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More than words Holt student wins state poetry final...again

By WILL KANGAS
Editor

HOLT — For Sarah Harris, luck came in the form of a six-year-old girl named Tess.

"She made me a sign," Harris said. "She gave it to me the night before I won. It was a good luck charm."

Tess is the daughter of Harris' coach and teacher Margaret Charette.

"Tess looks up to me," Harris said. "Just like I look up to her mom."

The result was a state championship in this year's Poetry Out Loud competition for Harris. She is the second straight Holt student to win the state title.

It was held on March 10 in the Forum Room of the Michigan Historical Center. For winning, Harris won \$200 and a trip to Washington D.C. April 30 - May 1 for the national finals to compete for \$20,000 in scholarship awards.

Last year, Holt's Travis Walter won the state championship.

Harris said it wasn't easy. She practiced in the morning, after school, at night — constantly memorizing her three poems.

Each student picks three poems from a pre-determined list of selections available from the competition.

The competitor then recites the poems in a colorful manner as judges rate them on several different categories.

"People were telling me I was going to win, so I felt confident," Harris said.

That confidence turned into a chance at a \$20,000 scholarship.

"She is very talented," Charette said after Harris won the Holt championship. "Everyone was really good but she was spectacular."

The competition is presented by the Michigan Humanities Council in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, The Poetry Foundation, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, and the Library of Michigan, said co-organizer Scott Hirko.

It encourages high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization, performance, and competition. During the past three months, Language Arts/English teachers spent at least two or three weeks of class time to prepare students for each school competition.

"Not only does this involve reading literature," but it provides an avenue to reach kids and builds on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form through "slams" and rap music.

For Harris, her three poems each have a distinct difference in time and place.

"I like learning about my culture," she said. "Holt doesn't have as much diversity as other places, so it's exciting for me to learn more."

One of her poems is called "The Cremation of Sam McGee."

"It's funny," she said. "Even though it sounds scary."

It starts:

There are strange things done in the midnight sun

By the men who moil for gold;

The Arctic trails have their secret tales

That would make your blood run cold;

The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,

But the queerest they ever did see

Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge

I cremated Sam McGee.

"The poem allows me to show rage and other emotions," she said. "But it is really funny."

Hirko said schools apply for the program, which provides materials for the classroom. Teachers take it from there.

"It is simply a new opportunity to get kids interested in literature," Hirko said.

As for Harris, the interest is there — just like her six-year-old friend Tess — ready and willing to learn more about life.