

J.D. Harrington/Michael Braukus
Headquarters, Washington
(Phone: 202/358-5241/1979)

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Janice Dunn
California Space Education and Workforce Institute, Santa Maria, Calif.
(Phone: 805/349-2633, ext. 14)

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Digging "Moon Dirt" is NASA's Fifth Centennial Challenge

NASA today announced the Regolith Excavation Challenge, a new Centennial Challenges prize competition that will award \$250,000 to the winning team and has the potential to significantly contribute to the nation's space exploration goals. The competition is in collaboration with the California Space Education and Workforce Institute (CSEWI).

The Regolith Excavation Challenge will award the prize money to the team that can design and build autonomously operating systems to excavate lunar regolith, or "moon dirt," and deliver it to a collector.

The challenge will be conducted in a "head-to-head" competition format in late 2006 or early 2007 and will require teams to excavate and deliver as much regolith as possible in 30 minutes. A detailed set of rules for the competition will be finalized later this year.

"Excavation of lunar regolith is an important and necessary step toward using the resources on the moon to establish a successful base for life on its surface," said NASA's acting Associate Administrator for the Exploration Systems Mission Directorate, Douglas R. Cooke. "The unique physical properties of the lunar regolith make excavation a difficult technical challenge," he added.

"This challenge continues NASA's efforts to broaden interest in innovative concepts," said Brant Sponberg, NASA's Centennial Challenges program manager. "We hope to see teams from a broad spectrum of technical areas take part in this competition," he noted.

"CSEWI is pleased to collaborate with NASA and to participate with the Centennial Challenges Regolith Excavation Prize Competition," said CSEWI Director, the Honorable Andrea Seastrand. "This is a challenge that places all companies, institutions and individuals on a level playing field, thereby widening the doors of opportunity for technology innovators. While welcoming entities with existing NASA relationships, this challenge stimulates and reaches out to the nation's untapped intellectual capital," she added.

NASA's Centennial Challenges program promotes technical innovation through a novel program of prize competitions. It is designed to tap the nation's ingenuity to make revolutionary advances to support the Vision for Space Exploration and NASA goals. NASA's Exploration Systems Mission Directorate manages the program.

CSEWI is a charitable, nonprofit corporation. It was formed to create understanding, enthusiasm and appreciation for space enterprise and space technology, and inspire parents, educators and students to engage in space-related education and enrichment activities. The Institute hopes to stimulate greater awareness and understanding of the space enterprise work force and research needs throughout academia, and attract, integrate and retain a robust space work force.

For more information about Centennial Challenges on the Internet, visit:

<http://centennialchallenges.nasa.gov>

For more information about NASA and agency programs on the Internet, visit:

<http://www.nasa.gov/home>

For information about the California Space Education and Workforce Institute on the Internet, visit:

<http://www.californiaspaceauthority.org/html/level-one/institute.html>

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