

NOTEBOOK

LI students top in design contest

Long Island students swept the top four spots statewide in an annual flag design contest held in conjunction with the Council for Art Education's Youth Art Month in March.

The contest's overall winner was Plainview-Old Bethpage Middle School eighth-grader Jillian Zhang, whose mixed-media piece featured a silhouette of New York with words such as "love," "pride" and "kindness." A single brush stroke connects the state's urban, suburban and rural areas, which are depicted through such landmarks as the Empire State Building and Montauk Lighthouse.

The high school level was won by Babylon High School junior Vanessa Espinoza. Yejin Park, a sixth-grader at John F. Kennedy Middle School in Bethpage; and Mia Reyes, a third-grader at East Lake Elementary School in Massapequa Park, won the middle and elementary school levels, respectively.

The contest, which had a theme this year of "Art Connects Us," was sponsored by the New York State Art Teachers Association.

"I was thrilled to learn that I won," Zhang said. "This means a lot to me, as art has been my motivation, especially during these difficult times."

Zhang's winning design was displayed virtually this month in the Youth Art Month Museum as part of the National Art Education Association's National Convention, which was held online this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each winner also received art supplies for themselves and for their schools to use in art classes.

ELWOOD

Literacy initiative

The Elwood School District has created a literacy program in which high schoolers can earn community service hours by reading age-appropriate books virtually to students at Harley Avenue Primary School and James H. Boyd Intermediate School. The teens then suggest simple activities for the children to complete.

One recent effort saw first- and second-graders in Jessica Jantzen's class at Harley Avenue listen to a reading of Susan Verde's children's book "Hey, Wall," and discuss its messages of peace, mindfulness and community. They also designed walls of their own on paper.

The program's goal is to help the elementary school students improve their literacy practices as well as foster a love of books, the district said.

WYANDANCH

Student Leadership Council

The Wyandanch School District has launched a new leadership program to



Jillian Zhang, an eighth-grader at Plainview-Old Bethpage Middle School, was the overall winner statewide in an annual flag design contest. She created a mixed-media piece that promotes unity and links different New York landmarks with a brush stroke.

give students an opportunity to have direct communication with the superintendent and other administrators.

The Superintendent's Student Leadership Council, which hosted its first meeting in January, is composed of 15 students in grades 3 to 12 and was created by Superintendent Gina Talbert. Participants are encouraged to share their experiences and opinions on school-related matters and work to create solutions for issues ranging from technology initiatives to wellness programs.

"These students are going to play a vital role in improving the Wyandanch School District, and we are extremely excited to work with them in this unique way," Talbert said.

COUNTYWIDE

Lunar New Year

Many schools celebrated the Lunar

New Year last month with educational events and activities held in recognition of the Year of the Ox.

In Blue Point, elementary schoolers were introduced to Chinese dance, music and art during a virtual visit from singer-songwriter Patricia Shih, who performed a show-and-tell using objects obtained during her travels to China.

In Huntington Station, Washington Primary School virtually hosted a cultural cooking night that guided participating families through the process of preparing dumplings. It was led by the family of first-grader Sophie Adcock.

In West Babylon, Forest Avenue Elementary School students learned about Asian cultures by reading fiction and nonfiction books and using online databases to research the Far East.

— MICHAEL R. EBERT



COUP DE MARDI GRAS

Eighth-graders Alicia Luchowski, left, and Cassidy Botsch made beignets in celebration of Mardi Gras. Their effort was part of Christin Mansfield's global foods class at the Lindenhurst Middle School in which students explored the blended culture of New Orleans by listening to classic Dixieland Jazz music and discussing traditional Cajun and Creole food, among other things.

WAY TO GO!

Harpreet Rattu

8th-grader creates care packages for troops

A South Huntington student recently spearheaded the collection of approximately 7,000 items for care packages sent to troops overseas.

Harpreet Rattu, an eighth-grader at Henry L. Stimson Middle School, collected the items — ranging from hygiene products to food items — in conjunction with the nonprofit Soldiers' Angels, for which she serves as an ambassador.

She was inspired to do so after hearing how difficult it is to receive basic necessities overseas from her sister, Inpreet, a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army who is now stationed in South Korea.

Rattu, 13, also advocated for the cause as part of her title of Miss Empire Star's Outstanding Teen, which she won in 2020. She will compete this spring for the title of Miss New York's Outstanding Teen.

"Growing up, my parents always emphasized the importance of giving back," Rattu said. Of those serving overseas, she said: "These people are risking their lives every day and I think that having necessities like these are very important, especially in times like this when it's hard to get them."

Rattu provided some of the items to Blue Star Moms, a nonprofit that provides support for mothers who have children in active service, and hopes to coordinate a letter-writing campaign for soldiers in the future.

She is also secretary of the eighth-grade class at Stimson.

— MICHAEL R. EBERT



LIZ DEMONTE

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