The Inspiration:

For my research project, I wanted to use science to accomplish something big. Climate change is primarily caused by an increase in Carbon Dioxide in the atmosphere. Carbon Dioxide is a greenhouse gas, meaning that it will trap radiation from the sun in the atmosphere. As a result, global warming happens. This heating is not good for the Earth. Global warming could cause the extinction of many animals, as well as an increase in extreme weather. As a result, I wanted to study existing chemical technologies which could slow down global warming.

How to Capture Carbon Dioxide:

To capture the Carbon Dioxide, I used an ion-exchange resin called I-200 from Snowpure in San Clemente, CA. The resin was originally meant for purifying water, so it had to be chemically transformed to capture Carbon Dioxide. The sheet came in a large 25 ft. roll, shown below. The sheet itself is made of polypropylene and in its original form has chlorine ions on it to remove positive ions from water. After it’s treated in a 90 °C water bath and has its Chlorine ions replaced with Hydroxide ions, the exchange resin is ready to capture Carbon Dioxide. It can capture Carbon Dioxide in two hour cycles. For one hour, when the sheet is dry, it will capture Carbon Dioxide, but once the sheet is dipped in water, the sheet will release Carbon Dioxide for another hour. The cycles can be repeated 1,000+ times.

Building the Machine:

In order to capture the Carbon Dioxide, I had to build a machine that could repeat the wet/dry cycles of the resin. Further, since this machine needed to have practical future applications, it needed to be automated. The machine has spaces for a box of water, and a release box. It rotates through these boxes and the open air to capture Carbon Dioxide. One of the “arms” of the machine has small squares of the ion-exchange resin, shown right, as well as a CO2R Carbon Dioxide sensor. The leadscrew (the dark long screw in the middle), as well as the two guide-rails around it, move the arms of the machine up and down, in and out of the water and release boxes when powered by a motor. The gear shown right moves the arms between the two boxes. I then used an Arduino microcontroller and an Adafruit v2 motor shield to automate the machine.
The Results:
The machine successfully captured Carbon Dioxide, as seen in the graph below.

In the graph, ppm of Carbon Dioxide is measured on the y-axis against seconds since the start of the trial on the x-axis. The graph shows roughly 8 wet/dry cycles of the resin. 400 ppm is roughly the atmospheric concentration of Carbon Dioxide, and 1200 ppm is triple that level.

In 8 cycles (16 hours), the machine captured 0.25 liters of Carbon Dioxide; however, the capture rate can be improved. Since the release chamber was never ventilated, the higher concentration in the release box made it harder for Carbon Dioxide to leave the resin sheet.

Looking Ahead:
In the future, the technology can be used in larger artificial “trees,” like the ones shown below. It’s estimated that 1 square mile of these “trees” could absorb 10 million tons of Carbon Dioxide from the atmosphere every year.

Further, the captured Carbon Dioxide can be put to good use. Since Carbon Dioxide is good for plants, it can be used to grow trees or algae, which can in turn be used to make fuel, or the gas can possibly be used to make carbonated soda water.

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To Sum it Up:
155 screws
62 Lines of Code
17 people consulted
6,006,945,000,000,000,000,000 molecules of Carbon Dioxide Captured

For More Info:
For more information on the machine, visit: https://goo.gl/UR2y9F
For a video of my machine in action, visit: https://goo.gl/w3kVVO