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N.M. Tech woos local freshman



Written by T.S. Last Meeting the Challenge A Difference Maker

Wednesday, 04 November 2009 06:00

Nico Seamons loves competition. Now he's officially the object of the game. New Mexico Tech made its first play for the multitalented 14-year-old Socorro High School freshman by offering him a \$3,000 scholarship.

The scholarship offer to Seamons was presented by Annette Kaus, director of Financial Aid at Tech, during an informal gathering at Brown Hall in the office of Dr. Daniel López, the university's president, on Thursday, Oct. 29. The scholarship would be in addition to any other scholarships he may earn.

"When we find students who are exceptional, we try to make a commitment early," López said following the presentation. "There's incredible competition for these students and anytime we find one of that caliber, we try to move quickly to show our interest."

The scholarship offer capped off the eventful month of October for Seamons, who excels in both mind and body. He began the month with a trip to New York City, where he finished as national runner-up in the Discovery Education 3M Young Scientist Challenge. He's also captain of SHS's junior varsity soccer team and got some playing time with the Warriors' varsity squad that made the state playoffs.

Seamons said competition is the driving force that motivates him to excel.

"When you get the results you want, it pushes you," he said. "If I do good in something, it makes me want to improve on it, and participation in the Science Fair and Science Olympiad and these other competitions makes me want to do better. That's just how my mind works."

The Young Science Challenge is one of his biggest accomplishments to date.

Seamons earned his place among 10 semifinalists in New York on Oct. 5, with his invention of an evaporative cooling system for homes during the hot summer months, a project he's still

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working to improve. He presented another invention in the opening round of the challenge.

"It's a film that's applied to the front bumper (of a vehicle) and it serves two purposes," Seamons explained. "It gets the bugs off because it's removable and disposable. You can tear it off and throw it away. The other thing is it has dimples on the outside that affects the air flow. Something smooth is more aerodynamic, but what the dimples do is make it cut through the air, so it can improve (gas) mileage."

In the next round, competitors were asked to devise a method to separate manmade diamonds from soil. Other challenges involved coming up with a method of purifying water and for removing graffiti from buildings without damaging the surface.

Seamons' performance in those events earned him a spot in the final competition — to design and construct a miniature tower that could preserve an egg against earthquake-level tremors. To test their aptitude for problem-solving and ability to think on their feet, contestants were allotted just 50 minutes to build the structure.

Although none of the three finalists' eggs survived the shaking, Marina Dimitrov of Bozeman, Mont. — who, interestingly enough, attends the same school as Nico's cousin — was deemed the winner.

Seamons' second-place effort earned him the "Build it Bigger" prize from the Science Channel's show of the same name. Seamons, who plans to pursue a career in mechanical engineering, will have an opportunity to get a behind-the-scenes look at the filming of a show that focuses on innovative engineering.

Seamons appreciated another parting gift that he got from the Young Scientist Challenge.

"One of the best things they sent me home with was a box of stuff made by 3M," he said. "It's a one-year supply of sponges and tape and different things."

Some of the products in the box Seamons said he already uses as part of projects and others could come in handy in developing other inventions in the future.

The oldest son of Janet Coursey and John Seamons, Nico said he's interested in developing ideas that will have an impact on people's lives. He pointed out how something as simple as Post-it Notes — a 3M product — can make a difference in helping people keep their lives organized.

But Seamons has designs to build something bigger as a mechanical engineer. Nico said he loves building things, whether it's a home cooling system or something with Legos.

Janet Coursey said Creighton Edington, a former science teacher at Cottonwood Valley Charter School, who is now teaching at Deming High School, had a big influence in stimulating her son's interest in science and math. And it was he who got Nico involved in entering academic competitions.

Seamons' competitive nature extends into other areas. Within the last year, he won the Rotary Club's "4-Way Test Essay Contest" and had the winning design for the "M" Mountain Classic soccer tournament.

Seamons also excels on the soccer pitch. He was a standout AYSO player before becoming one of the few ninth-graders to make the Warriors varsity roster.

Seamons loves exercising his body and mind and sometimes his passions for soccer and science collide.

"Sometimes it's hard to balance the two — I want to work on a project but I have to go to soccer," he said.

It's still too early for Nico to decide what he'll do after graduating from SHS. More scholarship offers — academic and perhaps athletic — are likely to come his way in years to come.

As a school that bills itself as an engineering and research university, New Mexico Tech is worthy of consideration, and Seamons is already a bit of a shop rat at Tech's mechanical engineering workshop.

"It's got great facilities and a nice gym," he said of the college.

Whether her son eventually accepts the scholarship or chooses to pursue his education elsewhere, Coursey appreciates Tech's early offer.

"What this represents is an effort on the university's part to show support for academics in the community," she said.

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