

From The Winner of the 2017 FRSF

Dear fellow students,

Did you ever have something really annoy you and not have an answer for it? Maybe it's something adults can't find an answer for, either. An original idea or solution that seeks to solve a problem which interests you – or nobody else has been able to solve – is a great place to start a science fair project.

It might be hard to see our young brains as an advantage in solving a problem, but consider the young brains at Intel, Apple, Facebook, Netflix, and Google. Wondering how something can be better, instead of finding all the reasons it can't, is a big advantage of a young brain.

Being inspired by the world's problems, or getting encouragement from the things you read or the places you visit are also opportunities for science fair projects. For example, at a visit to the Smithsonian, I saw a woodpecker exhibit and wondered why scientists couldn't do better in preventing concussions in collegiate and professional sports. I started investigating and experimenting on my own. I failed many times in my attempts, but eventually there was success (as Thomas Edison said, "Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.").

Then, each year at Science Fair, I looked forward to presenting to the judges who provide extremely helpful feedback, and hearing about other in-depth and exciting research each fellow student and competitor has completed.

Since first thinking about that woodpecker's head, I have been fortunate to win many awards, scholarships, trips to ISEF, prize money, and even travel to India to present my work! It sounds cheesy to say it, but all that was of secondary importance to proving to myself (and the adults that inspired me) that I could do it!

And there's more. At every level of competition, meeting people has been one my main highlights -- spending time with both the Flint group and getting to know many international students. The best part is getting to speak with international students about our scientific interests and how our cultures vary. Each year this experience has further cemented my career goal and passion to become a researcher and inventor.

Without the opportunities and support provided by The Flint Regional Science Fair, none of this would have been possible. Did you know the Flint Regional Science Fair awarded thousands of dollars in prize money and scholarships to high school students this year alone? It can seem as though these awards are a long way off, but I am living proof that it's not impossible!

So, consider entering your local science fair. Along the way you will enjoy the competition and meet new interesting people who have asked questions about science like yourself. Don't forget to ask questions, read papers, and keep an open mind to other ideas. Pick a project you find fun and interesting, and you can make the perspiration worthwhile.

Clara Wagner of Saginaw Arts & Sciences Academy won the FRSF in 2016 and 2017, the MSEF in 2017. She won 1st Place and Best-in-Category (Bio-Medical Engineering) at the 2017 International Science & Engineering Fair.