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**Tyncastle Academy Students Win Top Award:  
The \$25,000 Columbus Foundation Community Grant  
in National Science/Community Service Competition  
Held at Walt Disney World®**

***Students develop a public outreach effort to protect honey bee populations***

WASHINGTON, D.C.—June 17, 2014—Bright ideas, solid research, and teamwork won three students from Tyncastle Academy, in Banner Elk, N.C., the top prize in the Christopher Columbus Awards, a nationwide program of the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation, that challenges middle-school students to explore opportunities for positive change in their communities, utilizing STEM techniques and processes.

Students Claudia Button, Nathan Button, Kate Fitzpatrick, and Maria Melissaris, along with their coach, Jenny Fitzpatrick, made it to the finals last month, and now are winners of the grand prize—the **\$25,000 Columbus Foundation Community Grant**.

Known as the **Bee Aware Team**, the students developed an outreach campaign to inform the public and businesses about the harmful effects of specific chemicals on honey bee populations and the harmful ramifications to human, animal, and plant life.

The team met with local beekeepers and researched the serious problem of the declining honey bee population. They learned that this crisis is not isolated to just their community, but is a worldwide problem. Since 2006, honey bees have been dying off at the alarming rate of about 30 percent per year. Just 20 years ago, the annual die-off rate was only 15 percent. If the bees continue to decline at this rate, they may even become extinct.

Convinced that community members would help save the honey bees if they understood that roughly two-thirds of their daily diets would disappear or be severely limited without honey bee

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**FEATURING THE COLUMBUS FOUNDATION COMMUNITY GRANT**

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pollination, the team created and presented an awareness program designed to educate their community about the plight of the honey bee and the ways they could make a difference. Participants included area tree farmers and 495 students at four local schools. Additional materials were sent home with the students to educate their parents. Teachers also were provided with curriculum to use in the classroom for continued study of honey bees.

Post-surveys conducted with participants showed that they were largely unaware of the information presented in the campaign and were overwhelmingly willing to take steps to protect honey bees—chiefly, by reducing or eliminating the use of chemicals in their gardening.

“After researching this problem for several months, we concluded that there were a number of human factors contributing to the bee’s decline,” the team remarked. “We decided that an awareness campaign would have the greatest impact toward solving this problem.”

### **Team Wins a Trip to Walt Disney World®**

Eight finalist teams and their coaches won an all-expense-paid trip to the *Walt Disney World®* Resort, where they competed in the **Christopher Columbus Awards' National Championship Week**, and participated in 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 18th year and has attracted more than 20,000 students from diverse backgrounds all across the U.S.

The program is sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation (CCF), a Presidentially appointed independent Federal Agency. It 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 percent 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 third are from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, statistics that are higher than those of most science competitions. The CCF believes the teamwork aspect and community focus draw a broader range of students to enter.

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**About the Sponsor**

Founded in 1992, upon the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the Americas, the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation (CCF) is an independent Federal government agency that encourages and supports research, study, and labor designed to produce new discoveries in all fields of endeavor for the benefit of mankind. Governed by a Presidentially appointed Board of Trustees, the Foundation seeks to nurture and recognize community service through science and technology by middle and high school students. In addition to the *Christopher Columbus Awards*, the Foundation is restoring the *Agriscience Awards* and *Life Science Awards*, programs promoting the innovations of middle and high school students advancing and bettering the world around them. For more information about the CCF, please visit [www.christophercolumbusfoundation.gov](http://www.christophercolumbusfoundation.gov).

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