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## Campo Finishes on Top at California State Academic Decathlon

*Moraga high school named East County Region 2014 Academic Decathlon Champion fourth year in a row*

By Jennifer Wake



Campolindo High School Red Team with Coach Paul Verbanszky

Photo provided

The Campolindo High School Red Team, after winning the 2014 East County Region Academic Decathlon for the fourth year in a row, represented Contra Costa County at the California State Academic Decathlon last weekend and placed in the top 10 overall, winning the title of medium-sized school state champions to represent California at the national competition.

Directed by the Contra Costa County Office of Education and with the assistance of community volunteers, the county's Academic Decathlon provides an opportunity for high school students to compete as individuals and teams in a series of 10 academic tests and demonstrations. The curriculum includes art, economics, language and literature, mathematics, music, science, essay, interview, speech (prepared and impromptu), and the Super Quiz. Approximately 170 participating high school students have been studying and preparing for this event with their coaches since September.

"Uma Gaffney received a perfect score in the art competition and received a gold medal!" said Paul Verbanszky, proud Aca Deca coach and Campolindo teacher. "Marina Han received a silver in language and literature and a silver in essay. Tristan Caro and Christoph Steefel each received a bronze in science, while Sarada Symonds received a silver in art and gold in language and literature. Vikram Bhaduri re-

ceived a bronze in interview."

Acalanes High School was invited to join the state competition this year as an at-large team in Division 2, "so two Lamorinda schools were representing Contra Costa County," Verbanszky said. Acalanes placed 22nd at the state competition with Daylon Srinivasan, Iris Wang, and Karen Ma each taking home individual awards.

Acalanes High School placed (a very close) second at the regional competition, and the Campolindo Blue team, third.

"Four years ago was the first time Campo made it to state in almost a decade and we ranked toward the bottom of 65 teams. The following year we gained more success and moved up a bit. Then last year we started bottom third (40 something) and not only received most improved team (ending at 26 in the state) but also won the medium-sized school championship," said Verbanszky. "This allowed us to go to nationals where we won nationals. There is a huge banner in our gym and the Moraga Town Council honored us with a proclamation last May."

High school teams are made up of nine students, grades 9-12, with a maximum of three students in each of the following divisions: Honors (3.75-4.00 GPA), Scholastic (3.00-3.74 GPA) and Varsity (2.99 GPA and below). "It makes for an amazing mix of students because they are not all 4.0 students

and bring various skill sets to the team," said Verbanszky.

"Almost all the members on the [Campolindo Red] team have been part of the 'glory years' of Aca Deca since freshmen year and are, unfortunately, graduating," he added. Zach Scherer (class of 2014) has been at state four times now. Tristan Caro (class of 14) and Uma Gaffney (class of 2016) have done an exceptional job as captains. Other members include Vikram Bhaduri, Christoph Steefel, Sarada Symonds, Marina Han, Graham Wade, and Samuel MacAdam.

"I am honored to coach these fine young scholars, who have worked with me countless hours outside of the regular school schedule and have dedicated so much energy to represent Campolindo, Contra Costa, and Nor Cal well at this competition," Verbanszky said. "The Campolindo community is incredibly supportive ... In a time when funding to education is cut, it is great to see how a community comes together to support programs such as this one. I know that I would not be able to have such a successful after school club and compete with Los Angeles schools that have it as a class without the generous support."

The Academic Decathlon national championships will be held April 24-26 in Hawaii. The Campolindo Red Team will compete online. For information, visit [www.academicdecathlon.org](http://www.academicdecathlon.org).

## Edy Schwartz Honored By Contra Costa Commission for Women

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Derek Zemrak, Edy Schwartz, Leonard Pirkle, Supervisor Candace Andersen  
Photo Richard Harris

Every other year the Contra Costa Commission for Women (CCCW) recognizes women who have made a difference in their community in the areas of the arts, leadership, community, environmental stewardship, healthcare, justice and science, adding their name to the Women's Hall of Fame. This year Lamorinda is represented by Moraga resident Edy Schwartz for her contribution to the arts.

"I nominated Edy because she exemplifies what makes our communities the amazing places they are today," says Contra Costa Supervisor Candace Andersen. "When Edy sees a need she doesn't just talk about it, she does something, and generally in a very big way! She selflessly gives of her time and has done so much for Moraga, particularly with her efforts to preserve the Rheem Theatre and make it a gathering place for art, culture, and fun in Moraga."

A former president of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce, Schwartz was named Citizen of the Year in 2010. For the last several years she has channeled her enthusiasm and passion toward the Rheem Theatre and the annual California Independent Film Festival in Moraga and Orinda. Moving into the movie industry has opened a whole new world for Schwartz, while she continues to support her lifelong mission of building community.

Schwartz's involvement started in December 2009 when the operators of the Rheem Theatre announced that they were going to close the independent venue due to declining revenue. As chamber president, she called upon a group of local 'movers and shakers' to brainstorm solutions. Attendance grew, new events were offered that attracted more people, but the operators still closed the Rheem in 2010, preferring to concentrate their marketing efforts on the Orinda Theatre that they had also purchased.

Schwartz did not give up. She knew that if the Rheem stayed closed too long it would be impossible to revive.

For Schwartz the theater is a unique community asset that gets people of all ages together. She continued to look for solutions with other community members and in June of 2010, when she got a call from Derek Zemrak, co-founder of the California Independent Film Festival Association,

she shared her belief that the Rheem could be profitable due to community support. CAIFFA took over the Rheem and later, the Orinda Theatre; Schwartz's involvement intensified once she passed the baton as the head of the Chamber of Commerce.

She played an integral role in the campaign to raise funds for the three digital projectors at Rheem, the ADA compliance fund, and of course the promotion of the annual festival shown both at the Rheem and Orinda theaters. Schwartz is now working with a group that includes Orinda Chamber of Commerce president Sylvia Jorgensen to make the 2014 Independent Film Festival the most successful ever. Last year's festival registered the highest local attendance, likely because Schwartz conducted 25 "sneak-peak" presentations for different community groups in September.

"I do this because I believe Moraga needs the Rheem Theatre, as a major anchor in the Rheem Shopping Center, a community gathering place, and a unique artistic venue; and because I have learned the great value of independent films, the joy and discoveries they have brought to my life, and I'd like to share that with everyone." She continues to be a tireless advocate, because she knows that to keep the doors open, tickets have to be sold.

The eight women selected this year were honored at a dinner March 20 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Concord. "The selection process is quite rigorous," says CCCW Nancie Zimmerman who co-chairs the event. "Each recommendation is reviewed independently by three judges who live outside the area and are involved with the State Commission for Women." The judges also want to recognize women who might not be very well known beyond their community. "We received about 40 candidacies and I was blown away by the quality and leadership of all these women," adds Zimmerman.

Schwartz had the pleasure to meet with the other seven nominees at the event, as well as three women who were part of the Rosie the Riveter movement during World War II and are now involved with the namesake museum in Richmond. Having them as special honorees was a way for the commission to show the continuity of women's leadership throughout American history.



Acalanes High School team

Photo Diane Morrell