FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local VRT-U Announced by NIST as a Top Prize Winner in national Virtual Reality Heads-Up Display Navigation Challenge

McLean, VA (June 25, 2018) — The U.S. Commerce Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Public Safety Communications Research (PSCR) division recently awarded and announced the six (6) winners of the 2018 PSCR Virtual Reality Heads-Up Display Challenge. The four-stage challenge was designed to advance user interface (UI) design for first responders, who are rarely the target of such design, to complete navigational tasks. McLean, VA based VRT-U, in collaboration with Look On Media, placed first in the competition, taking home a cash prize of $25,000.

"PSCR is taking a giant leap forward in solving public safety challenges using virtual reality in collaboration with industry and academia through our grant programs and prize challenges," PSCR Division Chief Dereck Orr said, "Virtual reality allows us to create new test environments for public safety where we can envision future devices and HUDs existing in a real scenario without having a real incident. This allows public safety to virtually perform tasks and overlay all kinds of user interfaces. Then, we can measure it."

User Interface (UI) technology research examines the interactions between a user and the technology, such as how they input, utilize and understand the data and communications through the technology. Examples of UIs include haptic feedback mechanisms (e.g., vibration through wearable technology), audio cues, and visual indicators (e.g., heads-up displays in the form of VR or even augmented reality). Such mechanisms can mean the difference between life and death when first responders are conducting rescue missions and their situational awareness is impaired. The Virtual Reality Heads-Up Display Navigation Challenge was designed to advance UI technology research for first responders.

"Our winning HUD solution guides firefighters to find the victim as quickly as possible and to evacuate the victim through the fastest and safest path possible" VRT-U Founder Dr. Hurriyet Ok said. This solution dynamically adjusts the best route based on obstacles, fire hazards and other changes in the environment while safely guiding the rescue team through smoke, haze, and complete darkness. In designing the HUD Navigation UI, LookOnVRTU consulted with Dr. Paul Davis, the President of First Responders Institute, to select and prioritize the most important features. Upon seeing the demo video, his response was "This is ground-breaking!".

Contestants began the challenge in January 2018. Finalists presented their HUD prototypes in a live competition at the 2018 Public Safety Broadband Stakeholder Meeting in June. PSCR, which also hosts the annual meeting, provided the VR test environment for competitors. Over 500 meeting attendees, who represent all segments of the Public Safety community, had the chance to interact with finalists and their tech. Competitors were adjudicated and awarded cash prizes.

Previous media coverage of PSCR's efforts to propel forward communications technology for public safety, and mentions of the Virtual Reality Heads-Up Display Navigation challenge can be found here: Can a fake rescue help you save a real person? Researchers testing virtual reality think so. Also appears on: The Indy Channel; WCO Cincinnati; 6 On Your Side (Idaho); NBC26 (Green Bay); 23ABC (Bakersfield); WTMJ (Milwaukee); KTNV (Las Vegas); WXYZ (Detroit); Fox4 (Florida); ABC15 (Arizona); WTMJ Radio (Wisconsin); News Channel 5 (Nashville); KGUN9 (Tucson); Fox4Now (Florida); Fox47News (Michigan); ABC Action News (Tampa); 10 News (San Diego); KSHB (Kansas City); KJRH (Tulsa); 3NewsNow (Omaha).

Official contest result announcement by NIST PSCR:
https://www.nist.gov/ctl/pscr/funding-opportunities/prizes-challenges/2018-virtual-reality-heads-display-navigation

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About the Challenge: For more information about PSCR's Virtual Reality Heads-Up Display Navigation challenge and other funding opportunities, please visit: https://www.challenge.gov/challenge/Virtual-Reality-Heads-Up-Display-Navigation-Challenge/.

About PSCR: Since 2002, NIST's Public Safety Communications Research Program (PSCR) has worked to drive innovation and advance public safety communication technologies through cutting-edge Research and Development (R&D). PSCR works directly with first responders and the solver community to address public safety's urgent need to access the same broadband communications and state-of-the-art technologies that consumers on commercial networks now expect.

About NIST: As a non-regulatory agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, NIST promotes U.S. innovation and industrial competitiveness by advancing measurement science, standards and technology in ways that enhance economic security and improve our quality of life. Founded in 1901, NIST is one of the nation's oldest physical science laboratories. Today, NIST measurements support technologies from the smallest nanoscale devices to the largest and most complex engineering systems.

About LookOnVRTU:

VRT-U, based in McLean, VA, specializes in Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality and 360° video technologies to create immersive and transformative learning experiences. Their approach is to design and integrate creative visual arts and innovative products and bring cost-effective learning solutions to the target market. They develop VR content custom-made for specific learning needs in an organization, such as an enterprise, an education institution, or a government entity. They also offer AR/VR products for consumer use worldwide and transmedia products for amazing learning experiences unattainable by standard video-based eLearning.

Look On Media is a Virtual Reality (VR) development studio based in Baltimore, Maryland. Using the latest in 3D rendering and 360 video technology and their extensive background in the games industry, their team is able to create high end visuals and engaging interactivity for any VR experience.

Media Contacts:

To arrange an interview and/or any media inquiries with **VRT-U**, please contact Selim Yargici at (703) 364-8801 and selimyargici@vrt-u.com
To arrange an interview and/or any media inquiries with **Look On Media**, please contact Jonathan Powell at (410) 989-1661 and jon@lookonmedia.com

To arrange an interview and/or any media inquiries with **NIST**, please contact Jennifer Huergo at (301) 975-6343 and jennifer.huergo@nist.gov. Please also cc psprizes@nist.gov