

Rich in History, Full of Promise for the Future

www.edisonfairs.org

Edison Fairs aims to motivate and enrich the lives of youth in Southwest Florida through an annual regional science and engineering fair, a regional inventors fair, and a countywide elementary science expo. Through these initiatives, Edison Fairs empowers young people to explore the natural world and contribute in conscientious and creative ways to progress. Since its beginnings in 1958, and its formal establishment in 1986, Edison Fairs has carried forward the spirit of great scientists, inventors, and entrepreneurs like Thomas Alva Edison, inspiring hundreds of thousands of children.

Since its official formation, a remarkable list of mentors came to Fort Myers with Edison Fairs assistance. Rudy Garcia-Tolson turned out to be the youngest and most relatable to the K-12 population.

Born with Popliteal Pterygium Syndrome, a condition with facial and limb deformities, he endured nineteen surgeries. At the age of five he was given a choice, remain in a wheelchair or have both legs amputated and potentially walk with the aid of prosthetics. He did not hesitate to choose the latter and has never regretted the decision.

Now in his thirties, Rudy is an accomplished athlete and an inspiration to millions of young people and adults around the world. His collaborations with medical professionals and prosthetists have pushed the boundaries of what is possible for individuals with disabilities. Beyond his athletic achievements, Rudy, at the age of eleven, shared his story with hundreds of elementary students in Fort Myers, demonstrating how STEM and invention had transformed his life. He also participated in the Edison Festival 5K, setting a personal best, and served as the Grand Marshal of the Festival of Light Parade, where he inspired over one hundred thousand spectators. A web search will not disappoint if you would enjoy knowing more about the amazing accomplishments of Rudy Garcia-Tolson, "BraveHeart".

Edison Fairs has sponsored not only Rudy but also other notable figures such as physicist and origami master Robert Lang, inventor of the medical Byrd Respirator Forrest Byrd, and radar technology pioneer Robert Rhines, who played a critical role in World War II. Future www.edisonfairs.org articles will shine more light on each of these remarkable people.

In January 2023, Edison Fairs achieved 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit status. Despite the challenges posed by limited funding, the pandemic and Hurricane Ian, the organization has continued to offer life-enhancing opportunities to the region's youth. You are encouraged to explore this website to discover more about the organization and consider the value that Edison Fairs brings to Southwest Florida.

It is appropriate to recognize key sponsors that have stood by the Fairs programs *for over three decades*: Kiwanis, SONY, and Edison Festival of Light. Without their steadfast support, the incredible achievements of the K-12 participants would have only been a dream. Along with their support, this gratitude is extended to the many local, regional, and national businesses, institutions, organizations, individual donors, and the countless teachers, parents and volunteers who make all the magic happen!