Kids create their own utopian cities

BY SEUNG MIN KIM
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Jonah Lucas, Chris DeRende and Vinny Pisano have a solution to cure the Garden State's chronic traffic gridlock — and it doesn't involve toll hikes or incentives to use NJ Transit.

It's called the Smart Bridge, and its median shifts automatically when one side has too much traffic, creating an extra lane that allows jammed cars to ease by.

As an eco-bonus, the bridge reduces pollution through ventilation and filtration systems, and its coating allows water and dirt to slide right off the road's surface, slashing labor hours.

Okay, it's not real, at least in 2008. But in the imaginary town of Dorrtheyville — named after a girl whom the Hope Township Middle School boys had asked to join their group, but who said no — the Smart Bridge is possible.

The assignment was to create a "future city," and the boys devised the infrastructure for a town to accommodate its technologically advanced, healthy and well-educated populace.

"You think you need only one skill like engineering, but you need them all," said Chris, 14, as he looked at his team's model of the Smart Bridge, made from Styrofoam chunks, oxygen tank tubes and painted cardboard.

About 150 middle-schoolers throughout New Jersey gathered yesterday at Rutgers University to show off months of intricate planning, engineering and building of their ideal living spaces during the New Jersey Future City Competition.

For months leading up to yesterday's all-day event, students designed their city using a computer and pieced together a scaled model of their vision. In its 16th year, the competition challenges students to think creatively to devise solutions to urban problems, organizers said.

"The next time they use a faucet in the house, we want them to realize that real water comes from somewhere. That roads are there because of engineers," said Scott Lubarsky, the competition's regional coordinator. "We want them to understand the role engineers play in society."

The winner of the competition was the team of Cameron Anderson, Kevin Cheatham and Melissa Claus from Valley Middle School in Oakland.

They created Nuova Venezia, a revitalized version of the Italian city on the water.

John R. Wojnas III, left, a competition judge, looks at city Eva 01 as one of the builders, Justin O'Dea from Linwood Middle School in North Brunswick, talks about the city.

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