

Catholic Schools

Geography Bee at Immaculate

By KATHY-ANN GOBIN

DANBURY—A double tie-breaker determined the winner of the 12th Annual Regional Catholic Geography Bee hosted by the Knights of Columbus McGivney Council 29.

Fourth-grader Eduardo Toledo from Catholic Academy in Stamford won the bee by correctly answering a question about the biggest cities in the Pacific Time Zone.

Toledo said he was nervous at the beginning of the bee.

"I was thinking these are some of the best people in Fairfield County in Catholic schools that I'm competing against," said Toledo, who said he prepared for the geography bee by watching YouTube videos and praying.

The geography bee was held in March at Immaculate High School in Danbury. Twenty-three students ranging from fourth to eighth grade from 10 Catholic schools in the Diocese of Bridgeport participated in the bee and answered 125 questions in 22 rounds on world, North American, and regional geography.

"The goal of the geography bee for the Knights of Columbus is to showcase noteworthy achievements in our Catholic schools," said John Pitrelli, a member of the Knights of Columbus and founder of the geography bee. "There are good things going on in Catholic schools."

Students who participated in the geography bee expressed an interest in geography in their classes, were selected by their teachers or won a geography bee at their school.

The day began with a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Participants who successful-

ly answered written questions received an additional opportunity in case they got an answer wrong. Numbers were drawn from a hat to establish the order in which the students would answer the questions.

Toledo and William Cohee, a seventh-grader at Greenwich Catholic School, held the attention of all in attendance as they went 10 rounds during the geography bee before going into a double-tie breaker to determine the winner.

This was Cohee's third time participating in the geography bee. He was initially nominated by his teacher in fifth grade and went on to win second place in both 2022 and 2024.

"I didn't prepare too much. I just always enjoyed geography and history and watched videos about it in my free time," Cohee said.

Cohee's father said his son's penchant for world history, especially military history, naturally spilled over into learning about Europe and geography in general.

Cohee said he is open to entering another geography bee in the future, and would study more about American and regional geography to prepare.

As a student ambassador at his school, Cohee will have the honor of welcoming prospective students to the school and showing them his certificates of achievement and both trophies that are displayed in the school's awards case.

"I think it's great. As parents we are grateful, they nominated him," Cohee's father William said, adding that the school recognized his son's potential and encouraged him to pursue it in a fun but challenging way.

"We are grateful for the Knights

of Columbus for hosting this geography bee because it is a great opportunity for students to test their knowledge against students in other schools," Williams's mom, Gabriella Circosta Cohee, said.

Eighth-grader Charles Heffernan, a student at Cardinal Kung Academy in Stamford, won third place with his knowledge of Washington, London and the Pacific Coast of Australia, in addition to his knowledge about the path of the recent solar eclipse.

"I wanted to represent my school and give them a good name and also I have a competitive side of me, I like to play sports," Heffernan said.

Besides his natural desire to learn about world geography, Charlie said for fun he would watch Geography Now videos on YouTube about each country during his lunch break. He would also challenge himself with the Seterra website, with geography games, exercises and quizzes.

Heffernan said he always liked learning about European geography.

"It always stuck in my mind more, so I can always do it well, so it made we want to do it more," he said.

Heffernan, who plays basketball at his school, said this was his first educational bee and he said he would likely do more in the future.

"It's a very cool experience. You can learn more stuff you never knew about geography



through studying and from the other participants," he said.

"We are really glad that he did it," said Charlie's father, Keith. "We are a big sports family and it was good for him to participate in an academic competition and realize academic competitions can be as fun and rewarding as sports competitions."

"We're really proud of him for finishing in the top three," Keith said.

All three winners of the geography bee have varying ideas of what to do with their winnings, which ranged from \$100 to \$25, including putting it in the bank and spending it on clothes or food or computer equipment.

The geography bee has also sparked a desire to travel for the winner.

"I want to travel to every continent and maybe go to all the countries in one continent," Toledo said, adding that when he was six years old he started watching YouTube videos about all the countries in the world. His father, Jose, said Toledo asked for a globe for Christmas, something the child's grandfather also wanted when he was a child.

"He really likes the subject and really dedicated himself to watching the videos," Jose said. "He really enjoyed the process. We are proud that he managed to do it." ■

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