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Go For Launch! STEM Program Celebrates Student Champions in Herndon, Virginia

Division Winners Selected To Launch Innovative Science Experiment to the International Space Station Aboard Orbital ATK Cygnus Spacecraft

October 30, 2017—Leesburg, VA— Higher Orbits, a non-profit with the mission of promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education, announced the winner in its American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) Division of *Go For Launch!* The team known as "Operation Galaxy X" from the *Go For Launch!* event in Herndon, Virginia, captured first place for an innovative science experiment studying the reproduction and life cycle of mealworms in space. This event was part of a division of *Go For Launch!* competitions sponsored by AIAA. Students of middle school age from Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Northern Virginia participated in this division of the program, which took place from June 2016 through May 2017.

The first-place win for the Herndon, Virginia, team means that these students will see their experiment flown to the International Space Station (ISS) aboard Orbital ATK's Cygnus spacecraft during the OA-8 mission, which is scheduled for November 10, 2017. The "Operation Galaxy X" team included Desmen Boykin, Savar Shrivastava, Steven Van Hulle, and Shashank Varma Nadimpalli; they described the victory as an accomplishment that seemed to be written in the stars.

"My experience at *Go For Launch!* was amazing and it brought different people from different places to unite as one with great teamwork to win this competition," Nadimpalli said. "It taught us how to respect each other and work together in competitive environments. I am so happy I have such a great team, and thank *Go for the Launch!* team for giving us the opportunity to become a great team and making us shine! It's a great adventure!"

The flight concept for this student experiment was conceived during the inaugural *Go For Launch* Herndon three-day program, which focused on using space exploration as a foundation for inspiring ideas that can be examined further in a microgravity environment. Based on the winning team's presentation, the experiment will evaluate the growth cycle and reproductive cycle of mealworms in microgravity. It will be executed inside the International Space Station within Tango Lab, operated by Space Tango. This hardware facility inside the space station allows for multiple CubeLab experiments to run automatically and is an ideal platform for leveraging student engagement.

“AIAA is proud to sponsor experiential educational programs like *Go For Launch!* which encourage young people to think and work analytically, creatively, and collaboratively,” said AIAA Executive Director Sandy Magnus, a former NASA astronaut. “To have middle school students sending experiments to the ISS is really amazing experience for them and an inspiring for so many. Hopefully, it will help drive more students to pursue STEM-related careers, including those in the aerospace industry.”

Go For Launch! was created and presented by Higher Orbits to promote space exploration for aspiring students through interactive, hands-on activities delivered by experienced industry professionals. During the program’s first two years, students worked with former astronauts, former International Space Station and Space Shuttle controllers, astronaut instructors, scientists, and engineers. Working in teams, students sharpened their communication and leadership skills while designing innovative science experiments that could be flown to the ISS. Students presented the final product to a panel of judges representing space and STEM fields.

Based on the success of this program, Higher Orbits plans a variety of STEM-driven initiatives aimed at reaching thousands of students nationwide for the remainder of 2017 and in 2018. This *Go For Launch!* Division was made possible thanks to the generous support of AIAA. The Go For Launch! Herndon event was additionally made possible by sponsors Airbus, International Launch Services, Orbital ATK, and HRZ-Tech. Sponsorship opportunities are available at various levels for individual events, divisions/series, or the overall program. For more details please contact Michelle Lucas at GoForLaunch@higherorbits.org or call 707-893-STAR.

About Higher Orbits
Higher Orbits is a 501(c)3 non-profit with the mission of promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM); along with leadership, teamwork, and communication through the use of spaceflight. Mankind's journey into space serves as an ideal launchpad to excite students of all ages about STEM and working to fulfill their dreams and ambitions. Higher Orbits uses a variety of programs and partnerships with other organizations to achieve these goals and is excited to be holding events across the US again, including Northern Virginia, in 2018. To learn more visit http://www.HigherOrbits.org , or follow us on Twitter @HigherOrbits

About AIAA
The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) is nearly 30,000 engineers and scientists, and 95 corporate members, from 85 countries who are dedicated to advancing the global aerospace profession. The world’s largest aerospace technical society, the Institute convenes five yearly forums; publishes books, technical journals, and *Aerospace America*; hosts a collection of 160,000 technical papers; develops and maintains standards; honors and celebrates achievement; and advocates on policy issues. AIAA serves aerospace professionals around the world—who are shaping the future of aerospace—by providing the tools, insights, and collaborative exchanges to advance the state of the art in engineering and science for aviation, space, and defense. For more information, visit www.aiaa.org, or follow us on Twitter @AIAA.

For more information about the *Go For Launch!* program visit www.GoForLaunch.space or follow us on Twitter @HigherOrbits