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Ivy Tech honors 'innovators'

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October 17, 2008

By Michelle L. Quinn Post-Tribune correspondent

HAMMOND -- Ivy Tech celebrated the many good things that come out of Northwest Indiana by feting some of its most creative.

Six individuals from all parts of Northwest Indiana accepted the region's answer to the Nobel Prize with pride and humor during the fourth annual Society of Innovators induction ceremony held at Horseshoe Casino on Thursday.

Valparaiso's Thomas Jefferson Middle School science teacher Richard Bender, the winningest Science Olympiad coach in the country and the first teacher to be recognized as a fellow, demonstrated one of his more popular experiments for the crowd: A bottle rocket propelled by air pressure and water.

"The parachute has to have just the right amount of pressure in order to launch properly; the scientific term for that is 'boing-age,'" Bender said. "We took it out to the high school and launched it in what was our longest flight ever, it was a three-minute launch that landed by the Beef Mart."

Environmentalist Lee Botts, former Valparaiso University President Alan Harre, LaPorte orthodontist and inventor Peter Kesling, Banneker Elementary School Principal Sarah Givens and Task Force Tips Research Director Robert Steingass joined Bender as Fellows.

More than 70 nominations -- including some who were nominated many times, like Botts, who received 15 -- came in, making it difficult to narrow down, said Innovators Chairman Roy Evans.

Past winners include Gayle Faulkner-Kosalko, who brought the popularity of Whiting's Pierogi Fest to national prominence; Robert Cornwell, who oversaw the first phase of the Thomas Conway Astronomy Observatory at Buckley Homestead; and filmmaker Mark Spencer, who emceed the ceremony.

"Northwest Indiana is a place of big ideas, and we need to cultivate that in our young people," said Spencer, who also heads up the West Side High School Theater Guild.

The society also honored Community Health Care Centers with the Chanute Prize for Team Innovation for their work with breast cancer.

"When I brought this idea to my team, the answer wasn't just, 'Yeah, we can do that,' but 'We need this!' After all, one in eight women will get breast cancer," said pathologist Brenda Erickson, who shared honors with radiologist Mary Nicholson and their respective staffs.

Each fellow received a \$500 gift and Team Community Healthcare will display the traveling Chanute trophy for one year.



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