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Team beat out college students in design competition

Four Tohatchi High School seniors were recognized by the Gallup-McKinley County Board of Education during their June 22 meeting.

The students, Matthew Manuelito, Chad Kee, Tahira Mason and Cypress Mike, placed first in the New Mexico Tech Wolves Den competition in April. The competition was part of the New Mexico MESA USA Showcase at New Mexico Tech's campus in Socorro, N.M.

New Mexico MESA is a pre-college program that prepares students for college and careers in science, engineering, mathematics, or technology related fields.

Shawndeana Smith, coordinator for N.M. MESA, spoke at the meeting for the students.

"When the COVID-19 pandemic hit us, it impacted a lot of our students," Smith said. "It was a big challenge to get our students the necessary activities they can do at home."

Despite the challenge brought on by the pandemic, Smith said the four students being recognized by the board wanted to present an idea for a project that could benefit their communities.

For the competition, students were tasked with implementing a Human-Centered Design approach to find a client in their community who had a need, engineer a solution for this need using Arduino as the key component, and present their solution.

Arduino is an open-source hardware and software company that designs and manufactures single-board microcontrollers and microcontroller kits for building digital devices.

The four students in the competition came up with an idea for a prototype cell phone signal booster built using materials they had at home. The name for their project is “At Home Cell Phone Tower: The Key to Better Emergency Communication in Tohatchi, New Mexico.”

Smith said the students designed their project with help they got from their teachers and mentors they had met through N.M. MESA and N.M. Tech.

“New Mexico Tech then offered a spot for the students to compete in the Wolves Den competition, and they won against college students,” Smith said.

Three students were present at the meeting to receive plaques for their efforts. Each student wore a mask and adhered to the six-feet apart guideline.

“We really want to showcase these individuals and wonderful students, and highlight them for the future,” Smith said.

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