Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
For Immediate Release: April 25, 2017
Print PDF

WASHINGTON – A team comprised of Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) students won the grand prize of $5,000 and the a Gold Mars Trophy for the physical competition at the 2017 NASASwarmathon held at the Kennedy Space Center. The Swarmathon is a robotics programming challenge administered under a cooperative agreement between the NASA Minority University Research and Education Program and The University of New Mexico. More than 500 students from 40 colleges and 30 high schools participated in the competition held on April 18-20.

"Well done to the brilliant students at SIPI. These young people are breaking new ground and making everyone proud," said Secretary Ryan Zinke. "I look forward to following their budding careers in STEM and expect them all to make an impact."

This year, Swarmathon teams competing in the physical competition were tasked to develop codes for operating systems that instruct robots to find objects and return them to a designated place without human assistance. Teams created innovative algorithms that have the potential to be further developed for such tasks as cleaning hazardous waste as well as assisting with rescue missions during catastrophic disasters.

"Placing at the top of the 2017 NASA Swarmathon is an outstanding achievement for the students on the team, the SIPI faculty and students, and the Bureau of Indian Education," said Acting Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Michael S. Black. "These students exemplify how dedication to studies can translate into real life success."

"The post-secondary schools under the Bureau of Indian Education offer a great education," said Bureau of Indian Education Director Tony Dearman. "We at the BIE are enormously proud of the SIPI team for successfully tackling these challenges and showing the excellent education SIPI has to offer the students of Indian Country."

The 2017 Swarmathon SIPI team consisted of Schulte Cooke, a member of the Navajo Nation and studying Geospatial Information Technology; Emery Sutherland, a member of the Navajo Nation and studying Computer Aided Drafting and Design; Christian Martinez, a member of the Pueblo of Laguna studying Network Management; Ty Shurley, a member of the Navajo Nation and studying Engineering and Computer Aided Drafting and Design; Professor Nader Vadiee and Dr. Johathan west, the team's faculty advisors. Professor Nader Vadiee is the lead faculty/coordinator of the Engineering and Engineering Technology Programs and the director of the Intelligent Cooperative Multi-Agent Robotic System at SIPI.

SIPI has a history of success at the Swarmathon, placing third in last year's physical competition. Established in 1971, SIPI is an accredited National Indian Community College and Land Grant institution located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. SIPI is one of two post-secondary institutions overseen by the Bureau of Indian Education.

###

For Immediate Release: April 25, 2017

