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## NEW YORK TEEN AWARDED \$25,000 FOR MODEL PREDICTING POTATO LATE BLIGHT Benjamin “Benjy” Firester Named a 2017 Davidson Fellow

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Reno, Nev. – The Davidson Institute of Talent Development has announced the 2017 Davidson Fellows. Among the honorees is 17-year-old Benjy Firester of New York City. Firester won a \$25,000 Davidson Fellows Scholarship for his project, *Modeling the Spatio-Temporal Dynamics of Phytophthora infestans at a Regional Scale*. He is one of only 20 students across the country to receive this honor.

“When I started this project, I was looking for an opportunity to apply my skills in math and computer science to translating natural processes like disease spread into computational models,” said Firester. “Computer models that resemble nature in more accurate ways could enable important advances in health, medicine, and agriculture.”

Firester developed an explanatory and predictive mathematical model for the spread of Potato Late Blight, a devastating, global pathogen, which destroys billions of dollars of food crops annually. He worked with data collected at the Agricultural Research Organization in Volcani Center, Israel, and presented his findings and model to local potato growers.

As a math lover, Firester is on his high school’s and New York City’s math teams, and has been teaching himself additional math beyond the school curriculum since early childhood. He has also been studying classical piano and music theory at Mannes College the New School for Music since he was four years old. Firester enjoys playing chamber music, and has performed at Carnegie Hall and at Lincoln Center.

Firester is a rising senior at Hunter College High School in New York City, where he is a volunteer calculus and physics tutor. He plans to major in math after graduating high school, as well as explore other disciplines.

“We are thrilled to recognize the 2017 Davidson Fellows not only for their incredible projects, but also for the journey they forged to reach this point,” said Bob Davidson, founder of the Davidson Institute. “Every year I am amazed by the depth of the Fellows’ accomplishments. Through encouragement and recognition, the Davidson Institute for Talent Development anticipates that gifted students like these will be among the pioneers who will solve the world’s most vexing problems.”

The 2017 Davidson Fellows will be honored at a reception in Washington, D.C., on September 27.

The Davidson Fellows Scholarship program offers \$50,000, \$25,000 and \$10,000 college scholarships to students 18 or younger, who have completed significant projects that have the potential to benefit society in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, literature and music. The Davidson Fellows Scholarship has provided more than \$7.1 million in scholarship funds to more than 300 students since its inception in 2001, and has been named one of the most prestigious undergraduate scholarships by [U.S. News & World Report](#). It is a program of the Davidson Institute for Talent Development, a national nonprofit organization headquartered in Reno, Nev. that supports profoundly gifted youth.

### **About the Davidson Institute**

Founded by Bob Davidson in 1999, the Davidson Institute for Talent Development recognizes, nurtures and supports profoundly intelligent young people, and provides opportunities for them to develop their talents to make a positive difference. The Institute offers support through a number of programs and services, including the Davidson Fellows Scholarship and the [Davidson Academy of Nevada](#). For more information about the 2017 Davidson Fellows, please visit [www.DavidsonGifted.org/Fellows-Scholarship](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org/Fellows-Scholarship).

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*High-resolution photos are available at [www.DavidsonGifted.org](http://www.DavidsonGifted.org).*