

# Success for Irish students at ISEF – the world’s largest international science fair

David King



*Outstanding Success for Blackwater Community School Science Students at World’s Largest International Science Fair*

Carrying on the school’s long tradition of young scientist success, students from Blackwater Community School were proud to represent **SciFest** and Ireland last May at the **Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) 2012** in the USA. Not only proud to compete, they also scooped second place in the entire Environmental Management section. They were overall winners at the SciFest science fair in WIT 2011 and went on to win the national SciFest fair at Intel, where their prize included the opportunity to compete at ISEF 2012, May 13-18 in Pittsburgh, USA.

Making up Science Team Ireland were **Aoife Gregg, Loreto College St. Stephen’s Green Dublin** (mentored by her teacher

Yseult Whitaker) with her project on cryptography in the Irish language and from **Lismore, Eoghan Flynn and Ruairi O’Neill** with ‘**Polyfuel**’- a novel solution to fuel shortages and disposal of ELPs. To fly the tricolour on the international stage is a great honour in any discipline and Science Team Ireland did the country proud against some of the brightest young minds on the planet. Judging for the event took place over four rounds between Tuesday and Wednesday (15th & 16th May). On Tuesday evening judges evaluated projects without pupils present, then over a gruelling nine hours on Wednesday they questioned, probed and challenged contestants on their work. Over twelve judges from Intel, Google, the US military and the US office of Naval Research amongst others took great interest in the Lismore duo’s simple yet accurate method of converting end of life plastics into liquid fuel. They finally emerged tired yet energised that evening and happy they were still being considered in the final round of judging. It was a great relief for the Irish team to have some relaxation time that evening at Heinz Field, home of the Pittsburgh Steelers and at the Carnegie Science Centre.

On Thursday ISEF opened its doors to the public and for the first time the Irish mentors were able to get around and see the high calibre of work being exhibited. State and national science fair winners from over sixty-eight countries were represented, and they really were the best of the best. Innovations from around the globe included a method for transmitting wireless energy anywhere in the world, a simplified urine test for cancer and a device to allow blind people to see with their tongue!

On Thursday night we settled in for the first of two awards ceremonies, the special awards. Scholarships, internships and prizes to the value of around three million dollars were awarded on the night. Despite being nominated for a number

of special awards, the Lismore boys were not successful. A note of congratulations however, to the **Northern Ireland competitor, Henrik Brüsecke** who won an award from the IEE computer society.

On Friday morning we settled in for the ISEF 2012 grand award ceremony; 127 awards were being given out across the 550 projects exhibiting. Henrik Brüsecke won fourth in computer science and we waited with trepidation on a result for the Irish team. Finally, the announcer called ‘from Waterford, Ireland’ and the rest was a blur. The Irish mentors and fans nearly exploded with joy with the realisation that **Lismore had been placed second in the global young scientist final**. Euphoric scenes followed as Eoghan and Ruairi took their place on the ISEF 2012 stage amongst the world’s elite, and rightly so. The months and months of time, dedication and hard work that the boys and their mentors put into this project have been acknowledged every step of the way. They went from being recognised as the best young scientists in the south east at **WIT SciFest**, then nationally as **SciFest@Intel** winners and finally

they were recognised as one of the best young scientist groups in the world. This was a special moment for the boys, their mentors and families, the Lismore community, for Waterford and for Ireland. The achievements of Eoghan and Ruairi will live long in the memory and we will watch their future careers with great interest.

Huge thanks are due to all the people who made this possible. Thanks to **Intel** and **Discover Science and Engineering**, co-sponsors of the SciFest project.

Thanks to Michael Murray from **CYNAR PLC**, to

Pádraig Ó Murchú and all the good people at Intel Ireland who supported the boys both financially and through expert mentorship. Thanks to Wayne Cummins, Sheila Donnegan and Eoin Gill, **CALMAST**, and all at WIT, who have given every bit of support to this work that was needed.

Massive thanks to **Sheila Porter**, founder and Project Manager of SciFest; we are glad that her faith in the boys has been rewarded. Thanks to John and Catriona and to Eric and Rachael, the parents of Ruairi and Eoghan for all their dedication and support of the boys, the project and the school over the good and tough times in the last twelve months. Finally, a massive thanks to the Blackwater Community School science department for all their promotion of quality education in the sciences both in and outside the classroom over the last nine years. This success belongs to you, the entire school, to Lismore, Waterford and to Ireland.

*David King is a science teacher in Blackwater Community School, Lismore, Co. Waterford. He mentored Eoin and Ruairi from the conception of their project through its various stages to their well-deserved success at ISEF 2012.*



SciFest@Intel 2011, Minister Ciarán Cannon TD, with Eoghan and Ruairi and their teacher David King