



Joe Querques' project won a silver medal at the Regional Bay Area Science & Engineering Fair recently and now the Georgetown Bread Basket intends to use the Christ the King student's computer program.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

Student's science project to be used by food bank

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Staff Writer

Grade 11 Christ the King High School student Joe Querques has won several science and engineering project competitions over the years, but he has taken on a different tack this time around that is having an immediate positive impact on the Georgetown Bread Basket food bank.

The 17-year-old Querques saw a Microsoft-sponsored contest at last year's Regional Bay Area Science & Engineering Fair called the Imagine Cup and the straight-A student thought that he'd like to delve into computer programming for the 2006 event, which was held earlier this month at Mohawk College in Hamilton. Contestants were required to draw up a proposal that would benefit a community non-profit organization using a Microsoft system and then see the project through to its full implementation.

Querques earned a Silver Merit Award— along with nine other awards— for his Food Bank Inventory Application project at the fair and it will be implemented at the Georgetown Bread Basket by early May. He estimates to have spent more than 500 hours working on the concept and he's now preparing for the Imagine Cup preliminaries, to be held May 20 at Microsoft's Canadian head office in Mississauga. If successful at that stage, Querques could be selected to represent Canada at the Worldwide Imagine Cup competition in Delhi, India this summer.

"This is more than a school project to me because it started out as just an idea, but now that it's actually being developed and you can see the final product, it's rewarding to know it'll make a difference in people's lives and change the way people do their work," he said.

A family friend of the Querqueses, who works at the Bread Basket, told Querques about the operation of the volunteer-run local food bank. Incoming and outgoing food items are tabulated and then printed out on an Excel spreadsheet by an administrator at the end of the day, with inventory reports sometimes taking weeks or months to compile.

"So they never actually know at any point in time what foods they're in need of or what's coming in and out of the food bank," said Querques. "For me, this was a great opportunity because not only could I help the food bank by creating an inventory system for them, but I was learning something new myself because I'd never done computer programming before."

The good news was that the Bread Basket already had a computerized system that labeled food items, so Querques devised an application that used barcodes to track the inventory and allow volunteers to immediately find out the number of each food item that was in stock.

The application's design also recognizes that elderly volunteers at the food bank will be using the system, so user-friendly, large graphic user interfaces were implemented.

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