

COMMENTARY



DR. ANDREW N. BLACKWOOD

Executive Director, National Youth Science Foundation

In 1963, West Virginia hosted the inaugural **National Youth Science Camp** (NYSC) as part of the state's Centennial Celebration. Conceived as a one-time event, the NYSC proved so successful then that it continues to this day, stronger and more important than ever.

Over its nearly 50-year history, more than 5,000 students representing every state as well as 25 countries have participated in the program – free of charge. Camp alumni include scientists, researchers, physicians, teachers, entrepreneurs, and inventors; more than 40 percent went on to obtain terminal degrees. All are ambassadors for West Virginia.

Originally designed to showcase science and research conducted in West Virginia, the camp has evolved to become a valued service to the nation's best young scientists. At the height of the Space Race, Astronaut Neil Armstrong sketched the trajectory that he would use to go to the Moon. As they finished mapping the human genome, Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, lectured about the responsibilities and opportunities of thoroughly understanding human genetics. Most recently, Marissa Mayer, Google vice president and NYSC alumnus, spoke about the role and importance of Internet technologies as Google sought to balance freedom and government censorship around the world.



Throughout its history, the NYSC has been as much about economic development as it has been about education. Science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) are the driving forces behind innovation and improving the economic climate. Investing in STEAM education activities is critical, and with the support of the State of West Virginia, the Foundation has not lost sight of this challenge and the importance of leveraging the camp experience to benefit more West Virginia students.

Since 2005, an additional program, the Governor's School for Mathematics and Science, has allowed West Virginia students to conduct original research at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank. Starting last summer, students from across the state attended the W.Va. Youth Science Camp, which was modeled after the NYSC and shared many of its faculty. With seed support from NASA, the Youth Science Discovery Experience encourages West Virginia students, teachers and scientists to work together to solve real-world problems using a project-based learning approach.

Looking ahead to the next 50 years, the Foundation has developed plans to construct the National Center for Youth Science Education near Davis, W.Va. The Center will become the home of the NYSC and the Foundation's other STEAM education programs and will allow us to directly serve more West Virginians and others from around the nation and the world.

The National Youth Science Foundation is based in the W.Va. Regional Technology Park and operates the National Youth Science Camp, the W.Va. Governor's School for Mathematics and Science, the W.Va. Youth Science Camp, the Youth Science Discovery Experience and other STEAM education programs. Learn more at www.nysf.com.

