



## Paving the way for Texas' bright future

By Justin Minsker

Nearly 1,150 of the best and brightest young science and engineering minds from across the state displayed their projects at the 30th Annual Texas Science and Engineering Fair on April 2nd. The fair, which was hosted by The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), is co-sponsored by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and ExxonMobil.

"Innovation is what Texas does best, and this year's winners exemplify the innovative spirit that has propelled the Lone Star State to be a national leader in job creation," said Governor Abbott. "Texas is inspiring and encouraging a new generation of entrepreneurs, and I am confident that programs like the State Science Fair and the Governor's Science and Technology Champions Academy will help our students excel in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields."

Apollo 16 astronaut and the 10th man to walk on the moon, General Charlie Duke and 2015 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) award winner Karan Jerath served as the keynote speakers at this year's awards ceremony where awards were given to the top three projects in each category for both the junior (middle school) and senior (high school) divisions.

Jerath, a freshman engineering student at The University of Texas at Austin, was last year's Young Scientist Award Winner at the ISEF and was recently named as *Forbes* 30 Under 30 in the Energy Sector for his winning invention of an improved oil well head containment device.

General Duke, a NASA astronaut and the youngest person to walk on the moon in 1972, spoke about the importance of an education in science and seeking a career in STEM fields.

Students competed in 20 life and physical science project categories. The top two projects in the life science and physical science disciplines earned first and second grand prize recognitions, and from among these winners, one individual in each division was selected for the Best-of-Show designations. This year's junior division Best-of-Show winner, Kevin Meng



Left—Keynote speaker Apollo 16 Astronaut Gen. Charlie Duke, 10th man to walk on the moon.

Above right— Physical Science winners, left to right: Second Grand Prize Winner Yingjie Wang and First Grand Prize and Best in Show Winner Syamantak Payra

of Robinson Middle School in Plano, earned the honor for his project on "Smart School Bus Pro for Android - A School Bus Tracking and Monitoring Solution for Students, Parents and Drivers."

The senior division Best-of-Show was awarded to Syamantak Payra of Clear Brook High School in Friendswood who presented a project on "Brace Yourself: A Novel Electronically Aided Leg Orthosis." Last month, Payra attended the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in Phoenix and was named the ISEF Young Scientist Award winner where he received a \$50,000 prize, making the second-straight year a Texas Science fair participant has earned the honor.

The top two finishers in each category at the Texas Science and Engineering Fair from the senior division were awarded scholarships to attend the Texas Governor's Science and Technology Champions Academy, a weeklong residential summer camp, also sponsored by TWC, which was recently held at Texas A&M University.

"The Texas Science and Engineering Fair showcased the wonderful creativity of students across the state as they competed for recognition in 20 different categories," said TWC Chairman Andres Alcantar who attended the fair and addressed the students at the event's awards ceremony. "I congratulate all of the regional and statewide winners, whose continued work in STEM fields will lead to innovative solutions for real world issues facing Texas."

The Governor's Science and Technology Champions Academy and the Texas Science and Engineering Fair are two of TWC's many programs designed to encourage students to learn and participate in STEM activities to acquire the knowledge and skills to equip them for in-demand occupations.

TWC also sponsors high school robotics programs and the Governor's Summer Merit Program, which provides scholarships to enroll disadvantaged middle and high school students in STEM skills-related summer camp programs. ■