

# Egg Harbor Township Schools

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For Immediate Release:

**October 28, 2021**

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## Four EHT Student Teams Compete in Virtual NJSBA STEAM Tank Challenge

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP - When your hometown's namesake is so vitally important that it is designated a National Scenic and Recreational River by US Congress, it can evoke enough emotion to produce an award-winning invention to protect and preserve it.

It's safe to assume that Mayuri Acharya and Chantel Deveza, 10th grade students at Egg Harbor Township High School, had the health and wellbeing of the Great Egg Harbor River in their thoughts when they masterminded their "Eco River" invention -- a copper filter designed to help depollute rivers and streams by filtering out waste. Their creation, which caught the attention of judges at the annual NJ STEAM Tank Challenge competition in early October, garnered them an Outstanding Achievement nod in the *Sustainability* category. Judged on their ability to provide concrete evidence that their idea/invention is not harmful to the environment, limits the depletion of natural resources, addresses, presents innovative solutions to climate change, and provides long-term ecological balance that will benefit individuals, families and communities, the dynamic duo will receive a certificate and a digital badge for their ingenious work.

Modeled after the popular TV show 'Shark Tank,' the NJ STEAM Tank Challenge is hosted annually by the NJ School Boards Association (NJSBA) and sponsored by the U.S. Army. It enables student teams to work together to invent something new, modify an existing product, or identify a situation or real-world problem that needs attention. Teams are provided criteria, and a panel of experts judge the designs and solutions. The program, which encourages students and teachers to work collaboratively, supports the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Laine Elliott, Nadia Rahman, and Sydney Szeligowski, another team of 10th graders from EHTHS were also honored for outstanding achievement at the NJ STEAM Tank Challenge for their *Innovative Use of*

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*Technology* with their HBD (Helping the Blind and Deaf) Mitten invention that uses a variety of sensors to detect objects in close proximity to the users. “The judges really enjoyed the presentation, the transformation of their project, and the feedback they received from subject matter experts that they contacted about their projects,” said Kristen Zompa, Alder Avenue Middle School’s Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) teacher. The award is given to teams who demonstrate innovative uses of technology software, programming, and/or control technology that solves real-world problems, and benefits individuals, communities and/or organizations. The trio also received the judges’ endorsement for their creativity and their exemplar integration of the Arts and for societal, social and emotional impact, demonstrating great care and concern for human conditions and diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.

Egg Harbor Township Middle School students were also recognized at this year’s event. Alder Avenue Middle School’s 7<sup>th</sup> grade team of Anastassia Mytnik and Zoey Zompa received an *Innovative Use of Technology* award for designing an app called "My Dancer", a fitness game that connects to the user's activity tracker and takes fitness level data and converts it into a fun, dancing game. In addition to displaying innovation in technology and creativity, and exemplar integration of the Arts, Mytnik and Zompa were also honored for their entrepreneurial spirit -- demonstrating high levels of business skills in the areas of invention, analysis of product need and the potential success in the marketplace.

Nine students overall represented Egg Harbor Township School District in this year’s NJ STEAM Tank Final Competition held virtually on Oct. 6. Rounding out those competitors were Jeremiah Gonzalez and Hannah Lee, 8th graders from Alder Avenue Middle School who teamed up to create “Doodle Monsters”, an educational game designed to enhance virtual instruction and learning with more fun, effective, and engaging activities.

“Due to Covid-19, the regional and final competitions were cancelled in the spring of 2020. The timing of the pandemic caused some students who entered the competition as 8th graders to rejoin the STEAM Club as high school students. Those students continued to develop and refine those invention ideas throughout their freshman year and into their sophomore year. Additionally, new teams armed with fresh ideas also evolved and worked in groups virtually after school to develop their projects and presentations,” said Zompa. “The students met virtually last year to develop solutions to problems they saw during the pandemic. They persevered through virtual meetings with team members and entered videos of their projects to the STEAM Tank competition. They were invited to present their projects in the 2021 STEAM Tank Regional competition

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this past spring. The judges were impressed with their presentations at the Regional competition and invited them to compete at the STEAM Tank Finals on October 6<sup>th</sup>,” Zompa added.

Dr. Carmelita Graham, supervisor of Career and Technical Education and STEAM programs, commended Ms. Kristen Zompa, the STEAM club advisor and one of the district's STEAM teachers, and her students for continuing to develop and improve upon their projects over the pandemic and seeing them through to the final round of STEAM Tank competitions just a few weeks ago.

“The students are the stars of STEAM Tank, but the judges make a significant impact as well,” according to the NJSBA website. “The judges include teachers, business and industry leaders and entrepreneurs, U.S. Army engineers, university staff and leaders, and staff from education-focused non-profit organizations. They volunteer their time and provide in-depth feedback and coaching to the students.”

In addition to NJSBA and the U.S. Army, competition partners also include the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), NJ Audubon, Eco-Schools, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), NJ Parent Teacher Association (NJPTA), and NJ Principals and Supervisors Association (PSA). The PSEG Foundation has generously provided prizes for the past several years to the top-placing teams.

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