



# News Release

News Release No.

26 March 2009

For Information: Don Kennedy, 410-436-7118

## ECBC Invests in Future Workforce through Mentoring

**Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.** — With predictions of looming shortfalls in the government due to an aging workforce, leadership at U.S. Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center (ECBC) is focusing on mentorship as a tool to encouraging students to pursue careers in science and engineering.

"After teaching at West Point for a number of years I realized the impact that mentorship has on students," said Way Fountain, Ph.D., a senior research scientist at ECBC who serves as mentor to Stephen Sanner, a senior at Aberdeen High School's Science and Math Academy (SMA) in Aberdeen, Md. "Mentorship allows scientists and engineers to teach students real science."

As Sanner nears the end of his senior year, he has turned to Fountain for help putting the final touches on the senior capstone project he must complete in order to graduate. It's that relationship to which Sanner credits his success in the lab — the development of a waterproof and fade-resistant ink for use in a ballpoint or roller ball pen.

"The best thing about the SMA program is working with a professional scientist," Sanner said. "Dr. Fountain's years of experience have been an invaluable resource for me. Mentoring has further expanded my interest in a career in science."

Launched in 2004, the SMA grew out of a concept proposed by the Army Alliance and other science professionals associated with Aberdeen Proving Ground. Through the use of federal, state and local funds, organizers have created a high-level learning environment that offers students the opportunity to study robotics, cryptology, biotechnology and genetics, all with an emphasis on research and real-world applications.

Now in its fifth year, 43 of SMA's 188 students have been paired with mentors from the professional science and engineering community. For Fountain, the motivation of serving as an SMA mentor stems from his desire to see ECBC's successes carried over to future generations.

"We all have a stake in ensuring that we have a strong bench of scientists to work at Aberdeen Proving Ground," he said.

Faced with maintaining the workforce as employees reach the age of retirement, the importance of fostering an interest in science, engineering and mathematics among students has increased substantially.

"We want students to know that studying science and engineering is interesting and could lead to a career with the federal government," Fountain added.

While prospective mentors may have concern about their ability to commit enough time to their students, Fountain insists that successful relationships can be fostered through both electronic and in-person communication. In the end, he said, the benefits of mentoring are not reserved for the student alone.

"I mentor in spite of the challenges because it has kept me engaged in basic research," Fountain said. "A mentor can do as much learning as the student."

Hoping to build upon the success of the mentor relationship between the SMA student and one of its top scientists, ECBC will host an employee luncheon Thursday, April 2, that will highlight the SMA, Joppatowne High School's Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness Program and other future mentoring opportunities.

"The most important aspect of this program and mentorship is exposing students to the scientific process," Fountain said. "I want to foster a desire to become a professional scientist."

*ECBC is the Army's principal research and development center for chemical and biological defense technology, engineering and field operations. ECBC has achieved major technological advances for the warfighter and for our national defense, with a long and distinguished history of providing the Armed Forces with quality systems and outstanding customer service. ECBC is a US Army Research, Development and Engineering Command laboratory located at the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. For more information about the Edgewood Chemical Biological Center, please visit our Web site at <http://www.ecbc.army.mil> or call (410) 436-7118.*

**# 30 #**

**# #**

