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FLAGSTAFF TEACHER HONORED AS AN “INNOVATION HERO” DURING TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK

Coconino High robotics team leader first in region; student also honored

(FLAGSTAFF, AZ) - A Coconino High School science teacher and one of her students became the first in the region to be named Science Foundation Arizona “Innovation Heroes” for their outstanding achievements in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. SFaz’s “Innovation Heroes” are statewide awards presented to students and teachers who show extraordinary achievements in STEM education. STEM mastery is becoming increasingly important, as states must now compete in a global, 21st century marketplace where education, creativity and innovation are key to economic success.

SFAz’s “Teacher Appreciation Week” honoree, Christine Sapio, teaches advanced placement physics at Coconino High School in Flagstaff and is a coordinator of the Coconino Institute of Technology (CIT) accelerated science and engineering program. Sapio also coaches the robotics and engineering team known as the “CocoNuts,” which has excelled statewide and competed nationally.

Nominated by Flagstaff Unified School District Superintendent Barbara Hickman, Sapio is described as possessing an infectious energy that gets her students excited about college-level mathematics and science concepts. As a result, Coconino’s robotics students do well in academics and go out of their way to tackle Sapio’s challenging STEM curriculum, often pursuing careers in science and technology. Sapio’s Innovation Heroes award earns her a \$500 gift certificate for classroom projects.

Winners are chosen from a pool of nominees submitted by colleagues, teachers, student and members of the community. The awards are made possible through the support of Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold and the Rodel Foundations.

“Teachers who find ways to make science and math related subjects exciting and interesting are truly an inspiration to their students,” said William C. Harris, President and CEO of Science Foundation Arizona (SFAz). “Science and engineering provide the background and knowledge to change the world. This next generation will have this opportunity, and has the potential to foster the researchers who cure cancer or find answers to the energy problem.”

Student Vitas Zukowski also received an “Innovation Heroes” award, earning a savings bond for college worth \$1000. A student of the Coconino Institute of Technology, Zukowski was nominated by Sapio for his dedication to the CocoNuts team and his drive to excel academically, as well as use his skills in advanced sciences and chemistry to help his classmates and younger students.

Zukowski is known for diving into his CIT projects, conducting research, putting together intricate plans for and constructing prototypes prior to putting together his final projects. Zukowski is well-rounded, volunteering time to various school organizations and the community. He designed and maintains the CocoNuts’ website, mentors younger students at South Beaver School and Sechrist

Elementary, is co-president of Coconino's National Honor Society chapter, and a member of various school organizations and serves on the city of Flagstaff's Youth Advisory Council.

"Innovation Heroes' are all about showcasing examples of mathematics and science excellence in our state," said Darcy Renfro, Vice President of SFaz and Executive Director of SFaz's STEM Initiatives. "While we still have to make access to quality STEM learning more widespread, it is clear there are teachers who use project-based programs to ensure their students are learning these subjects in ways that make them relevant, useful and interesting."

"We are pleased to sponsor Innovation Heroes such as Christine Sapio and her student, Vitas Zukowski," said Carol Peck, President and CEO of the Rodel Foundation of Arizona. "Ms. Sapio is a true leader and motivator to her students, challenging them to a high standard and encouraging them as they succeed. Congratulations to Mr. Zukowski for his achievements, as he has a great future ahead of him."

"The type of creativity these 'Innovation Heroes' exhibit is truly amazing," said Richard Adkerson, President and CEO of Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold. "The concepts these young people are learning in grade school and high school in the areas of science and engineering – regardless of which industry they choose – are the pathway to careers of the future."

"In my 15 years of school administration, I have seen many teams and clubs for students – seldom have I had the pleasure to witness one with this kind of success, tangible and intangible," said Barbara Hickman, Superintendent of Flagstaff Unified School District. "That only comes with hands-on guidance and steady leadership of involved teachers and coaches."

SFAz is seeking nominations for more "Innovation Heroes." To submit a teacher or student for consideration, visit www.sfaz.org and download the application form. Self-nominations are also accepted.

About Science Foundation Arizona: Science Foundation Arizona (SFAz) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization initiated in 2006 by the Greater Phoenix Leadership Inc., Southern Arizona Leadership Council and the Flagstaff Forty in conjunction with the executive and legislative branches of state government. SFAz serves as a catalyst for high-wage, knowledge-based jobs and economic diversity through administration and strict oversight of research, development and education grants to public education and other non-profit research performing institutions. For more information, visit www.sfaz.org.

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