

Michigan Students Win Top Honors at National History Day

COLLEGE PARK, MD: Eleven Michigan students competing at National History Day outside of Washington, DC reached the top tier of competitors. Two students from Grand Rapids placed second in the nation. One student also won the prestigious Best Entry in Irish or Irish-American History.

Over 2,300 students competed from across the nation in National History Day this year, held on the campus of the University of Maryland in College Park. Only a handful of students advanced in each category to the final round. These top tier Michigan students presented their very best projects at National History Day 2009.

“This week's National History Day competition was a great experience” commented Shannon White, Michigan’s State Coordinator for National History Day. “Fifty-one Michigan students presented their very best work. Over 100 Michiganders were here, including family, friends and teachers, to help support our students. Everyone was full of enthusiasm and very proud to represent their state at National History Day.”

Michigan students competing at National History Day were from Ada, Atlantic Mine, Beaverton, Canton, Eaton Rapids, Gladwin, Grand Haven, Grand Rapids, Hamilton, Holland, Lansing, Montague, North Muskegon, Northville, Pinckney, Plymouth, Rose City, South Range, West Branch, and Whitehall.

Students Charlotte Cassidy and Clara Cullen of Forest Hills Eastern Middle School in Grand Rapids were awarded second place in the Junior Website category for their entry “Harriet Beecher Stowe: Author and Abolitionist.” Their teacher and History Day coach is Jim Cross. The students crossed the stage at the University of Maryland amid loud cheers from the Michigan delegation. Michigan has not had a History Day entry place higher in the national standings since 2001.

A Junior Individual Documentary entry developed by Noah Attal, also of Forest Hills Eastern Middle School, placed 6th in the nation for his entry “Ibn Sina: Prince of Physicians.” His entry explored the life of Sina who is often mentioned in the same breath as Hippocrates and others who developed the foundations of modern medicine. Attal also won the State Award for Michigan in the Junior category.

Five students from East Middle School in Canton placed 8th nationally in the Junior Group Performance category with their entry “Dorothea Lange: A Photographer for the People.” Their teacher is Tammie Groth. Using a variety of props including an antique camera, they performed twice, in the initial and final rounds, for judges drawn from history professionals across the country.

In the Senior category Whitehall High School student Alayna Klco took home the silver medal for her Best Entry in Irish or Irish American History which is sponsored annually by the Ancient Order of the Hibernians and the Ladies Ancient Order of the Hibernians. Her entry was titled “Mercy Unto Thousands: Catherine McAuley, Angel of the Irish

Poor.” The medals awarded to students are in honor of Commodore John Barry USN (1745-1803) who was a native of Ireland and considered the father of the U.S. Navy.

Students Brittany Puska and Hannah Rundman from Jeffers High School in Painesdale won the State Award for Michigan in the Senior category for their entry “Marconi’s Magic Box.” Teacher Cheryl Ruohonen coached the students.

“The process for competing at National History Day is not unlike the Olympics but on a national level and with an academic, rather than sports, focus” according to Larry Wagenaar, Executive Director of the Historical Society of Michigan. “The Michigan delegation represented our state well and all of them did an outstanding job. Their take-away is a greater appreciation of the history that made us who we are, sharper critical thinking and research skills, and better citizens of our state and nation – and they had a lot of fun too!”

More information on the Michigan History Day program is available at www.michiganhistoryday.org or by contacting the Historical Society of Michigan at (517) 324-1828.

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