

Winning Students Earn Green for Being Green in Lexus Eco Challenge

April 17, 2018



PLANO, TX, April 17, 2018—It's fashionable to be green, according to the Grand Prize winners of the 11th annual Lexus Eco Challenge competition. By creating jewelry and homemade candles from reusable materials, these students found creative ways to take their passion in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) to a whole new level.

More than 2,300 students in grades 6–12 participated in the Lexus Eco Challenge, an educational contest that empowers students to learn about the environment and take action to improve it. A total of \$500,000 in scholarships and grants is awarded to the winning student teams, their teachers and schools. To learn more about the program and winners visit: www.scholastic.com/lexus.

Through the first two phases of the Lexus Eco Challenge, 32 middle and high school teams were selected as finalists. Each finalist earned a \$10,000 prize to be shared among the team, teacher and school, and was invited to embark on the final challenge to reach beyond their local community to inspire environmental action. The teams communicated their innovative ideas to a wide audience in the last round, broadening the reach of their work to people outside of their communities.

Lexus and Scholastic, the global children’s publishing, education and media company, reviewed the finalists’ innovative submissions and selected one middle and high school team as the 2017-2018 Lexus Eco Challenge Grand Prize winners. The Grand Prize-winning teams each receive an additional \$30,000, divided into a \$7,000 grant for the school, a \$3,000 grant for the team’s teacher advisor, and \$20,000 in scholarships for the students to share. Eight First Place-winning teams are awarded an additional \$15,000 each.

This year’s high school Grand Prize-winning team is the “Enerjagers” from Saint Joseph Academy in Cleveland, Ohio. Enerjagers and teacher advisor Kristen Schuler focused on reusing materials and trash, which would otherwise find its way into a landfill. The students also produced 600 candles from old glassware, crayons and beeswax and distributed them to local residents. Team members of Enerjagers said they learned a lot about the environment while working on their project.

“Throughout the challenge, I learned that my daily choices make an environmental impact now and for future generations,” said Joslyn Muniz, 18, Enerjager team member. “My friends and family joined with me in making better choices in our daily lives to be more environmentally friendly.”

Tatyjana Henry, 18, agreed with her classmate Joslyn that the Lexus Eco Challenge competition was a positive experience.

“I am so thankful for the opportunity to do something to improve the environment and raise awareness in our community,” she said.

The Grand Prize-winning middle school team was “Plastic Elastic 3.0” from Christa McAuliffe School (P.S. 28) in Jersey City, NJ, guided by teacher advisors Malissa Yabut and Robert O’Donnell. They explored and confronted the dangers of how microfibers work their way into our water supply and eventually into our food. They also created jewelry from recycled plastic bags and gave them as gifts to young students and local seniors.

“As an inner city Title I district, our students have access to an incredible educational support system that enables them to feel empowered with their own ideas and have the guidance they need to pursue their goals,” said Malissa Yabut, one of the group’s advisors. “On behalf of the students and school community of P.S.#28 in Jersey City, NJ, we extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation for all parties involved with the Lexus Eco Challenge.”

“It is the organization's acknowledgement and support of our students’ work in environmental science that drives us all to do more to ensure the preservation and conservation of our local and global environment,” she added.

The Grand Prize- and First Place-winning teams that best addressed environmental challenges are listed below:

Final Challenge

State, City

School Name

High School Grand Prize Winner

Team Name

Project Summary

OH – Cleveland
Saint Joseph Academy

Enerjagers

Focused on reusing materials instead of utilizing the energy that goes toward recycling or tossing them into the trash. The students produced candles from old glassware, crayons, beeswax, and more, and got the word out about their actions.

High School First Prize Winners

NY – Jericho
Jericho High School

Powerfuels

The students forged partnerships with international organizations, collected trash in their community and shipped it to a facility to convert it into fuel (they aim to do this for the school district), produced a short film, hosted an event in New York City about their cause, and more.

TX – Dallas
School of Science and Engineering

3D Pneumatic Aerator Creators

The team is working with civil engineers to finalize its own filtration systems and partnered with the former ambassador to Nepal and others to get mini-filter systems and educational materials to the region for safe drinking water practices.

NM – Farmington
Navajo Preparatory School

Navajo Prep Flying Eagles

The Navajo Prep Flying Eagles focused on the needs of local communities that are dealing with high poverty. The students designed and built a prototype for a solar- and thermal-powered heating and cooling system that could be used in homes in an off-the-grid rural area (for which they foresee a global application).

WA – Redmond
Tesla STEM High School

Operation Sustain

Operation Sustain focused on climate education. The students partnered with a local university for help with improving the climate computer game they designed, and produced and implemented a new academic standards-based environmental science curriculum for elementary classrooms and more.

Middle School Grand Prize Winner

NJ – Jersey City
Christa McAuliffe School (P.S. 28) Plastic Elastic 3.0

Students created a prototype filter to keep microfibers from traveling into bodies of water and conducted repeated tests on their filter in the hope of getting it installed at local laundromats. Additionally, the students made and distributed jewelry from upcycled plastic bags.

Middle School First Prize Winners

NY – Locust Valley
Locust Valley Middle School Bottle Buddies

The students contacted local legislators about imposing a plastic bag usage fee, gave presentations, created a hip-hop song and video to get the word out, raised money for Puerto Rico’s hurricane relief, and more. Students led a community “trash walk” to emphasize Styrofoam’s eco-dangers; created a Styro-digester, which uses beetle larvae to recycle Styrofoam and secured bins for their school to collect Styrofoam for upcycling or feeding to their beetle larvae. They also presented to the Board of Education about eliminating Styrofoam trays from their lunchroom.

NJ – Jersey City
Christa McAuliffe School (P.S. 28) Styro-Terminators

Students planted trees in their community that were destroyed due to drought, invasive species, and other issues. The students estimate that their efforts will yield the planting of 160 trees this year at schools, parks and their local amphitheater. The team is sharing their ideas with contacts in Australia and Finland.

CA – La Habra
Washington Middle School WMS Tree Titans

KY – Lexington
SCAPA at Bluegrass

The Hydro Heroes

The team organized a cleanup at a nearby creek that yielded nine bags of non-recyclable trash and nearly 23 pounds of recyclable cans and bottles from the water source. They partnered with several big corporations and spoke to legislators at their state capitol building about putting a statewide bottle-deposit system in place.

Over the past eleven years, the Lexus Eco Challenge has awarded more than \$5 million in scholarships that has helped more than 33,000 middle and high school students have an impact on their communities, learn about the environment and improve their teamwork skills.

The Lexus Eco Challenge also provides supplemental educational materials, created and distributed by Scholastic, to encourage teachers to integrate creative environmental lesson plans into their classrooms. For each year's challenge, the website has lesson plans and teacher instructions, including questions to help guide a discussion about the current challenge topic, facts about the topic, and guidelines for a specific classroom project.

The Lexus Eco Challenge is part of [The Lexus Pursuit of Potential](#), a philanthropic initiative that generates up to \$3 million in donations each year for organizations that help build, shape and improve children's lives.

Lexus will open the 12th annual 2018-2019 Lexus Eco Challenge this fall with \$500,000 in prize money for eligible students, teachers and schools. Information on how students and teachers can participate in the "Land and Water" and/or "Air and Climate" challenges will be available this summer at www.scholastic.com/lexus.