

IP lawyers aid young Edisons at Chicago school science fair

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A student entry that lawyers examined at the Chicago Public Schools Student Science Fair tested whether hands or feet are more sensitive to touch.

The surprising conclusion was feet, said [Steven G. Parmelee](#), co-chairman of the Science Fair Committee of the Chicago Intellectual Property Alliance, or CIPA.

Eleven intellectual property lawyers, a patent agent and two technical advisers from Chicago law firms roamed among 302 student science exhibits Friday at the Museum of Science and Industry.

These 14 CIPA volunteers, assisted by seven law students, sought the most innovative exhibits that might have the chance of being patented, said Parmelee and [Sarah A. Kofflin](#), the co-chairwoman of CIPA's Science Fair Committee.

The winner of the first-place CIPA prize received \$500 and the offer of free help from the IP Patent Clinic at Chicago-Kent College of Law to apply for a patent on his invention.

Another student exhibit that interested CIPA volunteers, Kofflin said, this one in the aerospace category, was a test to determine which type of five-bladed rotors lifted the most weight.

Yet another was a test to determine the effect of propolis, a chemical produced by bees, on a microbe, Kofflin said. The idea is to protect statues from being eroded by microbes.

"It's just nice to see the kids working with science, getting excited about science and being proud of what they've done," Kofflin said.

The lawyers also explained the value of intellectual property law to the students and distributed literature on that subject.

"CIPA's whole thing is to provide education and to inculcate a culture in the Chicago area that's very

knowing of, and able to leverage intellectual property law," Parmelee said.

"We want local businesses to succeed in this realm as part of helping them to succeed overall."

The lawyers "really and truly are doing it for the bigger picture," Parmelee said. "I get a warm and fuzzy feeling that brings me back year after year. It's impressive beyond belief to see ... incredible work by these young kids."

He said the overall purpose of the student science fair is for the students to demonstrate mastery of the scientific method. The fair chooses its own winners.

Extra awards come from some companies and CIPA. CIPA seeks to recognize "first of all, an invention, and secondly, an invention you can actually have a chance to patent," Parmelee said.

According to Kofflin, CIPA's third-place prize of \$200 and a plaque went to Robert Sniezko, an eighth-grader at Columbus School, for the exhibit of bladed rotors.

The second prize of \$300 and a plaque went to Willa Sacks, a junior at Lane Tech High School, for the effects of bee propolis on the microbe *gloeocapsa*.

The first-place prize of \$500, a plaque and free help with a potential patent application, went to Omari Roberts, a senior at Williams Preparatory High School for his biochemistry project that studied the consequences of mutations in the ASK1 gene.

"This is nothing like the science fair that I knew growing up," Parmelee said.

He said some students take college courses and have access to college laboratories. Others work for local businesses and get access to equipment that way.

CIPA through interviews tries to find students who made their own inventions rather than those made by parents.

At Sunday's awards ceremony, Kofflin said when she announced that the winner of the top CIPA prize would get help to file a patent application, the audience "went oooooo."

"Maybe intellectual property is getting more attention these days," she said.

Pictured below: Fitch Even partner Nick Peters (left) interviews a student contestant.

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