



By: John Parker March 14, 2016

Airman Aureal Smith bent over slightly to listen intently to 9-year-old Waverly DiBello describe her new invention, the “High Waters Umbrella.”

The Red Oak Elementary fourth-grader from Moore pointed to the underside of her purple umbrella. Off to one side of the center, a 2-inch-square clear plastic flap was connected to a small cord.

“My problem was I wanted a drink of rain, but I couldn’t get one because my grandma thought I would get wet,” Waverly explained. “So I cut a hole in this umbrella. You pull this lever and it opens it up and you can get a drink without getting wet.”

“That’s really cool,” Airman Smith excitedly told her. “I would have never thought of that!”

Airman Smith was one of three dozen 552nd Air Control Wing Airmen who acted as judges March 1 in the 27th annual Oklahoma Student Inventors Exposition at Rose State College in Midwest City.

Airmen in battle uniforms waded through crowded aisles flanked by 172 K-12 inventors and their displays in the lobby of the college’s performance arena. Scholars from 28 schools across the state participated.

Airman Smith said she enjoyed meeting students of all ages and learning about their imaginative ideas.

“This is so awesome,” the Airman said. “I wish I could have done this as a kid. We didn’t have this when I was in school. It’s crazy how their minds work — so creative in everything.”

Second Lt. Albert Lorica, a navigator with the 963rd Airborne Air Control Squadron, met Paige Rice and Jaiden Davies, fifth-graders and best friends from

Poteau Upper Elementary School. Their invention involved a wireless tracker fastened to the bottom of a candy basket. “If a boy steals your candy, you can find him,” Jaiden explained.

“We did our invention together because we’ve always done things together,” Paige told Lieutenant Lorica. Jaiden volunteered, “This is my best friend,” which Paige finished with, “since kindergarten.”

Staff Sgt. Matthew Rice, with the 552nd’s finance/budget office, said he was impressed with a container that separates corn kernels that didn’t pop from popcorn.

“I have a heart for children, so to see their inventions and what they created, I think that’s amazing,” Sergeant Rice said.

Tech. Sgt. Landon Hamre of the 552nd Maintenance Group said the judging was a great opportunity for the children and the base to interact.

“It shows you where today’s kids are at in innovation,” Sergeant Hamre said. “Giving encouragement for that will help them in the future.”

One safety-minded invention he learned about had a nice tie-in with Tinker’s operations.

“We’re always looking for ways to improve and do things better and make things safer,” the sergeant said. “You never know, you may find something to take back to the big Air Force and help someone else.”

Betty J.C. Wright, a Rose State regent and exposition co-founder, said she highly appreciates the Airmen’s help every year. She enjoys seeing both the Airmen and the students excited to talk about the inventions, Ms. Wright said.