



## NHS students engineer a state victory

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PLUM ISLAND — The Plum Island Aerodrome has seen many feats of flight in its decades of existence. It saw another one yesterday when seven Newburyport High School students were honored for winning a statewide competition for designing a fuel-efficient plane wing.

Students Thayer Adsit, Philip Arets, Belle Douglass, Irene Jacqz, Molly Picillo, Travis Souther and Tom Svirsky, along with their team coach and NHS technology teacher, Sarah Leadbeater, received recognition for having the best design amongst all Bay State high school participants in the Department of Energy's annual Real World Design Challenge in a ceremony inside the airfield's hangar.

By virtue of winning the state competition, the team will head to Washington, D.C., this weekend to compete against RWDC winners from nine other states. While the state competition involved fuel efficiency for a wing design, the national competition will involve reducing drag for such jets.

"We are extremely proud of you, and know you will represent Massachusetts well," said Chris Willenborg, executive director of the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission, which hosted the event. He presented each team member, including Leadbeater, with a certificate recognizing their efforts and read a letter of congratulations from Lt. Gov. Timothy P. Murray.

The Real World Design Challenge is administered each year by the U.S. Department of Energy. Its mission is to "inspire and engage all students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education and systematically highlight the potential of future workers in science and engineering fields," according to its Web site. The challenge has sponsorship from the Federal Aviation Commission, NASA and Cessna Aircraft Co.

Remarks were made at the ceremony by Newburyport Mayor John Moak; Newburyport High Principal Michael Parent; Newburyport high technology department head Stephen Smith; Fred Lucy, staffer to state Rep. Michael Costello; and state Sen. Steve Baddour, among other speakers.

Lucy presented each of the team members with official congratulations from the Massachusetts General Court and invited them to visit the Statehouse after they return from Washington.

"You're the best from 10 states, which means you've already beaten 40 other ones," said Lucy to laughter from the crowd.

Moak lauded the city's education system in helping to produce such dedicated students.

"I don't have to say "good luck" to you because I know you'll use the knowledge you have to do a great job down in Washington," he said.

Winning the competition came as a result of many weeks of hard work for the NHS students, which mostly came on weekends on top of schoolwork, extracurricular and community activities, and, for the seniors in the group, college searches.

"I'm impressed that we pulled the project together so successfully," Jacqz said. "Everyone brings different strengths to the group, and I'm really impressed with what we did."

MAC Commissioner and Byfield resident Arthur Allen had a couple of pieces of advice for the winning team members.

"One, put this on your resume in big, bold colors, and two, go down there and win. That won't hurt," he said.

Allen is thrilled to see young students taking an interest in the fields of aircraft science and engineering.

"These are real heroes to me because if we don't have kids coming along that are going to do these jobs, we'll be worse off," he said, citing a need to stay in step with other countries developing systems of their own.

The NHS team had a few months to work on the wing design for fuel efficiency but has only had one month for the national challenge on drag. Despite this, they feel very confident about what they have going into this weekend.

"We spent all of the last five weekends working on this," Arets said. "We put a lot of time into it, so we're hoping to see some good results."

"I'm really interested to see what the other teams bring to it because presumably they're the best teams in the country," Jacqz said.

While looking forward to presenting and working to win the national competition, the team is also hoping to have some fun in D.C. and will spend at least some time getting to see the many museums there, they said. The trip will be all-expenses paid.

Smith credited a very supportive school district and community for fostering an atmosphere where his engineering students could succeed.

"Little by little, you've raised it up a notch, and this team right here has really done an exceptional job," he said. "It makes what I do for a living a pleasure."

The students didn't need a lot of pushing to become the winning team.

"For myself, we put the team together, gave them the competition, and got out of their way," said Leadbeater, who will join her students this weekend. "They've been amazing. They're a really motivated group of kids."

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