

Bringing Home G-O-L-D By Monica Parker-James

That particular species of rhinoceros is indigenous to Africa and has quite a dynamic character. If you could spell the words in that sentence, you would have been well prepared to compete in the twelfth annual Children’s Spelling Bee sponsored by the Westwood Educational Foundation.

The WEF spelling bee, held in March and sponsored by NSTAR, brought together teams of third, fourth, and fifth graders from across Westwood. Each team was comprised of three or four members from the same grade who met in the weeks prior to the bee to study and prepare.

“Our team went by majority rules,” explained Carley Stebbins, whose team “Fantastic Four” included Claire Coppola, Hayley Barner, and Meghan Farrell.

“We got out on ‘business’ even though our friend spelled it right,” continued Farrell. “The rest of us got it wrong, and majority rules.”

Many team members studied individually and met weekly or more often to prepare. The bee wasn’t just hard work, however. Teams had fun coming up with creative names, decorating t-shirts, and even arriving at the bee in costume. Andy LoPiano, John Pidgeon, and Ryan McDonald, aka “The Phat Barbies,” donned blonde wigs and sun glasses as they competed in the fifth grade bee. The “Busy Bees,” made up of third graders Dana Bamford, Nicole DiMaria, Olivia Morgan, and Samie Griffin, sported sparkly t-shirts and honey-bee scarves.



The Sonic Spellers, third graders Jacob Morris, Sophie Medina, Anusha Manglik, and Jack Jordanides



The Spectacular Spellers, fourth graders Aisha Chandraker, Natalie Perlov, and Shelly Chandraker

In all, 278 students competed in the two-day event, which was moderated by Westwood Selectman Nancy Hyde and Westwood Superintendent of Schools John Antonucci. Thirty-two teams of third graders participated, with The Sonic Spellers and The Zeppelins making it to the finals. In the end, the Sonic Spellers, made up of Sheehan third graders Jacob Morris, Sophie Medina, Anusha Manglik, and Jack Jordanides brought home gold by correctly spelling rhinoceros.

Sheehan School principal Joanne Hadalski credits her students' victory to the school's heavy emphasis on reading.

"They are all readers who come from a school where reading is the most important subject taught," said Hadalski.

"Spectacular Spellers" Aisha Chandraker, Natalie Perlov, and Shelly Chandraker beat out 26 teams to win the fourth grade contest with "poltergeist" while fifth grade "Stingers" Aasheen Qadri, Abby O'Callaghan, Julia Deininger, and Mary Kate Comer defeated 13 teams to claim the number one spot in their division with "indigenous."



Stingers, fifth graders Aasheen Qadri, Abby O'Callaghan, Julia Deininger, and Mary Kate Comer