

AROUND THE AREA

SPENCER WEATHER FORECAST	TODAY — Partly sunny, with a high near 83. East southeast wind 5 to 10 mph.	SATURDAY 85 69	SUNDAY 91 72	MONDAY 92 69	TUESDAY 86 63	WEDNESDAY 75 62
	TONIGHT — A chance of showers and thunderstorms. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 65. East southeast wind 5 to 10 mph. Chance of precipitation is 30%.					

Spencer student heads to ISSDC

Lair to represent Iowa in worldwide event to develop settlement

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Staff Writer

Four months ago, Mark Lair received an email stating that he had been selected to compete in the International Space Settlement Design Competition at the Kennedy Space Center in Titusville, Florida. Lair will be traveling to Florida on Friday, July 25, where he will compete against high school students from around the world in a challenge to design a hypothetical space settlement. The competition is scheduled to wrap on July 30.

ISSDC is an event that invites high school students from all over the world to compete using skills in STEM, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork and creativity. He is feeling both excited and nervous about the international competition.

“It’s a little bit of both. It’s like excitement, but also anxiety,” Lair said.

As far as the participant knows, Lair is the only student from Iowa going to the international competition. There will be a maximum of 192 participants from about 20 countries at ISSDC.

“The last one I went two nights without sleep, and this one’s supposed to be longer, so I’ll prepare for that,” he said.

In February, Lair and six other Spencer High School students went to Houston, Texas, for the Central Space Design Competition. Four hundred students from the central time zone were at the competition. When they arrived, all the participants were split into four companies to compete against each other, each given an RFP from the judges and a book of criteria that they had to meet. For the project, the judges asked students to design and present a plan for a settlement for humans on Mars.

“It was kind of like building an airport on Mars,” Lair said. “It was a place where ships and people had to be able to come and leave. In this situation, the judges played the role of a customer asking a company to create a space settlement for them.”

Within their companies, the students had to divide themselves into four subgroups for the project: automation, human resources, structural and operations.

“I went for operations,” he said. “I had to have a really long debate with another kid on why I should get to lead the operations group, and I eventually did end up getting voted into that.”

Lair’s group had a NASA engineer working closely with them.

“I got to talk with him about the hypotheticals and ideas in what



Spencer High School student Mark Lair worked on his group’s proposal at the Space Settlement Design Competition in Houston during the school year. (Photos submitted)

we were making,” Lair said.

From the competition, he felt he was able to understand what working for an engineering company would be like.

“I definitely learned about the structure of engineering companies that they were basing it off of, and the stress that certain deadlines can apply to people and how they have to work well as a group even when there’s such a close deadline coming up,” Lair said.

The students started working in their groups on Friday afternoon and had to present their proposal on Saturday morning. The judges selected the winning group based on whose design best met the requirements and if their presentation could demonstrate that.

The Spencer senior’s group won the competition. Out of the 100 students from the winning group, the judges voted on 12 to move on to the international level. A month after the competition, Lair received an email saying that he

was selected to move on to the international competition.

“I was really nervous about that for the time in between the competition and finding out that I got to go to the final one,” he said.

Throughout the competition, the judges observed the students while working on their projects.

“It’s not entirely based on leadership positions; it’s more based on how much you’re actually helping, how efficiently you’re doing your task, whether you’re communicating properly, and how much you contribute,” Lair said.

A senior at Spencer High School, he is in the gifted program at school and enjoys his calculus classes. After graduation, he is thinking about going to Grinnell, Buena Vista University or Iowa State University.

“My dream job would be flying aircraft in the military, but possibly aerospace engineering for an alternative,” Lair said. “I’m really interested in planes.”

Club members show talent at 4-H Achievement Fair



“It’s truly one of my favorite days for fair prep. It’s a great way for the kids to show us what they’ve learned,” — Clay County Youth Coordinator Jenna Steffen. (Photos submitted)

Clay County 4-H hosted its Achievement Fair July 23 at the 4-H Exhibit Building at the Clay County Fair. The Achievement Fair is considered the “Fair Before the Fair” for all nonlivestock projects. It allows projects and

events to be judged and selected to advance to the Iowa State Fair. “It’s truly one of my favorite days for fair prep,” County Youth Coordinator Jenna Steffen said. “It’s a great way for the kids to show us what they’ve learned.”

Area 4-H youth entered projects in categories of static exhibits, communications and clothing. The projects are conference-judged so that youth can explain their projects and share what they’ve learned to the judges.

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