

Good Citizenship Takes Home the Prize

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What is a good citizen? What is the importance of the Electoral College? What are the dangers of setting precedents? How do you define cruel and unusual punishment?

These were a few of the constitutional issues addressed by the five participants in the National High School Oratorical Contest sponsored by American Legion Post 360 and held on Jan. 18 at Rim of the World High School.

The contest was open for students from Crestline to Running Springs enrolled in the Rim of the World Unified School District.

It was senior Morgan Acaldo from Blue Jay who impressed the judges with his speech on the importance of being an involved citizen and he won the contest, earning a prize of \$150. He will move on to the district-level contest, to be held on Sunday, Feb. 12, in Redlands at American Legion Post 106.

The competition then moves to an area contest, the state contest, and ultimately to the national contest, which will be held in Indianapolis on April 22-23. The winner of the California state contest earns a \$1,200 scholarship, and the national winner earns an \$18,000 scholarship.

Second place and a prize of \$75 went to junior Marko Perko III from Lake Arrowhead, who spoke on the Electoral College. Junior Spencer Smith from Lake Arrowhead took third place and a prize of \$50 with his speech on the dangers of setting precedents.

Other participants were junior Sara Crowder from Cedar Glen and senior Brandon Yeaton from Cedar Glen.

Each participant prepared an oration on some phase of the Constitution of the United States, emphasizing the duties and obligations of a citizen to the United States government. The prepared oration must be eight to ten minutes long and is delivered without any notes or props.

Following the prepared orations, each participant spoke for three to five minutes on an assigned topic. Each student prepared to speak on four possible topics; a member of the audience chose the topic of the evening from a hat. Each student was then given five minutes to prepare for that particular topic.

Judges scored each participant on originality, skill in selecting examples, logic, comprehensiveness of knowledge, voice and diction, style, and body actions for both the prepared oration and the assigned topic. Penalties are assessed for time infractions and failure to speak on the Constitution.



Sara Crowder (L) was congratulated by American Legion Commander Armand LeSage following the organization's National High School Oratorical Contest. Other contestants were winner Morgan Acaldo, Spencer Smith, Marko Perko III, and Brandon Yeaton. Photo By Mary-Justine Lanyon

Judges Jim Lingenfelter, Deena Wood and Allison Banner were impressed with the caliber of the students' speeches.

"I am in awe," said Lingenfelter "that young people today are willing to stand up and do this. They all deserve a tremendous amount of credit."

Wood echoed these feelings, adding, "The quality of these students' knowledge is so superior. It's only a shame that there aren't more people in the audience."

"I really enjoy doing things like this," said Banner. "It makes you see exceptional students who are striving to better themselves and prepare for their futures."

Rim of the World teacher Gary Tompkins works with the students in the weeks preceding the contest. He also travels to the District-level contest to cheer on his student. "This is a wonderful thing for the American Legion to do for the school," noted Tompkins. "Schools don't teach speech anymore, so the more we can do to teach communication skills the better. The students learn a lot from this process."

Armand LeSage, Commander of Post 360, marvels at the poise and intelligence of the Rim students. "This is a fantastic opportunity for these young people. Not only do they have a chance to earn prize money, they hone their leadership and speaking skills by standing alone up there on the stage, speaking to an audience about difficult issues. The American Legion is very proud to bring this contest to the mountain communities." As a footnote he added that all students who participate in American Legion youth activities are eligible for a special scholarship from Post 360 when they graduate.

The local contest is held each January.

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