

Pittsford graduate honored for ethanol project

By Ernst Lamothe Jr.
Staff Writer
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When gas prices skyrocketed after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Sujay Tyle, then 8, was shocked at how much they rose in such a short time.

“It just made me think something as important as transportation could be affected and people had a hard time putting gas in their cars and it became national news,” said Sujay, 16, who graduated in May from Pittsford Mendon High School and is now a freshman at Harvard University. “My interest in gas prices led me to think of climate control, then ozone depletion, then how we could use alternative energy to better the world.”

Sujay, while working at a University of Rochester lab during the past few summers, invented a technique using genetically modified bacteria to convert cellulose into ethanol at a fraction of its current cost.

The technique extracts and clones a single gene sequence from bacteria, which is also more environmentally friendly and efficient. His work has won him the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, which honors outstanding 8- to 18-year-olds nationwide who are trying to make a difference. He is one of 10 recipients this year. Winners receive \$2,500 to apply to their education or service project. Sujay is working on selling his technique to companies.

“I marvel at the differences that these young heroes are making in positively impacting the lives of others and the environment,” says T. A. Barron, the founder of the Gloria Barron prizes, named for his mother.

Sujay also shares his passion for the environment with other students as a spokesperson for the National Environmental Education Foundation and the Weather Channel, encouraging kids to pursue science.

He founded ReSight, a non-profit group that he hopes will combat treatable eye degeneration with surgery in Asia and Haiti.

In turn, the patients would work for sponsored organizations and a small portion of their paycheck would go back to the hospital to provide other surgeries.

“This way the patient is now helping ‘resight’ someone else, especially in impoverished areas where they don’t always have access to proper eye care.” Sujay said.