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Local Leaders Launch Competition to Develop Graffiti Removal Device

City of San Jose, Caltrans, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and Silicon Valley Community Foundation come together to engage bright minds in effort to eradicate graffiti in the community

San Jose, Calif. – Mayor Sam Liccardo launched a competition today with Caltrans and Silicon Valley Community Foundation that challenges Bay Area students and entrepreneurs to develop a device to rapidly eradicate graffiti from hard-to-reach locations while dramatically reducing costs for the effort.

“Silicon Valley has given us personal computing, search engines and social media—all within recent memory,” said Mayor Sam Liccardo. “Now, we’re turning to these same innovators to dramatically reduce the costs of graffiti eradication and cure a big headache for cities around the world.”

Removing graffiti from overpasses, freeway signs, sound walls and railroad trestles is most intensive and expensive. For example, a recent effort to clean graffiti along a two-mile section of Highway 101 required closing freeway lanes for three nights, the mobilization of large bucket cranes and other equipment, and dozens of city and state personnel – ultimately costing \$60,000.

In addition to the huge expense, the complexity of coordinating such an effort often means that the graffiti will remain for weeks or months before it can be removed. And, the efforts have so far proved ephemeral, with graffiti reappearing rapidly after authorities repaint the tagged areas.

“Graffiti is a problem on many levels,” said Caltrans District 4 Director, Bijan Sartipi. “It drains our resources as most tagged locations reappear shortly after they are cleaned. Graffiti is not only unsightly and causes neighborhoods to look blighted and distressed but also hazardous when freeway signs are covered and are obscured for motorists. Caltrans welcomes this engagement with bright minds to move us in a positive direction in our fight against graffiti.”

The competition will occur in two phases. Today, the mayor and partners launched the first phase, where participants can submit their ideas for a graffiti removal device, asking for

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materials including concept drawings, a project budget and more. A panel from partner agencies will judge the proposals. The groups who submit the most promising ideas will share \$20,000 in funding to prototype their devices, which will compete against one another for the grand prize of \$5,000 and assistance in obtaining a patent.

The local Silicon Valley U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) will support the challenge by offering 1-on-1 assistance for the basics of patent application and search through its public workstations.

The City of San Jose and Caltrans will also be the first customers for the invention, receiving free use during a two-year beta-testing period.

More information on the competition parameters is available here: <https://herox.com/sjgraffiti>

Director John Cabeca of the Silicon Valley USPTO regional office expressed, “As a new resident of the City of San Jose, the Silicon Valley USPTO is pleased to support Unleash Your Geek and help tackle this important challenge while fostering creativity and innovation in the community.”

Silicon Valley Community Foundation is investing in the anti-graffiti competition as part of its mission to foster innovative solutions to community problems. “SVCF is proud to partner with the City of San Jose to harness our community’s innovative thinking and solve social challenges,” said Emmett Carson, Ph.D., CEO and president of Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

The City and partners have already reached out to the local universities, including San José State University, Santa Clara University, Cal State East Bay and Stanford to recruit participants.

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