

Local youth wow with solutions for future at Innovation Fair



As someone who lives with a physical disability, John Perry is attuned to the needs of those on similar paths.

Perry, who lives with cerebral palsy, has seen his friends excluded from certain groups and activities because of their ability to speak. But rather than just sit on the sidelines, the Grade 11 student from East Gwillimbury set out to help break down barriers in front of them.

The result of his work is the Second Voice Project, an augmented communication application that helps those with voice challenges fully communicate with those around them.

Perry's software, which has garnered significant interest from Google, took home top honours in the Senior category at last week at Aurora's annual Youth Innovation Fair.

Held at Aurora Town Square, the Youth Innovation Fair brings together youth of all ages from across York Region to showcase solutions they have come up with to address the challenges of today to help foster a better tomorrow.

Eager to evaluate this year's submissions were judges Wendy Browne of the Rotary Club, Aurora Citizen of the Year Sandy Bundy, Anthony Garramone of the Aurora Seniors' Centre's Men's Shed, Aurora Public Library Board Chair Lauren Hanna, past Youth Innovation Fair participants and members of Aurora's Youth Engagement Committee.

“What stood out wasn't just your creativity, it was your compassion,” said Mayor Tom Mrakas, speaking to participants and their families in the Aurora Town Square Performance Hall. “You tackled real challenges, imagined better futures, and worked to improve the lives of others. That combination is both powerful and rare. It shows that you don't have to grow up, wait your turn, or get more experience for ideas to matter. The problems you see today are real and your perspectives matter because they are fresh, honest and bold.”

Improving the lives of others was certainly the mission for Perry and his Second Voice Project.

“I myself have a physical disability and one of the biggest things is I have several friends with voice needs and I wanted to give back to this community and it's been really nice to be able to,” he shared. “A good friend of mine that I played hockey with was kind of excluded from group activities because of his lack of ability to speak in that regard. When he started using [this tool], he's now going to college, and there are all kinds of great things that are coming out of that.”

Last summer, Perry decided to take Second Voice to the next level and submitted it to Google for Startups on what he said was a ?Hail Mary? thinking it would ?never go anywhere.?

He was braced for rejection when he saw he had a response from the tech giant, but it was anything but.

?It's now powered by one of Google's speech models, so there's a lot of stuff that we've been able to do with their help,? says Perry. ?It's about helping people and helping kids. We are a business now, so obviously there are other factors at play, but my biggest thing was I didn't build this for money. This was never about making money. What's been really nice is seeing that I'm able to help people.?

Giving a helping hand to the environment was just one factor that secured Grade 8 students Arwin Ghahremanian and Dylan Jiang with their Self-Sorting Garbage Bin.

The Self-Sorting Garbage Bin concept uses an AI-powered camera, programmed by more than 5,000 individual photographs taken by the students of various examples of garbage, to create a sensor that can sort waste into different compartments as it gets tossed in the bin.

?We noticed a lot of our classmates are lazy. We have three bins ? compost, recycling, and waste ? and we'd see a classmate do a back-handed toss to whatever bin and with whatever garbage they had and thought, ?Why don't we just solve that problem for them?' If you're going to be lazy, at least do it in a smart way. The greatest mathematicians are the laziest, always trying to find a shortcut, so we created this machine that sorts the trash for you.?

The duo's concept involves bins equipped with their own modem, connected to a network, that is sustainable, ?self-reliable? and doesn't rely on external sources of power.

They see many more applications for their product beyond the school environment.

?In large malls, people can be very careless, especially in food courts. They would just dump everything on their tray into the garbage and wouldn't take the time to pick out each thing,? says Arwin. ?Here, they could just throw the garbage into one chute and out of that chute it would sort all the garbage into different areas.?

THIS YEAR'S WINNERS

JUNIOR CATEGORY

WINNER: Eyal Jorchatov ? Ice Build Up Machine

HONOURABLE MENTION: Kelly Guo, Chloe Huan, Ivy Wang ? Green Energy

HONOURABLE MENTION: Yejoon Kim, Olivia Park, Eric Shividky, Brian Zhang ? Boney Jr Robot

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY

WINNER: Arwin Ghahremanian, Dylan Jiang ? Garbage Sorter

HONOURABLE MENTION: Kristi Brkic, Maelle Hamilton, Zoey Rabinovich ? Comfy Curls

HONOURABLE MENTION: Ayden Arabi, Allegra Buchanan, Amaya Gajadhar, Ethan Gadadhar, Madeline Northrup, Patrick Northrup, Chase Sullivan ? Arcaomath

SENIOR CATEGORY

WINNER: John Perry ? Second Voice Project

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