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Google's global, online science fair kicks off

By John Matson | Tuesday, January 11, 2011 | 1 comments



NEW YORK CITY—The Google Science Fair is a bit different. For one thing, it's open to students around the world, who submit videos or slide shows. And the prizes are a tad snazzier than

Scientific American, along with Lego, *National Geographic* and particle physics, is a partner in the science fair, which kicked off here on January 11. The winner of the contest, which winners receive, among other goodies, a \$50,000 scholarship, a 10-day trip (where Charles Darwin did some of his most important field work) or a three-day site visit to CERN, Google or *Scientific American*.

"Kids can be just terrific at doing science," said Mariette DiChristina, CEO in chief, who served as emcee for the launch event and is one of the people who ask great questions, offer fresh viewpoints, and bring a sense of fun and a drive to learn," DiChristina said. "What if we harness our talents to solve the world's most vexing problems as a nation and around the globe?"

Two of the featured speakers testified to doing just that. William Kamkwamba spoke of building a windmill to provide power to his family's home in Malawi. After financial problems forced him to borrow textbooks from a local library and constructed windmills using old tractor and bicycle parts to protect the house, made of grass, from electrical fires. Kamkwamba co-authored a 2009 book about *the Wind*, and now teaches children back home how to build their own windmills.

Artificial-intelligence (AI) buff Tesca Fitzgerald of Oregon, who is already enrolled in college even though she's still in high school until June, showed off her entry in the science fair. Fitzgerald's project investigated how to reduce nurses' workload in hospitals. Citing statistics about a shortage of nurses, and about the disproportionate time spent transporting patient items, Fitzgerald presented a modification to a robotic pathfinding algorithm

reach their destinations. It was competing in science fairs, she said, that brought out her passion f

Entries to the science fair can be submitted until April 4. After multiple rounds of judging to winn
then finalists, the winner of the contest—and all the prizes that entails—will be announced in July.

Google Science Fair logo in Legos: Angela Cesaro/Scientific American

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