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MEDIA ADVISORY

Science Olympiad Students from Illinois Invited to White House Science Fair in Washington, DC

Oakbrook Terrace, IL — Two outstanding Science Olympiad competitors and their coaches will attend the fourth annual White House Science Fair hosted by President Barack Obama, an event highlighting the achievements of students from major national science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) competitions, on Tuesday, May 27, 2014. This is the fifth time Science Olympiad has been lauded by a sitting president; in March of 1992, President George H.W. Bush and Education Secretary Lamar Alexander hosted 180 Science Olympiad dignitaries and students at a Washington, DC ceremony; in October 2010, February 2012 and April 2013, students and coaches attended President Obama's annual White House Science Fairs.

Science Olympiad is a Chicago-area based, national non-profit organization founded in 1984 dedicated to improving the quality of K-12 STEM education, increasing male, female and minority interest in science, creating a technologically literate workforce and providing recognition for outstanding achievement by both students and teachers. Nearly 200,000 students and 30,000 teachers on 7,000 teams from all 50 states competed in 380 regional, state and national Science Olympiad tournaments last year. A signature program started in 2007, the Science Olympiad Urban Schools Initiative, provides schools with minority enrollment the additional training and resources needed for students and teachers to succeed in Science Olympiad's hands-on STEM competitions.

“For the past 30 years, Science Olympiad has allowed students to discover their passion and apply their skills in a team setting,” said Dr. Gerard Putz, president and co-founder of Science Olympiad. “With hands-on STEM events that cover biology, chemistry, engineering, astronomy, epidemiology and robotics, Science Olympiad often leads our participants to choose college majors and careers in science and technology.”

Background

Students at the White House event both attended the Science Olympiad State Tournament in Illinois, and received numerous Science Olympiad medals at the Invitational, Regional and State level. Representing Lane Tech High School from Chicago Public Schools in Chicago, Illinois are Robert Harris III and Coach Scott Vessalo. From York High School in Elmhurst, Illinois are Mary-Margaret Koch and Coach Jeremy Paschke.

Robert Harris III attends Carleton College on a four-year, full-tuition scholarship from the Posse Foundation, and plans to pursue a career in biological sciences. “Science Olympiad played an integral role in forming my future goals,” said Robert Harris III. “In the fall I plan on giving back and helping coach a middle school Science Olympiad team.” Coach Scott Vessalo's work with the Science Olympiad Urban Schools Initiative garnered a 2014 NBC Universal Foundation 21st Century Solutions grant for Science Olympiad's programs in the Chicago Public Schools.

Mary-Margaret Koch, a six-year Science Olympiad veteran, captain and 2014 U.S. Senate Youth Program representative, said, “My Science Olympiad experience in Earth Science gave me the background to set a goal of writing environmental policy to protect our planet.” She will attend American University in Washington, DC, this fall. Coach Jeremy Paschke is a 2012 winner of the American Association of Physics Teachers Outstanding High School Physics Teacher Award.

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