

Spotlight: Helping visionaries create a better world

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What does it take for one individual to change the world? Imagination, commitment, courage and skill are vital ingredients, but without funding from a government or major institution, visionaries with a pioneering mission often have to struggle mightily to realize their dreams. This is where Rolex has been helping for almost 30 years.

Yesterday, the Swiss watchmaker held a gala prize-giving ceremony at the Conciergerie in Paris to introduce five such visionaries - the winners of the 11th Rolex Awards for Enterprise, chosen for the ingenuity of their projects and the benefits they will bring to mankind.

The explorer Lonnie Dupre of the United States will cross the Arctic Ocean in the summertime to draw attention to global warming; Claudia Feh, a native of Switzerland based in France, is helping to reintroduce wild horses to their native Mongolia; the paleoanthropologist David Lordkipanidze of Georgia will continue excavations of the earliest known hominid site outside of Africa; Argentina's Teresa Manera de Bianco will preserve a unique set of prehistoric animal tracks in her native country; and Kikuo Morimoto of Japan will expand his ambitious project designed to revive Cambodia's traditional silk-weaving industry.

Advancing knowledge and well-being

What these laureates share is their passion and commitment to projects that will improve life on the planet by advancing human knowledge and well-being. The \$100,000 that each of them receives will be used to fund their winning projects; they will also receive a personally inscribed gold Rolex chronometer.

Previous laureates have accomplished small miracles with their prize money, although many of them have said the money is less important to the success of their projects than the recognition they receive from the publicity Rolex generates about them. Dave Irvine-Halliday of Canada, a 2002 laureate, helped supply inexpensive, reliable low-powered lighting to developing countries, while the Frenchman Laurent Pordié, who won in 2000, has successfully put in place a program to save traditional medicine in Ladakh, northern India. A Rolex Award won in 1990 by the Indonesian conservationist Suryo Prawiroatmodjo has helped him to make major changes in his country's attitudes to the natural environment.

The Rolex Awards for Enterprise began in 1976 as a one-off event to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Rolex Oyster chronometer - the first waterproof wristwatch, Rolex's greatest technical achievement. The awards were such a success that they were turned into an ongoing series. A total of 55 people have now received Rolex awards. Says Patrick Heiniger, chief executive officer of Rolex SA and chairman of the Awards Selection Committee: "Over three decades, we have helped advance the exceptional work of scores of individuals who are quietly changing the world and making it a better place to live. All of these extraordinary men and women share a passionate vision and an indomitable spirit of enterprise - the same spirit upon which Rolex was founded a century ago." He lauds the great determination the laureates have shown in overcoming all obstacles to realize their goals.

Rolex takes great care with every stage of the process, from selecting the judges and winners to publicizing their projects through events, publications and a dedicated Web site. All this has made it one of the world's most respected philanthropic programs. The nine independent volunteer judges on the 11th series' selection panel carefully reviewed the shortlisted candidates' projects before choosing the winners. A total of 1,703 individuals from 116 countries applied in that series. The projects are judged for their spirit of enterprise, feasibility, originality and impact. "A recurring theme in the winning projects is the importance of conserving our natural and cultural heritage," says Heiniger of the new laureates. He adds that the jury members were united in their support of

such endeavors.

Judges are leaders in their fields All the judges on the Selection Committee, which changes for each series of awards, have an international profile and are leaders in their fields, although their interests always go beyond the borders of their own discipline. Yves Coppens, a paleoanthropologist and prehistorian, is a professor at France's National Museum of Natural History and the College of France. Kathryn S. Fuller of the United States is a lawyer and the president and chief executive officer of the World Wildlife Fund (United States). The neurobiologist Dr. Guillermo Jaim-Etcheverry of Argentina is the president of the University of Buenos Aires and a professor at its School of Medicine. Krov Menuhin of the United States and Australia is an underwater explorer, filmmaker and conservationist. Mamoru Mohri of Japan is an astronaut and director of the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation. Sir Christopher Ondaatje of Britain is an explorer and philanthropist. Cristina Rapisarda Sassoon of Italy, a lawyer and journalist, is the director of the Research Unit of Touring Club Italiano. Dr. Kanwaljit Soin of Singapore, an orthopedic and hand surgeon, is a founding member of the Association of Women for Action and Research. Chris Y. H. Tan of Singapore, a biochemist and cell biologist, is a professor and founding director of the Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology.

In past years, judges have included Sir Edmund Hillary, famed for reaching the top of Mount Everest in 1953; the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Leo Esaki; Gilbert Grosvenor, chairman of the National Geographic Society; Kathryn Sullivan, a geologist, oceanographer and astronaut; and the architect Fumihiko Maki.

Associates are winners, too Five associate laureates were also selected by this year's panel. They are Pisit Charnsnoh of Thailand, Laury Cullen Jr. of Brazil, Shekar Dattatri of India, Dora Nipp of Canada and Jo Thompson of the United States.

The five award categories are science and medicine, technology and innovation, exploration and discovery, the environment and cultural heritage, but Rolex will consider a project in almost any field provided that it contributes to the betterment of mankind or human knowledge. Anyone can apply for a Rolex award.

One of the major benefits of this award is the support it gives to daring projects that might otherwise have difficulty getting funds from traditional sources.

When the late André J. Heiniger, former chairman of Rolex, founded the awards, he wanted to help new enterprises rather than reward established ones.

"It is indeed the unreasonable, the unconventional individuals who change the world time and time again who have reinforced my faith in the invincible spirit of mankind," he said.

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