

Media contact: “DT” Townsend
(803) 952-9256
dt-lawrence.townsend@srs.gov
Bonnie Toole
Future City Regional Coordinator
(803) 952-8720
bonnie.toole@srs.gov

Immediate Release

A New Benefit for Future City Mentors: Volunteering Produces Health Benefits

To all the engineers who want to stay healthy, the evidence is in: Watch your diet, exercise regularly, and volunteer as a Future City mentor.

It’s true. Engineers who have mentored in the National Engineers Week Future City™ Competition often say that their participation rejuvenates their career outlook and makes them happier, but a comprehensive review of more than 30 recent scientific studies on volunteering shows that their efforts may make them healthier, too. Although none of the studies specifically cited Future City nor the engineering profession, the findings seem to indicate that engineers and Future City make for a healthy mix.

Engineers who feel pressured by their work, for example, may well find themselves more at ease after mentoring, since volunteering has been proven to reduce stress. Similarly, engineers who grapple with highly detailed tasks can benefit from mentoring, as volunteers were proven to have higher functional abilities. Volunteers were also found to have increased longevity and improved cardiovascular health. The review, *The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research*¹, was released in May 2007 and compiled by the Corporation for National & Community Service, an independent federal agency.

(More)

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Every year, hundreds of engineers volunteer as mentors in the annual Future City Competition, the nation's largest and most successful not-for-profit engineering education program. Middle school students work with a teacher and mentor as they create cities of tomorrow using *SimCity 3000*, build a large, 3-D tabletop model, write an essay and prepare an oral presentation. More than 30,000 students from 1,000 schools participated in Future City in 2006-07. Winning teams from 38 regional competitions receive an all-expense-paid trip to the National Finals in Washington, D.C., Feb. 18-20, 2008, during Engineers Week, co-chaired by IBM and the Chinese Institute of Engineers (CIE-USA).

The studies found that an average of two hours of service a week were the ideal amount of time to receive the beneficial effects. Coincidentally, that is almost precisely how long Jennifer Partlan, a control and system engineer for Jacobs Engineering in Southfield, Michigan and a Future City mentor since 2005, says she spends helping her student team.

“My company is very supportive and they allow me to leave early on the days I meet with the team. I make up the hours throughout the rest of the week,” says Partlan, “and it's usually only an extra two hours a week.”

For Partlan, it's not her personal health, but the health of the profession that drives her to volunteer. “There aren't any TV shows that portray engineers, but there are tons of lawyer shows, CSI shows, doctor shows. We need to give that kind of visibility to engineering,” she says. “I find time to mentor because we need to ensure our future in the United States and get kids excited to be engineers.” Her efforts have certainly generated excitement among her students at Helen Keller Middle School in Royal Oak, Michigan, who placed third in the 2007 Future City National Finals.

Companies, too, find benefits in volunteering. Partlan notes that Jacobs Engineering receives positive exposure in the community when she mentors a Future City team. “It's a great way to advertise ourselves as a community service friendly company, which helps in recruiting potential employees,” she says.

For many engineering firms, volunteering is simply part of a well-rounded company profile. Long-time Engineers Week supporter IBM had more than 4,000 employees volunteer in EWeek

activities in 2007. The company says that number marked an eight percent increase in employee volunteers from 2004, and included 1,700 women employees, an increase of six percent, and 1,000 under-represented minority employees, an 18 percent increase. Those efforts helped reach more than 100,000 girls and 66,000 under-represented minority students through visits to schools, events at IBM sites, and other community activities.

“We’ve long understood that the young people who participate in Future City enjoy a wide range of educational benefits and, increasingly, we’re beginning to understand that benefits also extend to those who do the giving,” says Thomas Edison, mentor for the winning team of the 2006 SC Regional Competition and WSRC employee. “Companies establish a well-regarded reputation in the community, the engineering profession receives increased interest from future employees, and now we see direct, proven benefits to volunteers themselves. That’s a healthy situation across the board.”

For more information on how to mentor a Future City team, contact Bonnie Toole, Future City Regional Coordinator, WSRC Educational Outreach Program, (803) 952-8720, or visit www.futurecity.org and click on “Register / Register as an Engineer.” Engineers will be contacted by their area’s regional coordinator.

¹ http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/role_impact/performance_research.asp#HBR

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In Brief

Since its founding in 1992, the National Engineers Week Future City Competition™ has introduced hundreds of thousands of young people to engineering. Often, it is the volunteer engineer mentor that will have the greatest impact in helping make engineering come alive for students. Future City needs engineers from every field to volunteer this fall and winter. For more information on how to mentor a Future City team, contact Bonnie Toole, Regional Coordinator, WSRC Educational Outreach Program, (803) 952-8720, or visit www.futurecity.org and click on “Register / Register as an Engineer.” Engineers will be contacted by their area’s regional coordinator.

About the National Engineers Week Foundation

The National Engineers Week Foundation, a formal coalition of more than 75 professional societies, major corporations and government agencies, is dedicated to ensuring a diverse and well-educated future engineering workforce by increasing understanding of and interest in engineering and technology careers among young students and by promoting pre-college literacy in math and science. Engineers Week also raises public understanding and appreciation of engineers' contributions to society. Founded in 1951 by the National Society of Professional Engineers, it is among the oldest of America's professional outreach efforts. Co-chairs for 2008 are IBM and the Chinese Institute of Engineers (CIE-USA). For more information, visit www.eweek.org.

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