

## **For the love of words and country**

This spring, Renata Schalk won the state American Legion Oratorical Contest and went on to nationals in Indianapolis, sponsored by the Sabattus American Legion Post 135. The 17 year old, headed to Thomas College in Waterville in the fall, put in months of hard work. Would she do it all over again? You bet.

**Name:** Renata C. Schalk

**What got you interested in the oratorical contest to start with?** An article about it in the paper caught my mom's eye. She said everybody should get some public speaking experience, and when I saw the scholarship money that was offered, I agreed.

**Describe the competition to someone who's never heard of it before:** (It) requires contestants to give two speeches; a prepared eight-to-10- minute one on some aspect of the Constitution, and then a three-to five- minute speech on an assigned section of the Constitution. The competition starts out on the local level and reaches, through a series of levels, the nationals.

**How difficult is it to give a long speech? Do you get to glance at notes?** Giving a well-organized and thought-out eight-to-10- minute speech is very difficult and time-consuming. My speech coach, Mrs. Shana Donnell, and I gave a lot of time to hammering out the speech text and then working out the delivery of the speech. We worked on the speech from December to April, striving to make every word count and every gesture forceful and effective. I couldn't look at notes, but by the time I'd practiced the speech a lot, I didn't need them.

**Learn anything about the Constitution or an amendment that surprised you?** Well, I was surprised when, upon reading the Fifth Amendment, I found a phrase protecting private property in among a lot of phrases dealing exclusively with courtroom procedure. I didn't think that made sense the first time I read it. However...I came to see the amendment as protecting citizens' rights from the government as well as from lawbreakers.

**Think other local juniors or seniors should give it a shot next year?** I absolutely think so! I have come to love my country and the Constitution more than I did before this contest. Further, The American Legion is very helpful and encouraging to contestants; the skills provided by public speaking will be used throughout life; and the scholarships are very generous. My mom and dad loved it, and I am trying to get both my sisters to participate in it next year.

**Does it help to be naturally chatty?** I think it helps to be self-confident, so if that's what causes chattiness, yes. At the awards banquet in Indianapolis, I sat with the third place winner of the contest (she was from Vermont). Her mother remarked that it was ironic that she was the quietest one in the family!

**Last two books you've read that you'd recommend to a friend:** “How Should We Then Live” by Francis Schaeffer – it gives an overview of the attitudes and culture of the Western World from the days of the Romans, explaining how Christianity has affected them. “Green Money” by D.E. Stevenson – an extremely funny story that details how this fellow named George has to cope with the responsibilities of being a guardian (of sorts) to a girl.

**“This summer, I’m most looking forward to”:** Getting all my summer goals done and working at the Lisbon Library and at a local farm. I want to be able to get all my goals accomplished (sewing a jacket as a present for my cousin; reading some books that I am not normally interested in) so that I don’t have to worry about them any more and can goof off with a clear conscience.