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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2020-21 A.H. Nickless Innovation Award competition canceled
In lieu of competition, Nickless Family Charitable Foundation approves funding for Boys & Girls Clubs program serving two Bay City elementary schools

UNIVERSITY CENTER, MICH., Sept. 8, 2020 – With the COVID-19 pandemic still in progress and continuing to foster uncertainties, the Nickless Family Charitable Foundation has canceled the 2020-21 A.H. Nickless Innovation Award competition.

“In light of the fact that not all school districts in our competition region will offer in-person instruction to begin the school year and the fact that many of our competitors would have little or no access to the school facilities, equipment and personnel needed to complete a competitive project, the Nickless Family Charitable Foundation has made the difficult decision to cancel this year’s competition,” said Tri-Star Trust Senior Vice President, Senior Relationship Officer and Philanthropic Solutions Group Director John W. Kidwell, who organizes the competition on behalf of the foundation each year. “In the interest of maintaining as level of a playing field as possible and encouraging social distancing to help slow the spread of COVID-19, canceling the competition feels like the right thing to do, though it’s certainly not the easy thing.”

Aimed at inspiring passion for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) subjects and challenging students to work in teams to think innovatively and develop solutions to problems impacting the world, the award is a competition for high school students ages 13 to 18 in Bay, Midland, Saginaw and Tuscola counties. Topics typically include – but are not limited to – issues related to alternative energy, healthcare, science, technology or life sciences.

Kidwell said the foundation fully intends to resume the competition – which has awarded more than \$500,000 in scholarships and grants to local students – in 2021-22.

In the interim, the Nickless Family Charitable Foundation has committed some of the dollars that would have been used to fund the 2020-21 competition to support a program at the Bay City Unit of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Great Lakes Bay Region that provides a supervised, socially distanced remote learning space for Washington and MacGregor elementary students whose parent or parents work outside the home.

“While we are not able to offer the Innovation Award this year, the foundation is pleased to continue supporting educational efforts in the region with this grant to the Boys and Girls



Clubs,” Kidwell said. “Through this program, up to 90 students are able to have their remote learning activities overseen by the Boys and Girls Clubs in a safe and socially distanced environment while their parent or parents can continue working outside the home to support the family.”

2019-20 A.H. Nickless Innovation Award recap

The 2019-20 competition wrapped up unconventionally in June following an approximately two-month postponement due to the COVID-19 pandemic – and the subsequent adoption of a remote competition format to promote social distancing and participant safety. A total of 12 of the top 20 teams opted to finish out the seventh annual competition and present their projects during a day of Zoom meetings.

The winning teams and their projects were:

- **First place** (\$5,000 scholarship per team member; \$20,000 STEM education grant for the school) – **CD-ROM** from **Midland High School**: Team Leader Corbin Fleming-Dittenber and team members Andrew Scheffer, Timmy Kipfmiller and Erika Leasher, coached by Robert Fox; the team’s project was a meal-planning app to help low-income households save money and reduce food waste.
- **Second place** (\$2,500 scholarship per team member; \$10,000 STEM education grant for the school) – **Foresight** from **Freeland High School**: Team Leader Liam Pan and team members Hana Pan, Britnee Niedzielski and Ashley Harvey, coached by Thomas Short; the team’s project was a vision-enhancing electronic device for individuals with low vision.
- **Third place** (\$1,000 scholarship per team member; \$5,000 STEM education grant for the school) – **SunSafe** from **Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy**: Team Leader Bhanu Mamillapalli and team members Pratham Patel, Malhar Amin, Shiloh Maliskey and Brendan Fosgitt, coached by Matthew Miller; the team’s project was a skin cancer prevention device that alerts users about dangerous UV exposure levels.

In addition to the three winning schools, Herbert Henry Dow High School (Midland) and Reese High School also were represented in the final 12 teams.

About the A.H. Nickless Innovation Award

The A.H. Nickless Innovation Award was created in 2013 by the Nickless Family Charitable Foundation to honor the memory of the late Arthur H. Nickless, a local innovator and owner of Wolverine Telephone Company. With a goal of inspiring passion for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), the competition is open to high school students in Bay, Midland, Saginaw and Tuscola counties and awards up to \$77,500 per year in scholarships to students and STEM grants to schools. For more information, visit ahninnovationaward.com.