earn top honors at Idaho Science & Engineering Fairs

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho (April 6, 2021) — Hillcrest High School junior Lindsey Holtom earned Best of Fair at the 2021 Eastern Idaho Science and Engineering Fair. Her project was among 110 entries that 150 students statewide presented at the fifth annual Idaho Science & Engineering Fairs, which the Idaho STEM Action Center staged virtually throughout March.

Holtom's project, "Developing Bacteria from Public Places," also earned EISEF's Best in Category in Biological, Earth, and Environmental Sciences, a Category Gold award, and a special award from the U.S. Air Force.

On top of earning serious bragging rights, Holtom and five other Best in Fair winners (one each from two other regions and three at-large winners) will represent Idaho at the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair in May.

Hillcrest High School students earned EISEF's other Best of Category awards.

Mikaela Spafford, a junior, took Best of Category in Behavioral and Social Sciences for her project, "How Much Can I Modify a Character Before They Become Unrecognizable?" She also earned a Category Gold award.

Ethan Grigg and Carter Thompson, also juniors, took Best of Category in Engineering, Mathematics, and Physical Sciences for their project, "Paper Towel Absorbency and Force Resistance." They also earned a Category Gold award and special awards from Mu Alpha Theta, U.S. Metric Association, and Yale Science & Engineering Association.

Judges honored three more EISEF projects with Category Gold awards: "Veni Vedi Vici," a Behavioral and Social Sciences entry by Hillcrest High School junior Andrew Dawson; "Best Removal of Carbon Deposits in Engines," an Engineering, Mathematics, and Physical Sciences entry by Hillcrest High School sophomore Thomas Endsley; and "Antibiotics vs. Gram Positive and Negative Bacteria," a Biological, Earth, and Environmental Sciences entry by Hillcrest High School junior Sydney Woolstenhulme.

Endsley also received the Lewis Engineering Award from Pocatello-based Lewis Corporation that includes a cash award of \$250 plus a certificate for the most outstanding EISEF project that demonstrates engineering-based skills.

The STEM Action Center also presented nine EISEF projects with Category Silver awards, as well as an additional nine special awards from the American Psychological Association, ASM Materials Education Foundation, United States Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Naval Research, and Society for In Vitro Biology.

Hillcrest High School earned the Top School award, which is based on total projects and total category awards, including Silver, Gold, Best in Category, and Best in Fair. And Hillcrest High School science teacher Barbara Nelson was named EISEF's top-performing educator.

A group of experts throughout Idaho from an array of STEM-related fields served as judges.

EISEF is one of three regional science fairs the STEM Action Center stages statewide each spring. Although held virtually this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Idaho State University typically hosts the Eastern Idaho Science & Engineering Fair. Boise State University and the Coeur d'Alene Resort usually host the Western Idaho and Northern Idaho Science and Engineering Fairs, respectively.

Students in ninth through 12th grades throughout Idaho are eligible to submit entries.

According to STEM Action Center interim executive director Dr. Kaitlin Maguire, competitions like these are important to the state's future, offering students opportunities to engage in original research projects aligned with their interests and meet and learn with other motivated students in their area.

"The quality of the research that Idaho students present each year never ceases to amaze me," Dr. Maguire said. "Although our science fairs were virtual this year, the awards still have the same merit. And the experience students gained by participating — by thinking critically about real-world problems, seeking solutions, and explaining their findings succinctly — will prove invaluable when they enter the workforce."

In addition to facilitating critical and creative thinking, problem solving, innovation, and collaboration, she said 19 of Idaho's 20 hot jobs through 2026 require STEM skills and that STEM jobs pay more than twice as much as non-STEM jobs.

The STEM Action Center presented the 2021 Idaho Science and Engineering Fairs in partnership with the NASA Idaho Space Grant Consortium, Battelle Energy Alliance, Micron, Society for Science, Cradlepoint, POWER Foundation, Applied Materials, Idaho Central Credit Union, Lewis Corporation, and Nutrien.

Visit the Idaho STEM Action Center's YouTube channel at [youtube.com/c/IdahoSTEMActionCenter](https://www.youtube.com/c/IdahoSTEMActionCenter) to watch the awards ceremony.

About the Idaho STEM Action Center

The Idaho STEM Action Center was created in 2015 because Idaho citizens are not entering the STEM pipeline fast enough to meet current and future Idaho workforce needs. Its goals are to increase equitable access to STEM opportunities, align education and workforce needs, and amplify awareness of STEM throughout Idaho. The organization is working with industry, government, educators, and students to develop new resources and support high-quality professional-development opportunities to foster a STEM-educated workforce that ensures Idaho's continued economic prosperity.

Visit STEM.idaho.gov for more information, and visit <https://STEM.idaho.gov/support-us/foundation> to make a tax-deductible donation to the Idaho STEM Action Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, to enhance the investment the state has made in Idaho's STEM community. Contributions provide greater access to STEM camps for children, student competitions, and many other life-shaping programs.

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