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CIRCUIT OF IRELAND TEAM LAUNCHES NEW EVENT, CIRCUIT FESTIVAL 2017

The team behind the world-famous Circuit of Ireland Rally is staging a totally new event this year, the Circuit Festival 2017, supported by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. Running from the 4th to 8th April and based in Ballymena Showgrounds, the event will include the International Circuit Challenge, launched in January at the Motor Racing Show in Birmingham's NEC, plus an innovative addition with a STEM theme, called STEM@TheCircuit.

Mid and East Antrim Mayor, Councillor Audrey Wales MBE is looking forward to welcoming the new Circuit Festival to her home town of Ballymena: "We're delighted to be working with the International Circuit Challenge team on another exciting rallying event and to once again be showcasing the Mid and East Antrim borough on a global stage.

"Both the International Circuit Challenge and the associated STEM@TheCircuit will find a welcome home in Mid and East Antrim's Ballymena Showgrounds, strategically located as one of Northern Ireland's premier sporting and leisure complexes.

"As a Council, we are committed to growing the local economy, not only by attracting overnight visitors to the area through our support for major festivals and events, but also by encouraging the development of business innovation and technology. With Catalyst Inc, formerly the NI Science Park, right on our doorstep at Ecos, we've included our support for the STEM project within the Circuit Festival this year. We hope that by promoting the vital Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths subjects as positive career choices for young people, we will encourage the growth and development of an entrepreneurial culture both locally and throughout Northern Ireland.

"We're very excited about the new Circuit Festival and I hope everyone will join us in April as we don our overalls for some rally festival fun."

STEM@TheCircuit, a unique new event aimed at young people, joins the International Circuit Challenge in a packed programme of activities promoting a festival atmosphere and adding to the excitement of the event.

Festival Director Bobby Willis, explains, “Rallying has made a major contribution to engineering and technological development in car manufacturing and can provide an innovative platform for the promotion of STEM careers to young people. As part of the Circuit Festival, STEM@TheCircuit will offer experiential STEM opportunities for school children across Northern Ireland, inspiring them to follow education and careers in STEM subjects – Science Technology Engineering and Maths. The students who attend will not only have the chance to meet and talk with industry professionals but also be able to get ‘up close’ to the international rally cars, drivers and teams participating in the International Circuit Challenge Rally.”

STEM@TheCircuit will take place in a dedicated STEM marquee in the Ballymena Showgrounds and include the Showgrounds stadium building. Interactive displays and activities created by STEM companies, professional bodies, colleges, and institutions will demonstrate STEM in action in Northern Ireland today.

Key partners for the event will be Sentinus, Northern Ireland’s main STEM promoter and Catalyst Inc, the local umbrella group for business innovation and technology.

Bill Connor, Chief Executive, Sentinus said, “Sentinus works with young people of all ages, providing practical experience in the STEM subjects and the Circuit Festival is a perfect chance for them to see the application of science and engineering in the real world. As well as attending a science show and visiting interactive stands provided by local companies, they will be able to get hands on with some of the cars which will be starring in the Rally and see their own model cars being raced at speeds of 60 kilometres per hour. This is a wonderful opportunity for pupils to taste the excitement of science and engineering and find out more about potential careers in the sector.”

Joanne Stuart OBE, Director of Development at Catalyst Inc added, “We are delighted to be supporting STEM@TheCircuit which will provide opportunities for young people to get engaged with STEM particularly in the context of racing. There are many career opportunities within the STEM industries in Northern Ireland and the Festival will provide an opportunity to meet with innovative businesses who are working in exciting areas and see how STEM is being applied to create products and services that are solving problems across the globe.”

An extensive programme for young people has been created during Circuit Festival 2017 including:

- Celebration day for Sentinus Team R&D projects (4th April)

- F1 in Schools – Northern Ireland final (6th & 7th April)
- Demonstration/science/engineering shows for young students aged 10-17 years
- Fun and interactive displays and activities by Northern Ireland STEM businesses and institutions (6th & 7th April)
- Pitstop Challenge/Wheel Change Competition with fantastic Motorsport prizes (every day)
- Opportunities for young people and families to get 'up close' to rally cars and teams (6th & 7th April)
- A celebration of local business technological innovation

STEM@TheCircuit will complement the International Circuit Challenge which will take place on 7th and 8th April. This new event will feature 30 invited drivers in internationally recognised R5 cars tackling eight competitive elements across the Mid and East Antrim areas.

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