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Hagerman, Idaho Falls students earn top honors at Eastern Idaho science fair

POCATELLO, Idaho (March 14, 2022) — Student projects from Hagerman High School in Hagerman and Hillcrest High School in Ammon earned Best in Fair at the 2022 Eastern Idaho Science and Engineering Fair, and one from American Heritage Charter School in Idaho Falls garnered Fair Runner Up. They were among 30 projects that 52 students from three schools presented at the sixth annual event, which the Idaho STEM Action Center staged March 4 at Idaho State University.

Best in Fair winners

“The Relationship of Being a Supertaster and People’s Scores on the Autism Spectrum” by Hagerman High School freshmen Saree Hillstead and Danica Knapp earned one of two Best in Fair awards. In addition, they earned Best in Category in Behavioral and Social Sciences and a Category Gold award. Knapp and Hillstead also earned one of the fair’s special awards: first place from the Idaho Academy of Science & Engineering (which includes a \$75 cash prize).

Hillcrest High School sophomore Brecken Allegood and junior Nathan Elison garnered the other Best in Fair award for their project, “Testing Water Quality.” They also earned Best in Category in Biology and Environmental Science, a Category Gold award, and several special awards, including the Cross Charitable Foundation Environmental Sciences Award, second place from the Idaho Academy of Science & Engineering (which includes a \$50 cash prize), the NASA Earth System Science Award, and a Stockholm Junior Water Prize.

On top of serious bragging rights, the Best in Fair winners will represent Idaho at the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair in May. The winning teams from each Idaho regional fair and their mentors earn all-expense-paid trips to attend and compete in the event in Atlanta May 7-13.

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Fair Runner Up

American Heritage Charter School junior Annie Brownlee earned Fair Runner Up for her project “Musical Three Pointers.” She also won a Category Gold award and several special awards, including the American Psychological Association and the Mu Alpha Theta Award.

Four strands, many awards

Students in ninth through 12th grades throughout Eastern and Southern Idaho were eligible to submit entries in four categories: Biology and Environmental Science; Behavioral and Social Sciences; Engineering and Computer Science; and Physical Sciences.

American Heritage Charter School and Hagerman High School students captured the two remaining Best in Category awards:

- “Mission Impossible” by American Heritage Charter School juniors Ashton Blackburn and Jake Swenson earned a Best in Category in Engineering and Computer Science, a Category Gold award, and the Yale Science and Engineering Association Award, one of the fair’s special awards.
- “Ziploc, Polyvinyl, vs. Vacuum Packaging Types for Extending the Shelf Life of Fresh Ground Meat” by Hagerman High School freshmen Katherine Kinder and Jonah Knapp earned a Best in Category in Physical Sciences, a Category Gold award, and several special awards, including third place from the Idaho Academy of Science & Engineering (which includes a \$25 cash prize) and the Ricoh Sustainable Development Award.

Judges honored one more project with a Category Gold award: “Bleach Try-outs,” a Physical Sciences entry by American Heritage Charter School juniors Taylor Malony and Salina Saiz.

In addition, judges awarded Hillcrest High School junior Dallas Hunzeker the Bearden Award for Women in Computer Science for her project “A Tech Reaction: Combination of Animation, Programming, and Coding.” The award, which also includes a \$500 cash prize, is funded by longtime Idaho resident Elizabeth “Betsy” Bearden for the female or team of females whose research exemplifies high standards of innovation in creating solutions with computer science

The STEM Action Center presented 10 other projects with Category Silver awards and an additional nine special awards from the American Meteorological Society, the ASM Materials Education Foundation, the Genius Olympiad, the National Geographic Society, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Office of Naval Research, Regeneron, the Society for In Vitro Biology, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Metric Association, and the United States Agency for International Development.

American Heritage Charter School earned the Top School award. The award is calculated based on total projects and total category awards, including Silver, Gold, Best in Category, and Best in Fair. Science teacher Alaysha Whitworth coached American Heritage Charter School's participants, which earned Fair Runner Up, one of the four Best in Category awards, three of the six Category Golds, and four of the 10 Category Silvers. Whitworth was named EISEF's top-performing educator.

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

One of three regional fairs

EISEF is one of three regional science fairs the STEM Action Center stages statewide each spring. Boise State University hosted the Western Idaho Science and Engineering Fair in Boise Feb. 25, and the Coeur d'Alene Resort is hosting the Northern Idaho Science and Engineering Fair March 11. The Best of Fair winners from those events will join the top EISEF prizewinners at the international science fair courtesy of the STEM Action Center.

The STEM Action Center is presenting the 2022 Idaho Science and Engineering Fairs in partnership with the NASA Idaho Space Grant Consortium, Micron, Battelle Energy Alliance, Cross Charitable Foundation, Idaho Central Credit Union, Sahai Family Foundation Inc., POWER Foundation, Idaho Power, Cradlepoint, Lewis Corporation, Elizabeth Bearden, Nutrien, Regeneron, and Society for Science.

Ensuring economic prosperity

According to STEM Action Center 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. "The experience students gained by participating — by thinking creatively about real-world problems, seeking solutions, and explaining their findings succinctly — will prove invaluable when they enter the workforce."

She said STEM jobs in Idaho are projected to grow 15.4 percent by 2030, outpacing the national average of STEM job growth at 10 percent.

"STEM jobs are broad and include careers in healthcare, engineering, software development, and agriculture, and STEM jobs pay nearly twice as much as non-STEM jobs," Dr. Maguire said. "Moreover, STEM education builds knowledge and skills that are important to the future of Idaho, because it help students develop creative thinking, problem solving, innovation, and collaboration skills. These are skills that Idaho employers want and are needed to solve tomorrow's problems."

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 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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