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News

8th-grader stings competition

Friday, February 26, 2010

By Cassandra Shofar

CShofar@News-Herald.com

After hours upon hours of studying words with origins spanning from German to Latin, Kelly Tapager pulled from "Harry Potter" to spell the word that got her the trophy Thursday night.

The eighth-grader from Andrews-Osborne Academy won the 2010 Lake County Spelling Bee hosted by the Lake County Educational Service Center in Concord Township by calmly stringing together all 11 letters in "poltergeist" to clinch the trophy and a spot in the Tri-County Spelling Bee.

The Huntsburg Township resident, who only participated in one other Lake County Spelling Bee two years ago, has a loyal practice partner in her mother when it comes to spelling.

"My mom will read the words to me and I'll spell them and she'll just keep reading them to me until I get them all right, which can sometimes take days because some of the words can be really tricky," she said. "Some of the capitals or most words from German or French origins (are hard) because of the all the silent letters."

Debbie Tapager, Kelly's mother, said her daughter has always had a knack for spelling.

"Her fourth-grade teacher told us that from the get-go," Debbie said. "She just has an affinity for spelling. I'm thrilled (she won) because she worked so hard. I'm proud of her no matter what she does, but I'm happy for her because she had to think on her feet and ... she wanted to win."

Debbie said in order to calm Kelly's nerves before the competition, they spelled words during the drive and while walking into the building.

"We were spelling up until we walked through the doors. She just kept saying, 'Give me another one. Give me another one,' " Debbie said with a laugh.

When asked if the spelling drills helped ease the tension, Kelly said she thought so.

"I was just glad we didn't get to all the awful, German ones," she added with a laugh.

Eric, Kelly's father, said he was "very proud of my girl."

"I drove through a blizzard to get here," he said, chuckling.

Kelly was one of 14 students ranging from fourth-graders to eighth-graders, to participate in the spelling bee, which went 12 rounds.

Some were lax, sitting back in their chairs awaiting their turn, others teetered on the edges of their seat, bouncing their legs as their competition would approach the microphone.

"I enjoy the different ways they do it. One girl writes the word on her hand, and one of the boys just spelled the words right away," said Hilary Bixler, a former English teacher and pronouncer for the spelling bee for the last four or five years. "I enjoy seeing the different way they get the words out."

Bixler said she battles her own nerves right alongside students. "I get very nervous because I have to pronounce them how they're given in the book ... not necessarily how I would want to pronounce them," she said. "So it's a challenge and I enjoy that."

Steve Young, coordinator of special projects for the LCESC, said he also enjoys interacting with the kids and has done the spelling bee for the last seven to eight years.

"I think it's good for them to be involved in an academic related activity," he said. "It's an American Institution in some ways and it's just a great, healthy academic related competition."

He added, "The kids are usually always very pleasant and you hate to see any of them miss."

The Tri-County Spelling Bee is set for March 11 in Kirtland.

"I'm nervous, because I only have two weeks to study," Kelly said, adding she plans to use as much of that time as she can to prepare.



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