

Key to Road Safety

DHS project earns global award

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Carol Roehm/Commercial-News

Danville High School Future Problem Solvers (from left) Kaleb Medina, Micah Cherry, Makayla Smith and DJ Barnette received third place internationally for Project Ignition.

DANVILLE – A Danville High School student group brought home a third-place award for their Project Ignition: Be the Key to Road Safety project earlier this month at an international competition.

The DHS Future Problem Solvers presented their project at the International Future Problem Solvers competition June 3-9 at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where they competed with more than 75 teams from around the world. The international competition draws about 2,000 problem solvers in three age divisions — junior, middle and senior.

During the international competition, the Danville teens were judged on their project, with judges also interviewing the students and asking them questions about their project.

This year's Project Ignition: Be the Key to Road Safety was a continuation of what the students started during the 2017-2018 school year.

"It's a project we felt we could do more with," Future Problem Solver and DHS graduate Makayla Smith said.

Although two years is the maximum a group can work on a project, Future Problem Solver and DHS graduate Kaleb Medina said, "The judges still gave us constructive criticism on our project and told us what we could have done better."

Also during the competition, the Danville group was paired up with an international team. This year, the local teens' "buddy team" was from Turkey who gifted the group with a confection called Turkish Delight and jewelry, according to DHS junior Micah Cherry.

DHS senior DJ Barnette said he thought the best part of the group's presentation at the competition was their video.

"Our video was really good," he said.

Earlier this year, the DHS Future Problem Solvers were named 2019 Illinois State Champions for the same project in the community problem solving category. That win earned them a spot in the international competition.

The Danville group always competes in the community problem solving category. In that category, groups of up to 15 students per school follow a six-step problem solving process to affect change and help solve real community challenges. Students also learn lessons about dealing with local authorities and organizations and making a positive impact.

For their project, the DHS Future Problem Solvers developed strategies for safe driving not only on local streets and rural county roads, but also along the Interstate 74 corridor between Danville and Champaign.

The DHS teens hatched the idea for the project after reflecting on the October 2016 death of fellow student D’Nija Parker who was killed in a car accident on Griggs Street. Kaleb also had a personal connection to the project because his sister was killed several years ago in traffic accident as a passenger.

The DHS group researched accident statistics and the leading contributors to accidents. The students learned about the “Fatal Four,” which is not wearing seat belts, speeding, using electronics, and driving impaired. The teens also learned that 94 percent of all accidents are due to driver decisions or human error and the other 6 percent is due to dangerous road conditions and roadways.

The highlight of the project, though, was the group’s brightly colored signs that remind motorists to drive safely. The signs were 18 months in the making.

The teens unveiled two different signs in May in front of Fagen’s at the corner of North Vermilion Street and Liberty Lane. One sign reminds motorists and pedestrians to Be Smart, Be Safe and Be Seen. Another sign tells motorists to Drive Safe, Arrive Safe.

The colorful signs will be installed in five different areas of Danville, and the group hopes the project’s driving safety information and the signs will make an impact in the area and improve road safety.

“They should be up forever, much like the fitness loop at Espenscheid Park we did in sixth grade,” Kaleb said of the signs.

Micah, who will lead the DHS Future Problem Solvers next year, said the group won’t decide on an issue to tackle until August when school is back in session.

“We haven’t decided yet,” he said. “We need to figure out what’s the problem and what do we need to do to fix it.”

The DHS Future Problem Solvers are: DJ Barnette, Jolene Blodgett, Layla Castro, Micah Cherry, Alexis Flores, Amelia Ingold, Alana Kleiner, Kaleb Medina, Brooke Parker, Shivangi Patel, Makayla Smith and Quemarii Williams.

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