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## ***2 Middle School Students from the Virginia Piedmont Regional Science Fair are Named Semifinalists in Discovery Channel's Young Scientist Challenge***

Charlottesville, VA - The countdown to choosing the nation's top young scientist began today as Discovery Communications announced the 400 middle school students from around the country selected as semifinalists in the 2006 Discovery Channel Young Scientist Challenge (DCYSC). The DCYSC is the nation's premier science contest for students in grades 5-8. The competition, created by Discovery Communications, gives students the opportunity to test their knowledge and push their limits as they explore the world of science.

Among the semifinalist are two of our regions students, Zoe Ackerman, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Buford Middle School in Charlottesville, and Emily Fennell, a six grader at Ni River Middle School in Spotsylvania County. Zoe and Emily qualified for the Discovery Channel Young Scientist Challenge at the Virginia Piedmont Regional Science Fair in Charlottesville in March this year.

### **The Semifinalists**

The 400 semifinalists, and contenders for the title of "America's Top Young Scientist," come from 43 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia and were selected from a group of 1,900 formal entries, initially chosen from a pool of 70,000 students who entered science fairs nationwide. Virginia is represented with 8 semifinalists. The top state represented is Florida with 36 semifinalists. California and Texas each have 32, and Missouri and Utah, both with 18.

"I'm proud to have two semifinalists from the Virginia Piedmont Regional Science Fair" said Fair Director Gary Henry. "As the United States struggles to compete with other nations in the fields of science and technology, we need to do more to encourage and inspire students who excel in these areas."

The countdown to choosing America's Top Young Scientist continues next month, on September 14th, when the field of 400 semifinalists is narrowed by the DCYSC judges to the "Final Forty." The young scientists will use their scientific know-how to find solutions to this year's five-part challenge. The students will compete for more than \$100,000 worth of scholarships and special prizes, as well as the title of "America's Top Young Scientist of the Year."

## **About the Competition**

In 1999, Discovery created the DCYSC to be a part of the solution to alleviate America's chronic underachievement in science and math. The contest responds to evidence that academic performance and interest in science among American students declines dramatically as students get older - particularly during the middle school years.

The DCYSC identifies and honors America's top middle school student who demonstrates the best skills in leadership, teamwork and scientific problem solving. In addition, the ability to be an effective science communicator - a goal that reflects Discovery's philosophy that scientific knowledge is most valuable when it is communicated and shared - is a key component of the judging.

More than 13,000 children have entered the DCYSC since its inception eight years ago. Winners have received approximately \$700,000 in scholarship awards and federal government recognition, and have participated in science-related trips that have taken them to the far corners of the globe.