



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LAUREL HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOLER ADVANCES TO STATE CIVICS BEE

Uniontown, PA – Knowing about the rights and responsibilities of citizens and their interactions with government is important. The National Civics Bee gives middle schoolers a chance to sharpen and show off that knowledge.

One local middle schooler exhibited his knowledge of the subject well enough to earn second place at the local bee earlier this month and advance to the state competition in June in State College.

Laurel Highlands Middle School eighth-grader Brady Sirochman said he enjoyed the experience and is looking forward to the state bee.

“I get to study more civics and have a chance to win the entire thing,” Sirochman said. “It feels pretty good.”

Local civics bees are hosted by chambers of commerce throughout the country. The Fayette Business Education Partnership, in partnership with the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, attempted to host a local event this year but lacked participation as a first-year venture.

Greater Latrobe-Laurel Valley Chamber of Commerce President Briana Tomack explained that interested middle school students submit essays.

“There was an essay round (in which) the students were given the same essay prompts in the fall. They had to identify something in their community that they thought would be a civics challenge,” she said.

Tomack said a panel of 10 judges spent until early February reading and judging each essay. She noted local students’ essays weren’t necessarily read by local judges. Essays remained under review until they were read by three separate judges. Authors of the top 20 essays from each chamber advanced to the live event.

Tomack said some chambers of commerce didn’t have enough participants to hold a live event, so students who were selected from those areas attended the live bee in a neighboring county. Three Fayette County students submitted essays and were welcomed into the Greater Latrobe-Laurel Chamber’s bee, held at the Fred Rogers Center at St. Vincent College in Latrobe. Sirochman, however, was the only Fayette County competitor.

“I moved on past the essay round to the live (bee),” Sirochman said. “It had three rounds. The first two were trivia. The last one was for the final five contestants, and that was for them to actually present

the idea that they wrote about.”

Sirochman said he did well on the first two rounds, which were structured much like a traditional spelling bee.

“I think I only missed one question,” he said.

Scores from the three rounds were compiled for a final score. Sirochman came in second, just behind Cole Cramer, an eighth grader from the Valley School in Ligonier.

Tomack noted it was the first National Civics Bee competition sponsored by the Greater Latrobe-Laurel Valley Chamber.

“I think it went fantastic,” she said. “It ran very smoothly. The students had a great time, and their families all came to cheer them on. I was really happy with it.”

She noted the competition only began in 2022, when it drew competitors from five states and five partnering chambers of commerce. This year, students from 39 states and more than 150 chambers participated.

“It has really grown, and they’re hoping to grow it every year, so that every state will be participating and more kids can be involved,” she said.

The Fayette Chamber of Commerce served as a sponsor for the live bee and Workforce Coordinator Kathi Hull attended to support the Fayette county students.

“Brady’s accomplishment in the Civis Bee is a testament to the power of knowledge, leadership and civics pride,” said Hull. “We are so proud of him and can’t wait to cheer him on at the state competition in June.”

The Fayette Chamber of Commerce and Fayette Business Education Partnership have already begun plans to host a local bee with neighboring counties next year.

Tomack said the event at the Fred Rogers Center included food, a balloon wall for photo opportunities, a speaker from Pennsylvania Free Enterprise Week, and even a Westmoreland County Commissioner to serve as master of ceremonies.

The contestants had a fun night, but now, the work begins again for Sirochman as he prepares for the state bee.

“I have a 10-page Google document that I’m calling the ‘study guide’ at this point,” Sirochman said, noting he will use that to help him hone his knowledge for the next round. He even listens to patriotic music for inspiration.

The top three finishers at the state bee will win cash prizes, and the top finisher will earn a place at the national competition in Washington, D.C., in the fall.

To learn more about the National Civics Bee, visit <https://civics.uschamberfoundation.org/national-civics-bee/>. To learn more about the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, visit www.fayettechamber.com.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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