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Campo's Academic Decathlon team takes fifth at state finals

By John T. Miller



Campo teacher Paul Verbanszky with co-captain Maddie House stand in front of nine year's worth of trophies. Photo John T. Miller

The Campolindo Academic Decathlon team won first place in their regional competition for the ninth year in a row, qualifying for the state finals where they finished fifth against 28 other schools in their division.

The Aca Deca Club, as it is known, has 30 members, with a core of nine who represented the school in the state finals.

Students were asked to research and study the 1960s - this year's theme - and be proficient in many different categories, including art, econ, math, music, science, and social science. In addition, they needed to present both a prepared and extemporaneous speech, write an essay on an impromptu topic, and conduct a personal interview.

Maddie House, a junior co-captain along with senior Lilli Heutmaker, said, "The state meet was so exciting with the energy and the enthusiasm. It was great to meet all the people from the different schools."

She added that the experience helped make the topic applicable to her classroom studies. "I would go into a class and find something I learned about already in Aca Deca - like the feminist movement. We didn't just learn about the '60s, our packet including everything that happened in the previous decades that led up to these events."

Paul Verbanszky, the club's advisor and a teacher at Campolindo, said that one of the difficulties in fielding a competitive team is that they must have representation from all academic achievement levels. At the state competition, three of the competitors have a GPA of 3.75 and above (Honors), three are between 3.0 and 3.75 (Scholastic) and three are at 2.99 or below (Varsity).

"The challenge is finding members with lower GPAs," says Verbanszky. "People think that Aca Deca is just for the honors students, but that's not the case. Often, the more average student can both improve their performance in school - adding to their chances of getting into a college that exceeds their expectations - while also helping the team's performance at the competitions."

All 30 members of the club competed on the regional team, while Heutmaker and House were joined on the state team by sophomores Zoe Heidersbach, Jessica Long, and Alexander Sastokas; juniors Santiago Milano, Jordan Jackson and Christopher Lobron; and senior Stephen Chilimidos.

Verbanszky gave special mention to Milano, who received multiple medals, and to Heutmaker, the team's highest scorer. Additionally, four of the nine members medaled in the music category.

The team also placed third in the Super Quiz category. Each round featured 14 questions in the pressure-filled event in front of a thousand spectators at the Sacramento Convention Center.

The state meet was held in Sacramento in March and featured three intensive days of preparation and competition, concluding with a dance on Saturday night and an awards ceremony Sunday. Four of the nine CHS students received medals.

While it might have been nice to reach the national finals at the end of April, Verbanszky pointed out there was some pretty stiff competition: "Scoring 60 percent out of the thousand points possible is a fairly respectable score, but El Camino Real Charter School from Los Angeles scored 99 percent and will once again represent California in Bloomington, Minnesota, at Nationals.

The Campolindo club raised funds for attending the competitions by holding their first-ever Trivia Night where they sold baked goods and raffle tickets for prizes donated by local businesses and families.

Verbanszky, who was recently named the Acalanes Union High School District Teacher of the Year and in the

running for the county award, also teaches AP European History and is advisor for the school yearbook (see story in the April 3 issue). He said, "The Aca Deca club is a very strong program here that facilitates student leadership and helps lead to success."

Next year's theme, as announced by the U.S. Academic Decathlon, will be: In Sickness and in Health: An Exploration of Illness and Wellness.

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