

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**U.S. Navy to Introduce Gemini Award at 2017 Conrad Spirit of Innovation Challenge**

The U.S. Navy, a sponsor of the Conrad Spirit of Innovation Challenge (Conrad Challenge) – an annual, multiphase, entrepreneurial STEM competition between top high school students from around the world – is pleased to introduce the Gemini Award to the 2017 competition. The new award will be given to the team that best demonstrates Navy characteristics of teamwork, innovation, and hard work.

The 2017 Conrad Challenge will hold its three-day Innovation Summit competition April 27-29 at the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex in Titusville, FL. During the summit, student teams will present innovative, commercially viable products to benefit humanity in one of four areas: Aerospace and Aviation, Cyber Technology and Security, Energy and Environment, and Health and Nutrition. (Recent winners have developed brain food that astronauts have taken into space; created lightweight, flame-resistant gear worn by firefighters; and designed a water filtration system being used in Haiti and Nigeria.)

The Conrad Challenge was founded by Nancy Conrad in honor of her late husband, Charles "Pete" Conrad Jr., a U.S. Navy officer and aviator. He was selected as an astronaut in the second round of pilots chosen to join NASA and became the third man to walk on the moon during the 1969 Apollo 12 mission. He set an eight-day space endurance record on the Gemini 5 mission, and commanded the Gemini 11 mission. He logged more than 6,500 hours flying time and 1,179 hours of spaceflight. In 1978, he was awarded the Congressional Space Medal of Honor.

The U.S. Navy began its sponsorship of the Conrad Challenge in 2016, and this year will have an even stronger presence at the Innovation Summit. In addition to creating and presenting the new Gemini Award, four Navy officers will serve as judges in categories related to their specialties: CAPT David W. Bouve - Aerospace and Aviation; LCDR Chris Coy - Cyber Technology & Security; LT Hamilton Gubanc - Energy & Environment; and LCDR Brett Chamberlin - Health & Nutrition

Outside the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex near the Rocket Garden, the Navy will set up its new mobile, virtual reality experience named the Burke, which allows visitors to virtually pilot a high-speed assault craft and extract Navy SEALs from enemy territory. This high-tech display will be open to the public from 9 a.m.-7 p.m. each day of the event.

"The Navy and the Conrad Foundation both share a deep commitment to STEM-related career fields," says CAPT David W. Bouve, National Director of Marketing and Advertising for the Navy Recruiting Command. "The Navy's sponsorship of the Conrad Challenge provides the opportunity for a diverse group of Navy experts to share their experiences and perspectives with the competitors."

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