Northeast students win honors
Science project takes national second place

By KRISTEN KING
Advocates staff writer

After long hours of working after school and on weekends, a group of Northeast High students came up with an idea for treating diabetes and earned themselves a national award.

The four Northeast High students — all seventh- or eighth-graders — won second place in the nation's largest science competition for kindergartners through 12th-graders.

The students are thrilled with their prizes: they each get a digital camera, a DVD player and a $5,000 savings bond.

Their teachers and principal, on the other hand, are thrilled with the lessons their students learned. The students' project envisioned the day when some diabetics might be treated with an implanted, genetically engineered, artificial pancreas.

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"No," English teacher Margaret Hersh interjected. "A master's thesis." -

In all, there were 4,149 entries for this year's competition for kindergarten through grade 12.

The Northeast group's entry — called "How Sweet It Is: An Insulin-Producing Bio-Artificial Pancreas for Type 1 Diabetics" — took second place in the cate-

Northeast High School students Brittany Primus, left, Kelly Hersh, Heather Leleu and Damon Henderson recently took a second-place award in the national 2000 Toshiba/NSTA ExploraVision competition.

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Northeast Principal Ulysses Joseph said he's proud of his students.

"I think this is really, really impressive, mainly because these kids are getting involved in truly solving problems at an early age," he said. "It's almost like playing basketball. If you start early, somewhere down the road, you're going to be really good."

Margaret Hersh, Kelly's mother, said she's already noticed changes in her daughter.

"As a parent, I can tell you it stimulated her thinking," she said. "We'll be driving along and she'll say, 'You know, they ought to do this.'"

Appenzeller served as coach for the project. He chose the four students because he knew they had the determination to follow through with a lot of research and a lot of learning.

Not only did they research existing treatments for diabetes and come up with their own idea, they also had to write a paper and design their own Web site (www.mfxinc.com/toshiba) to explain their concept.

On Thursday, the students got a standing ovation at an East Baton Rouge Parish School Board meeting.

"There is a history of diabetes in my family, and I join with many others in saying we appreciate your interest in this subject," board Vice President Jackie Mims told the students.

Their time at the School Board meeting was just the start of their honors. Soon they'll appear in front of the Metro Council, Appenzeller said. And in June, they'll travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with members of Congress and the national media.

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