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## Airline student to compete in BioGENEius Challenge

By Nicole Blake Johnson • nblake@gannett.com •  
March 20, 2010

Stephanie Axelson's passion for cancer research is in her genes.

Her grandfather was a cancer researcher, and although he died of colon cancer before the two could meet, she carries his legacy.

"I'm really interested in science," said Axelson, a senior at Airline High School in Bossier City. "I love biology and learning about how the body works."

Axelson is one of more than a dozen high school students from the United States, Canada and Western Australia being recognized for her work in biotechnology, which includes research in biology, chemistry, physics, engineering, computers and information technology.

Her research project, titled "Identification of a New Link in Gene Silencing: Acetylation of the Methyl Binding Protein MeCP2," has earned her a spot at the sanofi-aventis International BioGENEius Challenge in Chicago this May. The competition is in conjunction with the 2010 Biotechnology Industry Organization International Convention. Prizes include cash awards up to \$7,500 that can be used for college.

"These kids are the future of the industry," said Janelle Curtis, vice president of programs for the Biotechnology Institute. "These are kids who are going to be leading scientists and leading executives in biotechnology."

Students in the U.S. must compete in a state and regional competition and be enrolled in biology or science-related courses. Scientists, secondary and post-secondary educators, and executives in the industry judge students based on their scientific knowledge and responses to questions about the potential commercial application of their research.

"When you look at the research, it's often graduate level," Curtis said.

Since June, Axelson has been working with researchers and doctors at LSU Health Sciences Center in Shreveport to study the pathway by which genes become silenced in different types of cancers. She works in the lab more than 10 hours a week through the Science, Mathematics and Research Training program, and she plans to submit her work to be published in the coming months.

She also will compete in the INTEL International Science and Engineering Fair in San Jose, Calif., this summer. "I'm just excited to be where I am right now," she said.

For now, her heart is set on attending Baylor University and eventually being accepted into the Baylor College of Medicine early admissions program.