

Campo's Academic Decathlon team takes fifth at state finals



Photo John T. Miller

Campo teacher Paul Verbanszky with co-captain Maddie House stand in front of nine year's worth of trophies.

By John T. Miller

The Campolindo Academic Decathlon team won first place in their regional competition for the ninth year in a row, qualifying for the state

finals where they finished fifth against 28 other schools in their division.

The Aca Deca Club, as it is known, has 30 members, with a core of nine who represented the school in the state

finals.

Students were asked to research and study the 1960s – this year's theme – and be proficient in many different categories, including art, econ, math, music, science, and social science. In addition, they needed to present both a prepared and extemporaneous speech, write an essay on an impromptu topic, and conduct a personal interview.

Maddie House, a junior co-captain along with senior Lilli Heutmaker, said, "The state meet was so exciting with the energy and the enthusiasm. It was great to meet all the people from the different schools."

She added that the experience helped make the topic applicable to her classroom studies. "I would go into a class and find something I learned about already in Aca Deca – like the feminist movement. We didn't just learn about the '60s, our packet including everything that happened in the previous decades that led up to these events."

Paul Verbanszky, the club's advisor and a teacher at Campolindo, said that one of the difficulties in fielding a competitive team is that they must have representation from all academic achievement levels. At the state competition, three of the competitors have a GPA of 3.75 and above (Honors), three are between 3.0 and 3.75 (Scholastic

and three are at 2.99 or below (Varsity).

"The challenge is finding members with lower GPAs," says Verbanszky. "People think that Aca Deca is just for the honors students, but that's not the case. Often, the more average student can both improve their performance in school – adding to their chances of getting into a college that exceeds their expectations – while also helping the team's performance at the competitions."

All 30 members of the club competed on the regional team, while Heutmaker and House were joined on the state team by sophomores Zoe Heidersbach, Jessica Long, and Alexander Sastokas; juniors Santiago Milano, Jordan Jackson and Christopher Lobron; and senior Stephen Chilimidos.

Verbanszky gave special mention to Milano, who received multiple medals, and to Heutmaker, the team's highest scorer. Additionally, four of the nine members medaled in the music category.

The team also placed third in the Super Quiz category. Each round featured 14 questions in the pressure-filled event in front of a thousand spectators at the Sacramento Convention Center.

The state meet was held in Sacramento in March and featured three intensive days of preparation and competition,

concluding with a dance on Saturday night and an awards ceremony Sunday. Four of the nine CHS students received medals.

While it might have been nice to reach the national finals at the end of April, Verbanszky pointed out there was some pretty stiff competition: "Scoring 60 percent out of the thousand points possible is a fairly respectable score, but El Camino Real Charter School from Los Angeles scored 99 percent and will once again represent California in Bloomington, Minnesota, at Nationals.

The Campolindo club raised funds for attending the competitions by holding their first-ever Trivia Night where they sold baked goods and raffle tickets for prizes donated by local businesses and families.

Verbanszky, who was recently named the Acalanes Union High School District Teacher of the Year and in the running for the county award, also teaches AP European History and is advisor for the school yearbook (see story in the April 3 issue). He said, "The Aca Deca club is a very strong program here that facilitates student leadership and helps lead to success."

Next year's theme, as announced by the U.S. Academic Decathlon, will be: In Sickness and in Health: An Exploration of Illness and Wellness.

Acalanes alumna plans to spend summer studying animals in Madagascar



Morgan Orsolini at work with animals.

Photo provided

Submitted by Suzanne Roady

Local resident and Acalanes High School alumna Morgan Orsolini is preparing for anything but an ordinary summer. Combining her passions for nature and animals, Orsolini has accepted a 10-week internship with SEED Madagascar (Sustainable Environment, Education and Development in Madagascar) based in Fort Dauphin, Madagascar. Starting in July, she will be living in "the bush" to work directly with the Malagasy people and local researchers.

Orsolini has spent the last few years as an animal science

major at Cal Poly SLO, and her main goal is to help captive breeding programs and understanding of reproduction so that she can help keep endangered animals from becoming extinct. She has been an intern at the Oakland Zoo and Charles Paddock Zoo assisting with animal care, animal training, public education and more in an effort to gain hands on experience in her chosen field. She also created educational videos for the Charles Paddock Zoo. During this past summer, Orsolini conducted a research project as a part of her fellowship with the San Diego Zoo's Institute for Conservation Research

to learn about how a rhinoceros diet affects reproduction. She has worked with lemurs and rhinoceroses along with many other animals at the zoos. She has also been involved in dog agility training since the age of 10, which has greatly helped her understanding of animal behavior.

This summer, Orsolini will be spending 10 weeks living in a tent in Madagascar in order to further her understanding of the wildlife and nature, lemur populations included, in the area. She will also be working with locals to help them establish a sustainable relationship with their environment. Hundreds of species, including the iconic lemur, are only native to Madagascar and they have lost about 80 percent of their original habitat. There are approximately 50 different kinds of lemur; over half of the populations are critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable. Orsolini hopes her work will help protect lemur species as well as the other plants and animals living on the island.

In order to support SEED Madagascar and all of the work being done in the Fort Dauphin community, Orsolini has started a fundraiser. All proceeds will be donated directly to SEED, of which 92 percent will be going straight to their on-site projects in Madagascar.



In order to support Orsolini's fundraiser for SEED Madagascar, please follow the following link to her GoFundMe page: <https://www.gofundme.com/seed-madagascar>. For more information: <https://madagascar.co.uk/>

THT's staged reading of Thomas Gibbons' 'Uncanny Valley,' April 29

Submitted by Susan Evans

Town Hall Theatre will present a one-night only reading of "Uncanny Valley" – a riveting new play about artificial intelligence and ethical quandaries by Thomas Gibbons, directed by Lana Palmer – as part of its staged reading series "In the Wings."

Set 30 years in the future, "Uncanny Valley" dissects the intense relationship between Claire, a neuroscientist, and her creation, Julian, a nonbiological human. As the play unfolds, we see Julian through various developmental stages, first just a head, neck and

shoulders, next an armless torso, then with one arm, and another arm, and finally completed, as Claire mentors him through the process of becoming as human as possible. Claire is working to combat the uncanny valley phenomenon, by which people become creeped out by robots when they look too lifelike, almost – but not quite – human.

And then the scientist must reveal to Julian the specific purpose for which he has been designed: as a receptacle for the consciousness of a very wealthy man dying of pancreatic cancer, who has purchased the right to be im-

mortal. After the man's identity file is downloaded, "Uncanny Valley" takes off in a different direction, and poses many provocative questions, such as how are we redefining what it is to be human in the 21st century?

The staged reading of "Uncanny Valley" will be at 8 p.m. Monday, April 29 at Town Hall Theatre Company, 3535 School Street, in Lafayette. Tickets are \$10 general admission and free to subscribers, and are available through the Box Office at (925) 283-1557 or online at www.TownHallTheatre.com.