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California Space Authority
Contact: Matt Everingham

310-208-9468

matt.everingham@californiaspaceauthority.org

MOON DIGGING COMPETITORS LINE UP

Strong Showing of Teams Seek \$750,000 Purse

MOUNTAIN VIEW – A record number of entrants have signed up to compete in the 2009 Regolith Excavation Challenge and its whopping \$750,000 prize money. Twenty-three teams have fulfilled the application requirements to compete in the October 17 and 18 event at the NASA Ames Research Park at Moffett Field in Mountain View.

The competition requires teams to build a roving lunar excavator that can "navigate, excavate, and transfer 150 kg of simulated lunar regolith (moon dirt)" into a collector bin within 30 minutes. As part of NASA's Centennial Challenges designed to incubate cutting-edge aerospace technology through non-traditional incentives and public competition, the competing excavators must carry their own power source and are required to be controlled remotely in a way that mimics the logistics of lunar surface communications. Each team has just one chance at the prize. Thirteen of the teams are returning to compete after having attempted in prior years.

Regolith excavation is a necessary first step towards lunar resource utilization, and the unique physical properties of lunar regolith make excavation a difficult technical challenge. Advances in lunar regolith excavation have the potential to contribute significantly to the nation's space exploration operations, as well as foster advancements in technology for use on Earth.

"An important aspect of this competition is to challenge the teams to push the limits of convention. Our great hope is that through their excavator designs, one or more of them will strike on an innovation that revolutionizes the power and energy requirements for excavation systems of all kinds," stated Lynn Baroff, Executive Director of the California Space Education and Workforce Institute (CSEWI), co-host of the event with its sister organization, the California Space Authority (CSA). "Consider the impact on our daily lives if, through this seemingly fun-filled exercise, a terrific development in energy efficient excavation systems could be demonstrated."

"The enthusiasm we see from the teams signing up this year gives us all cause to expect that one of them will actually walk away with the top prize. It is encouraging to see so many people making the leap to take space exploration into their own hands," stated Andrea Seastrand, Executive Director of CSA. "We are expecting to see some truly out-of-the box designs and are anxious to see how they will perform."

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The majority of the teams represent the private sector, while it is estimated that 11 of them are affiliated with universities or have a majority of student team members. Several of the teams have backgrounds that are not traditionally associated with the aerospace industry, such as information technology and the energy. Yet others are made up of representatives with traditional backgrounds in space enterprise and at least two of the teams have won prizes in other competitions.

Teams registered this year are the following:

Auric Designs	Orlando, FL
Braundo	Rancho Palos Verdes, CA
C2 Robotics	San Luis Obispo, CA
Colorado School of Mines	Golden, CO
E-REX	Little Rock, AR
Green Cheese Solutions	Hudson, WI
Innovation Island	Southwest Harbor, ME
Invading Huns	Palm Bay, FL
Laurentian Rock	Glendale, CA
Lunar Arc	Irvine, CA
McGill Lunarex	Knoxville, TN
Moon Diggers A	San Francisco, CA
Moon Diggers B	San Francisco, CA
Next Step Robotics	Houston, TX
Ockham's Razor	Arroyo Grande, CA
Paul's Robotics	Worcester, MA
Sandstorm +	North Royalton, OH
Seraphim Aerospace Systems	Moshannon, PA
Team Waldbaum	Sunnyvale, CA
Technology Ranch	Arroyo Grande, CA
Terra Engineering	Gardena, CA
Top Hat Robotics	West Lafayette, IN
UBC Thunderbird Robotics Team Tread	Vancouver, BC

For more information on the 2009 Regolith Excavation Challenge, go to:

<http://regolith.csewi.org/>

Selected to serve as an Allied Organization by the NASA Centennial Challenges Program, CSEWI administers the Regolith Excavation Challenge along with its sister organization, CSA. The event is supported by Diani Building Corporation, Empirical Systems Aerospace, and the NASA Lunar Science Institute. Prize funding is provided by the NASA Centennial Challenges Program.

The Regolith Excavation Challenge is part of the NASA Centennial Challenges program, which is providing the prize money for this competition. For more information about this Challenge and other Centennial Challenges, please visit, www.ipp.nasa.gov/cc.