



News Release

NASA Awards Toronto Team SkyWatch with Best Use of Data in International Space Apps Challenge

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Details

The NASA International Space Apps Challenge Toronto took place April 11-13, 2014 at The Ontario Science Centre.

All projects and presentations can be viewed at spaceappstoronto.com.

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Toronto, ON | Today, NASA announced that the Toronto team behind SkyWatch, an app that visualizes observatory data, won the Best Use of Data award in this year's International Space Apps Challenge. SkyWatch is the first Canadian team to take home an international-level prize and was one of two global finalists from Toronto. The second was CuriousBot, a self-driven weather rover, which made the top five in the People's Choice category.

For their inspiring efforts, the SkyWatch team has been invited to visit NASA and the Kennedy Space Center this September to watch one of Elon Musk's SpaceX rockets leave the planet to serve the International Space Station.

"When we were first conceptualizing SkyWatch, we aimed to build a tool that simply 'opened up the heavens' to the 7 billion-plus here on Earth," says James Slifierz, an entrepreneur and member of the SkyWatch team. "As the product developed we began to realize an even greater potential: one that allowed children to witness spectacular events millions of light years away at the exact same time as NASA scientists, a privilege never before recognized."

Currently, observatory data is collected by and for scientists and is difficult for the average person to understand. SkyWatch aims to use that data in a "Twitter-like platform where people all over the world can follow what is happening in the skies at all times," and add appropriate context. Its creators are: Dexter Jagula, Ryan Ovas, Roland Sing, Stefan Sing, and James Slifierz.

SkyWatch was one of 14 teams that presented solutions on April 13 at The Ontario Science Centre in Toronto, and one of 3 who were nominated for international judging. All presentations and projects are viewable on spaceappstoronto.com.

The NASA International Space Apps Challenge is one of the largest global hackathons in the world, with over 8,000 participants in 2014 creating nearly 700 projects in 95 cities. Its goal is to make space-related data more accessible, usable and fun.

"As engineers, entrepreneurs, and most importantly, space enthusiasts, winning the NASA International Space Apps Challenge is a dream come true," says James. "Equally, it was an honour representing Toronto and Canada on the international stage."