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EDUCATION

Local students stretch their imaginations

Mountain Area students excel at state competition once again

By Elizabeth Gabriel

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Mountain Area Destination ImagiNation teams hit the state competition last weekend like an avalanche, and several are going on to the four-day global competition at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville in May. Teams from Yosemite High, North Fork, Rivergold and Chawanakee Academy participated at the finals in Elk Grove.

DI, as everyone involved calls it, is kind of like debate/oral interp/drama/improv on steroids. The kids know some of what they have to prepare for, but there are on-the-spot challenges with limited time to prepare.

Up to seven participants work together as a team for eight to 12 weeks to create their unique solution to a challenge, which can have a focus that is theatrical, structural, improvisational, scientific or technical -- or a blend of several disciplines.

More than 200,000 students in 56 countries participate and along the way build skills in creative and critical thinking, teamwork, time management and problem solving, states DI literature.

The Yosemite High School Team, Assken 4 Ic, took a first place in its Chorific! category and received a special Renaissance Award as well. All the girls are ninth-graders. They are Erica Grant, Kazia Hart, Sierra Patterson, Shelli Christianson, Ali Curtiss and Natalie Neff. Their managers are Annie Scott and Julie Grant.

"It's a really big deal to get to state," said Grant. "You're competing against all the bigger schools like Clovis."

At state this year, the team's chore was to find food. The first obstacle was that people are no longer at the top of the food chain and the second was that all the team could find was worms. The famous person was Pharoah Hatshepsut and the improv technique was freeze frame commenting.

Grant said the girls received the Renaissance Award for their creative use of materials and extensive array of props and costumes.

"The sheer volume was impressive given that they produced all of it in a 30-minute time period," Grant said. "For example, the team used cardboard in a unique way to create the back of a dinosaur and they also created an old-fashioned movie camera using a box, duct tape, a paint roller, and pieces of plastic cups that produced a clicking sound."

Here's how the organization explains the Renaissance Award:

"On our journey we sometimes encounter exceptional travelers who entertain and enlighten us along the way. The Renaissance Award recognizes those among us who demonstrate extraordinary amounts of effort and preparation in their solutions or outstanding skill in engineering, design or performance."

Chawanakee Academy in North Fork sent the Flaming Pink Fluffy Bunnies, Jamin the Small Town Gurls and the Crazy Frogs to the state finals.

The Bunnies took a first at the university level and competed in the Chorific! category. Last year the team placed 26 in the global finals and earned the DaVinci Award for exceptional creativity, a unique approach to the problem or solution and/or risk taking with their solution.

The team headed for the globals is made up of Chris Hayes, Katie Cantwell, Greta Bell and Sarah and Jonathan Oatman. The team manager is Michelle Piotrowski.

The Frogs, a middle school team, has been together for four years. Team members decided to take on two challenges and placed sixth in Hit or Myth and fourth for Switch at state. They won regional honors for a structure they built out of playing cards without using glue that held more than 100 pounds.

Team members are Barbara and Joe Purmort, Anneliese and Sabrina Tate, Crystal and Christopher Piotrowski, and Aniesha Craig. The team manager is Michelle Piotrowski.

The Gurls is a middle level team and competed in Chorific! Team members have been participating in Destination Imagination for the last four years on various teams. They took a third place at state.

Team members are Sarah Bradshaw, Tara Nunley, Rachel Oatman, Jamin Baker and Breanna Cairns. The team manager is Becky Cairns.

Rivergold sent the Flying Penguins in the Obstacles of Course challenge for middle grades, where they had to design a vehicle and overcome obstacles. They took a first in the regionals in February and placed ninth at state.

The team is Jake Corchine, Jack Abel, Paul LaSpada, Fletcher Haggard and Craig Talbot. The manager is Holly Fowler.

Rivergold's Undefeatables are third- and fourth-graders who came in 16th at state. The team's vehicle was a rocket and the obstacles were space-related.

The team members are Holden Kenedy, Audrey Kenison, Christian Low, Katie Low, Terrance Oldham, Sienna Pillsbury and Hannah Wimer. The manager is Wendy Kenison.

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Photo courtesy of July Grant

The Assken 4 Ic Destination ImagiNation team from Yosemite High School in action at the state finals: Front, Erica Grant, Shelli Christianson and Ali Curtiss; back, Kazia Hart and Sierra Patterson; on floor, Natalie Neff.