

Wagner Ranch fifth-graders place first in creative competition



From left: Maya Elkind, Sadie Elkind, Raunav Agarwal, Bryce Gordon, Davis Gordon, Brian Volk, Bryce Batiuchok. Photo provided

Submitted by Regina Gordon and Ritu Goel

The Fifth Grade Team at Wagner Ranch Elementary in Orinda rose to the challenge amidst a pandemic year and placed first in their division at the Odyssey of the Mind SF Bay Regional Competition held in a virtual tournament on Feb. 27. Odyssey of the Mind is a world-renowned program where students learn how to problem solve, create, design, and think outside of the box as a team.

Apart from developing a solution to a long-term problem over several months, the team learned spontaneous problem-solving techniques to “think on their feet.” Their performance, which centered around team-developed technical effects, portrayed a character that must escape a virtual world and defeat a nefarious character. One team member said, “I have learned a lot of hands-on skills through this problem solving competition. The process of building the solution teaches us what works, what doesn’t and how to find alternative solutions. We also have to work within a budget which encourages us to utilize recycled materials. This creates unique looking structures.”

The team’s coach, Leslie Volk (who also heads the Innovation Lab at Wagner Ranch), has been leading members Raunav Agarwal, Bryce Batiuchok, Maya Elkind, Sadie Elkind, Bryce Gordon, Davis Gordon and Brian Volk for the past three

years. “I’m in awe of how this team has grown as creative thinkers, problem solvers, and teammates that support each other to overcome challenges. Odyssey has been a wonderful experience for me as a coach and parent to see the group develop strong friendships while working towards a goal. One of the best parts about Odyssey is that the kids take full ownership over their project and come up with everything on their own.”

Odyssey of the Mind was born out of an industrial design class by founder Dr. C. Samuel Micklus in 1978 who challenged his students to solve unique problems with creative solutions. The professor’s classroom challenges spread amongst other schools and is now a worldwide competition. “We love Odyssey of the Mind because it allows you to be creative while working with friends on a hands-on project and you’re able to compete with other schools,” said the OMers (a nickname used for Odyssey of the Mind participants). For many schools, the Odyssey of the Mind program offers a creative outlet that students may not acquire as part of the general education curriculum.

These Wagner Ranch OMers are looking forward to the NorCal State competition and hope to advance to the World finals in June 2021. For more information on how to start your Odyssey journey visit www.odysseyofthemind.com. Local team and contact information can also be found on this website.

Troop 204 honors 2021 Eagle Scouts



Photo Mika Watanabe

Top row: Paul Munnely, Joshua Gohres, William Innenberg, Benjamin Thiselton-Dyer; bottom row: Cole Foster, Liam Bodner, Ilhan Evrenosoglu, Charles Wheeler.

Submitted by Martin Thiselton-Dyer

Lafayette’s Boy Scout Troop 204 will honor nine scouts at the troop’s upcoming 68th Eagle Court of Honor on April 18. These Scouts will each be advancing to Eagle Scout – the highest rank in scouting. There will be a small invitation-only outdoor ceremony in light of current circumstances.

To attain the Eagle Scout rank, a Scout must earn at least 21 merit badges including 13 Eagle-required badges, demon-

strate leadership and Scout Spirit, and successfully complete an approved Eagle service project. Over their years with the troop these Scouts have also joined, planned and exhibited leadership during the annual 50-mile wilderness backpacking trips that have been a hallmark of the Troop 204 scouting experience.

Eagle service projects were necessarily planned, coordinated and adapted by the Scouts during 2020-21 to take account of pandemic restrictions and protocols. They responded to a variety of community challenges and needs of

the times.

With funding from community donations for supplies, Paul Munnely led construction of a wooden deck at the Lafayette Community Garden to enhance the utility of that public space. Joshua Gohres raised funds and constructed plexiglass barriers for the Husky House Child Enrichment Center in response to pandemic safety needs. William Innenberg raised funds and assembled donated and purchased supplies into care packages for members of the U.S. military stationed in areas of conflict. Ben Thiselton-Dyer

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led a drive for the Contra Costa and Solano Food Bank, donating 1,700 pounds of food and funds sufficient for more than 2,500 meals thanks to the generosity of the community.

After students shifted to distanced learning Cole Foster initiated a drive to collect, prepare and distribute surplus computers and tablets to Oakland schools to help address the challenges of unequal access to technology. Liam Bodner coordinated with the Lions Club and led a team of distanced volunteers to process 22,000 pairs of glasses ultimately destined to correct the

vision of patients in need in developing countries. Ilhan Evrenosoglu raised funds and led the construction of storage/book shelves for Lafayette Elementary School. Charles Wheeler led the construction of redwood planter boxes for the outdoor communal area of STAND!’s emergency shelter, where women and children find safety from domestic abuse. Edward Gray (not pictured) designed and created a newly landscaped area in the front of Lafayette Elementary School in coordination with the school’s Green Team.

Community Service: We are pleased to make space available whenever possible for some of Lamorinda’s dedicated community service organizations to submit news and information about their activities. Submissions may be sent to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com with the subject header In Service to the Community.