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Moraga Rotary and Odyssey of the Mind: A Winning Combination

Submitted by Gary Irwin and Pin-Pin Wong



Moraga Odyssey of the Mind team members (from left) Nicki Bartak, Raymond Tsou, Sophia Angelides, Gwendolyn Tom, Layth Ramatala, and Colton Jang, stand by the Terrapin mascot at the University of Maryland during the 2010 World Finals. Photo provided

risk takers, will study economics or engineering at Yale University. Gwendolyn Tom, the resident artist of the group who wowed the judges with her forest mosaic made from recycled calendars, will attend American University in Washington D.C., and Raymond Tsou, the provider of comic relief for the team, will be studying at U.C. Davis this fall.

This phenomenal team has won six State championships and four World Finalist top 10 placements. They have won Omer Awards for outstanding sportsmanship and exemplary behavior, and the prestigious Ranatra Fusca at every level of competition. Last year, they were dubbed 'Team Awesome' by World Finalist judges.

The team is made up of the Student Body president, class presidents, treasurers and spirit commissioners; lifetime members of the California Scholarship Federation; Coca Cola Scholars, and National Merit Commended and Finalist Scholars. They have been selected for Campolindo Department Awards in English, history, social studies, language, physical education and leadership. They are varsity athletes in golf, swimming, and water polo. They are CIF Scholar-Athletes and AP Scholars. They are National Charity League members. They are Eagle Scouts and Girl Scout Gold Award recipients. They have started a micro-finance club and volunteered in Africa and Cambodia. They have performed in the high school musicals and volunteered hundreds of hours of community service. They are recipients of the California State Odyssey of the Mind Scholarships. They are the best of friends.

While this team of graduating seniors chose not to compete in the World Finals, the other high school team made up of Campolindo sophomores placed third against very tough international competition. They continue the tradition of excellence for Moraga teams, who have sent at least one team to the World Finals in six out of the past seven years, all of which placed in the top 10 every year they attended.

Every year since 2005, there have been at least eight Odyssey of the Mind (OoTM) teams competing at the Regional competition under the banner of "Moraga Rotary" thanks to a simple conversation between Pin-Pin Wong and former Moraga Rotary president Rich Render at Rancho Laguna Park.

Wong explained about the lack of school sponsorship of OoTM in Moraga. Render had a solution; he convinced the Moraga Rotary to sponsor OoTM, a creative problem solving competition for elementary to high school aged children, as part of its community service effort. Since its inception, hundreds of Moraga kids have participated in the program.

In 2012, four of the 10 teams qualified to move on to the State Tournament in Brentwood, and two high school teams came in first in their division to qualify for the World Finals at Ames, Iowa. One of the original teams has been together for eight years; its members are now Campolindo high school graduates and are heading to colleges across the nation.

Layth Ramatala, described as "the soul of the team" and natural leader, will attend New York University. Sophia Angelides, with her sunny personality, great sense of humor, and strong work ethic, will attend UCLA to study life sciences. Nicki Bartak, an original member of the team with an unstoppable creative streak, is off to George Washington University to study international affairs. Colton Jang, another original team member, one of the team's biggest

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[back](#)

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