

# Got Brains? Get driving simulators

Posted: Wednesday, June 12, 2013 12:00 am

*Technology will take more teens* off the road for their driving lessons, thanks to a statewide program that recognizes local safety initiatives.

Four local school districts have been awarded driving simulators through the third annual U Got Brains competition.

The Lenape Regional High School District was named one of two grand prize winners in the contest hosted by the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey's Champion Schools Program. In addition to a simulator, it will receive a \$10,000 cash grant earmarked for post-prom activities and a districted driving presentation.

The recognition gives the competition its first repeat winner, after awarding Lenape Regional a grand prize in 2011. Columbia High School in Maplewood, Essex County, was this year's other top winner.

Overall, 55 schools in 16 counties across the state participated in the 2013 competition and each is being provided with a simulator, valued at about \$10,000 apiece. They include Delran High School, Maple Shade High School and Bordentown Regional High School, which also earned a driving simulator as a grand prize winner last year.

All of the contest prizes, valued at more than \$700,000, are provided by New Jersey Manufacturers Insurance (NJM) Co. and are expected to be delivered to schools this fall.

"NJM cares about the safety of all New Jersey drivers, especially the youngest, who have so much living ahead of them," said NJM President and CEO Bernie Flynn of Delran. "This is a substantial investment in helping to ensure the safety and well-being of our loved ones and reaffirms our commitment to the well-being of residents in our state."

U Got Brains required schools to create a public service campaign based on an issue related to teen driving safety, such as texting or driving under the influence of alcohol. Campaigns included social media interaction, slogans, T-shirts and other goods, and the submission of videos that were subject to an online, public vote.

Contest results were announced Friday in Freehold with representatives from most participating schools in attendance. NJM surprised them all with the news that all would be receiving simulators as a way to honor the company's centennial. In the past, only the pair of top winners were given prizes.

Bordentown Regional Principal Patrick Lynch said the competition was much stiffer this year with more schools participating. "When they saw what won the previous year, they stepped their

game up,” he said. “Last year, we did a music video with ‘Parents Just Don’t Understand.’ This year, we did another video.”

Sophomores at Bordentown Regional have responded well to its simulation device, Lynch said, and often compare it to a video game. However, he said the lessons it provides are real.

“They do crash. They do run into things. They do make wide turns. They do get into accidents,” he said. “It’s immediate feedback without anyone getting hurt.”

Led by adviser Erica Wright, the U Got Brains effort drew about 100 students to the “Don’t Text and Drive, Bordentown Wants You Alive — Spread the Word” effort, Lynch said. Meanwhile, Delran’s submission (“Drive Delran to Safer Roads”) was produced by members of the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), and Maple Shade’s “Check Your Mirrors, Not Your Phone” video was created by a small group of students and faculty.

According to Eric Stenson, spokesman for NJM, the Lenape Regional district submitted a series of videos this year. The public service announcements were created by students and staff in the television production program, LDTV, as part of the district’s “Heads Up, Eyes Forward” campaign.

The addition of the U Got Brains award brings Lenape Regional’s total number of driving simulators to 18, according to Chris Heilig, the district’s director of Programs & Planning. Provided through charitable programs, four devices are utilized in sophomore health education classes at each of the district’s high schools, including Lenape in Medford; Cherokee in Evesham and Seneca in Tabernacle.

Shawnee High School, which also competed individually in the 2011 competition, has a fifth simulator. Heilig said the newly awarded device will be given to one of the district’s other three schools.