

EDUCATION

Queen (spelling) bees

Goodnight sixth grader bests strong middle school field

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

In the literal sense of the word, these are some real queen bees.

In its 42nd year, the Pueblo City Schools (D60) middle school spelling bee, presented by *The Pueblo Chieftain*, saw the top slots filled by a trio of young women with a true “affinity” for correctly sequencing the letters that form words.

From a field of more than 35 of the district’s best middle school spellers converged inside Centennial High School’s auditorium Tuesday, Zoey Hynes, a sixth grader at Goodnight School, gallantly fought for the right to wear the coveted first-place crown.

Amillia Agüero, a Risley International Academy of Innovation seventh grader, placed a close second, with eighth-grader Mailee Holley, from Roncalli STEM Academy, rounding out the top three.

For 11 intense rounds, Zoey and Amillia went head-to-head and brain-to-brain as a barrage of challenging words — provided by Scripps National Spelling Bee and presented by pronouncer and hostess Jenny Smith — relentlessly came their way.

While the astute duo easily handled such words as “feldspar,” “rupee,” “tomatillo,” “spherical,” “toucan,” “abdicate” and “Gestapo,” proving to be a bit more difficult to arrange were “Parmesan,”

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“toboggan,” “pinafore,” “isobar,” “parfait” “lariat” and “oolong.”

It was in the 17th round that Amillia stumbled, misspelling “extravaganza” while Zoey successfully worked through “shrapnel.” To capture the championship, Zoey correctly arranged the letters to “affinity.”

For the competitors, the first round proved to be the most brutal, with nearly a third of the field knocked out by the end. At the conclusion of round three, 11 more were gone.

For the record, the words that led to students’ downfall in those initial rounds included “stethoscope,” “cauliflower,” “hickory,” “chinchilla,” “android,” “gunnysack” and “icicle.”

Proving not to be a stumbling block were “vampire,” “frolic,” “ditto,” “ninja,” “bungalow,” “futon” “geode” and, most appropriately, “Pueblo.”

“It feels good to win,” said Zoey, as cool and collected in victory as she was on stage. “But those words toward the end were hard.”

Like the mastery of any skill, Zoey said becoming a great speller requires repetition.

“You have to practice — look through words over and over and spell them out. I went through a practice list and spelled every word over

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CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/CHRIS MCLEAN

Goodnight School sixth grader Zoey Hynes smiles as she successfully spells a word during the Pueblo City Schools middle school spelling bee Tuesday at Centennial High School Auditorium. She placed first among the district’s young spellers.

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and over.”

Admitting that she became a bit emotional after first place slipped through her hands, Amillia said she’s “very proud of my second place, and I’m looking forward to competing in Denver.”

Led by Zoey, Amillia and Mailee, the top 10 D60 spellers will advance to the March 10 Colorado State Spelling Bee, sponsored by The Denver Post Foundation to be held at Sturm Hall at the University of Denver.

Serving as judges for Tuesday’s competition were Chieftain Managing Editor/City Editor Steve Henson, Belmont Senior Care operator and former D60 school board President Phyllis Sanchez, and Centennial educator David Montera, with Kelly Warren and Elaine Madrid coordinating.

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