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ALL SAINTS 7th GRADER DAJAHNELLE JOSEPH SECURES STTJ DISTRICT SPELLING BEE CHAMPIONSHIP

ST. THOMAS, USVI –Following twenty-four grueling and intense rounds, All Saints Cathedral School seventh-grader DaJahnelle Joseph secured the championship with the correct spelling of “gingivitis” at the St. Thomas – St. John (STTJ) District Intermediate Spelling Bee on Tuesday, February 12, 2019 in the Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School auditorium. Addelita Cancryn Jr. High 8th grader Waniya Baig and Antilles School 7th grader Priya Giyanani took second and third place, respectively.

“I was studying with my mom and sometimes we would stay up late because some of the lists of words were really long. But with my mom and my coach’s help, I was able to get through them. And when I would get words on the list wrong, I wrote them down in a notebook,” admitted Joseph, who notably traced letters in her hands as to visualize words throughout the competition.

“Reading also helped me prepare because some of the words in my books were also in the Spelling Bee and words from the news were there as well.”

STTJ District Language Arts Coordinator Kendra Vicars opened the annual spelling event with a warm welcome to parents, students, coaches and guests. Students from the Addelita Cancryn Jr. High music department then performed renditions of the Star Spangled Banner, Virgin Islands March and the Negro National Anthem.

Acting Deputy Superintendent Dr. Symra Dee Brown addressed her remarks to the champion spellers with words of comfort and motivation as ‘Bee’ participants.

“I want to remind you spellers, that you are already winners. You have captured the title at your schools,” said Dr. Brown. “Your role as a Bee today is to be competitive and highly determined.

Bees are the most productive creatures on the planet. They have mastered the skill of how to focus and so today boys and girls, know that it is an honor to be called a Bee. Today you will focus on the prize, to be the 2019 [STTJ] District Spelling Bee winner. Bees have mastered it, and you will too.”

Following brief self-introductions by the spellers and the Reading of the Rules, the competition began.

More than half of the 18 competitors were eliminated within the first three rounds and the Bee glossary grew increasingly challenging, to include words such as “uitlander,” “drupaceous,” “tetrarch,” and “fantoccini.” The competition was also emotional, drawing a slew of grievances for judges to review.

2018 STTJ District Intermediate Spelling Bee winner Priya Giyanani incorrectly spelled “Anschluss,” leaving Baig and Joseph to battle for the championship.

In Round 19, Joseph spelled “pituitary” incorrectly and Baig spelled her round-word “nucleotides” correctly. However, Baig misspelled her championship word “Enneagram,” further allowing both finalists to battle for five more rounds.

In the end, Baig misspelled “diaspora,” and Joseph came back to win the title with the word “gingivitis.”

The audience gave both girls a standing ovation as they endured a fierce battle to the end, spelling words such as “pelagial,” “satrapy,” “viaticum,” and “Oaxaca,” (pronounced /wah-hah-kah/).

Suzette Gomez-Smith, DaJahnelle’s coach and All Saints Middle School Language Arts and Writing Teacher was anxious yet satisfied with the results of the competition. “We had our in-school Bee around November and we worked to prepare for today. She was a willing participant, I never had a hard time getting her to come to practice. She’s a very serious and dedicated student. She loves to read and she’s involved in so many activities and was still able to maintain a balance and study for the Spelling Bee. I’m proud of her.”

Vicars expressed her satisfaction with the group of students she helped prepare for the Bee. “In actuality, our students exceeded our expectations. If you look at it, the words were very difficult. I’m proud of them all, said Vicars.

Vicars also provided additional support to the students and coaches, some of which were new to the Spelling Bee competition.

“This is not mandatory but what I did in terms of support was I brought all of the champion spellers together the last two Saturdays. We drilled them on spelling and the various tools for them to use to be successful. Those practice sessions were really good I think they paid off,” said Vicars.

All Spelling Bee participants received student dictionaries, trophies, and certificates, compliments of the STTJ District. The top six spellers also received word puzzle books and Amazon Echo Dots.

The Virgin Islands Daily News and United Way of the Virgin Islands sponsored the event.

Lt. Governor Tregenza Roach and a representative from the Office of the Governor were in attendance. Thirty-third Legislature Senators Dwayne DeGraff, Janelle Sarauw, Stedman Hodge, Jr., Myron Jackson, Marvin Blyden, Donna Frett-Gregory, Athneil Thomas and Senator-at-Large Steven Payne also attended the event in full support.

The Territorial Spelling Bee, which will feature the top six spellers from both the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John districts will take place on Tuesday, March 19 in St. Croix.

The top six finalists that will compete in the Territorial Bee from the St. Thomas – St. John District are DaJahnelle Joseph of All Saints Cathedral School; Waniya Baig of Addelita Cancryn Jr. High; Priya Giyanani of Antilles School; Ivante Mark of Yvonne Milliner-Bowsky Elementary School; Dewanjah Defoe of Tutu Church of God; and Destinee Martin of Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School.

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