THE JEWISH JOURNAL

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February 11, 2009 | 5:22 pm

Milken teams qualify as Conrad finalists

Two teams of students from Milken's Mitchell Academy of Science and Technology (MAST) are finalists for the Pete Conrad Spirit of Innovation Award, a student prize for aerospace concepts.

Milken ideas up for consideration include a railgun method for moon launches and the X-Suit, a spacesuit that would perform life-support functions. The Mitchell Academy is competing against 19 other finalists from around the world.

The Conrad Award is named for Charles "Pete" Conrad, the third man to walk on the moon and commander of the Skylab II mission in 1973. The inaugural Conrad Award, which was co-sponsored by the Conrad Foundation and the X Prize Foundation, was given to Milken last year for high-tech goggles that would monitor a space traveler's vital signs.

For this year's competition, teams could enter one of two space categories – lunar exploration and personal spaceflight product design – or a carbon-free renewable energy category. The 21 concepts are currently open to online public comment and voting, the results of which be tallied along with the judges' votes to determine the winners in April.

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"It's going to require us to get our ideas across to our community. And our community, if we're going to win, needs to log on and vote for the teams," said Roger Kassebaum, director of Milken's MAST program. "Even if we lose miserably, it's a huge opportunity for us to point to excellence in science."

Mitchell's Team MAST has developed a railgun launch concept for getting tourists into space or supplies to a future lunar outposts. Much like the Superman ride at Six Flags Magic Mountain, the railgun launch system would use maglev-style propulsion—powered by solar energy—to boost reusable launch vehicles into low-earth orbit. For more information or to vote for Team MAST's proposal, click here.

Mitchell's second team, Final Frontier Apparel, is developing the X-Suit. The spacesuit would provide an astronaut with life-support function, greater mobility and electro-muscle stimulation during long voyages. For more information or to vote for Final Frontier Apparel, click here.

The winning teams will be announced during the Conrad Foundation's Innovation Summit, April 2-4. The summit is being held in conjunction with Yuri's Night—a celebration of the first manned spaceflight—at NASA Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, Calif.

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