

Published March 20th, 2019

Several Lamorinda Odyssey of the Mind teams advance to state finals

Submitted by Nancy Phan Fields and Hannah Yan



Orinda Rotary #42350 Team, from left: Abby Kim, Livia Phan Fields, Aimee Steinmeier, Angelica Steinmeier (back), Caitlin Chan, Zia Cohn, Ava Yap, Sannam Tognotti and Janis Dewar (OM NorCal Regional Director). Photo Nancy Phan Fields

After facing tough competition at the regional finals held March 2 at Concord High School, several local Odyssey of the Mind teams advanced to compete at the Northern California State finals this year: Orinda Rotary, Moraga Rotary A, Glorietta Elementary School Red, Del Rey Elementary, Burton Valley Elementary, and Stanley Middle School.

Odyssey of the Mind is an international educational program that provides creative problem-solving opportunities for students from kindergarten through college. While teams have adult coaches, the students are responsible for all planning, collection and construction of materials, and writing of the presentations, which often include humor and musical elements. Coaches and parents are not permitted to offer suggestions or to opine on the team's ideas. Strict penalties are assessed for any adult assistance.

Team members apply their creativity to solve "long-term" problems that range from building mechanical devices to presenting their own interpretation of literary classics, as well as "spontaneous" problems presented on

the spot at tournaments and solved as a team in a very limited time. Performances in both long-term and spontaneous problems are graded on multiple elements. Teams with the two highest combined scores in each division go on to compete in the World Tournament in Michigan against other teams from the U.S. and about 25 other countries.

Lafayette Elementary School fielded four teams to compete in the March 2 San Francisco Bay Region Odyssey of the Mind Competition. For each team the competition was a culmination of up to six months of hard work in order to be ready to tackle a Spontaneous Problem and present their solution to the Long-term Problem of their choice. The PTA for sponsoring all the OM teams at Lafayette Elementary.

The fifth-grade team (aka "Creative Horse Yaks") won first place in their division and will be going on to compete in the Northern California State competition on March 30th. This team had an amazing performance in their self-directed skit that went back in time to the workshop of Leonardo de Vinci and emphasized both creativity and style with detailed props, costumes, and sets made from scratch. Additionally their teamwork was recognized with both a high scoring solution to the spontaneous problem and an OM sportsmanship award given to only one team out of 147 teams. Many thanks to their coaches Nicole Hoppe and Iryna Ryzhenkova for their enthusiasm and tremendous efforts in organizing and supporting the team.

Orinda Rotary 42350, a rookie team, consists of seven fifth-grade girls - five girls from Sleepy Hollow Elementary School (Abby Kim, Aimee Steinmeier, Caitlin Chan, Ava Yap and Sannam Tognotti) and two (Livia Phan Fields and Zia Cohn) from Hillcrest Elementary School in Oakland. Orinda Rotary 42350's participation in OotM is coordinated and coached by Zimian Huang and Angelica Steinmeier, parents at Sleepy Hollow Elementary School. The team chose the "Opposites Distract" long-term problem and there were 14 teams competing in that problem category in the SF Bay Region, consisting of San Francisco and all of Contra Costa County.

The Odyssey of the Mind Northern California State Competition will be held in Santa Rosa on March 30.



Lafayette Elementary School's fifth-grade team along with their Leonardo de Vinci show props and sets. From left: Toby Meehan, Claire George, Weston Hoppe, Varya Efimova, Sean Hu, and Noah Henry. Photo Nicole Hoppe

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