Spelling Bee Raises $26,000

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📁 Around Town 👤 Written by Mary Grainger

Over 300 members of the community of all ages gathered for the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI) Adult Spelling Bee on Sunday, March 1 in the Ithaca High School Wellness Center Gym. The 17th annual event featured 28 spelling teams of three adults each competing for the championship Fuzzy Bee trophy and raising $26,000 for IPEI's grants for teachers.

I.H.S. Bee-T-A, representing the Ithaca High School PTA, was victorious spelling "idiosyncratic" after Highway to Spell from Cayuga Radio Group misspelled it. Following four preliminary rounds with seven teams in each, four finalist teams advanced to the championship round including We Spell Krazy Good and the Bunco Bees. In addition, the Caroline Bee-tniks were recognized for having the Best Costumes and Most Spirit. The ICSD Librarians known as #icsdlibs raised the most funds for their team entry.

Chemung Canal Trust Company, the Blue Ribbon Champion Sponsor for the fifth year, was joined by Red Ribbon Finalist Sponsor Wells Fargo Advisors and two Gold Ribbon Sponsors, Cayuga Radio Group and Sciarabba Walker & Co. Their corporate support covers all event expenses so that team sponsorships directly support grants for teachers. West Hill Graphics and Calf Audio were also key event partners.

Run like an official spelling bee, with rules, a pronouncer, host, timekeeper, and three judges, event income also includes team fundraising, a silent auction, event program advertisements, and a 50/50 raffle. Geoff Dunn pronounced the words with assistance from Zoya Segelbacher while timekeeper Susan Piliero alerted spellers when their time had expired. Each round featured an honorary celebrity bee-keeper assisting her: Cornell's Robin Davisson, Chemung Canal's Mike Wayne, TC3's Deb Mohlenhoff, and Wells Fargo's Rob Ainslie. Judges included IPEI founder Ralph Jones, Paulette Manos and Deborah Lynn. This year's Bee host was Jean McPheeters.

Bee host Jean McPheeters

Teams are known by creative names such as Highway to Spell, Spell Sesquicentennial, Slightly Better than Autocorrect, Beankeepers, I.H.S. Bee-TA, BJM Spell Casters, LACS Alternative Spellerz, and the Hilarious Spell-Loehrs. Two teams were back after multiple championships: the Spellicans and Fine Arts "Word" Boosters, and last year's winners, We Spell Krazy Good (WSKG), attempted a repeat victory. Some teams were comprised of community members who want to support local public education and enjoy spelling. Others are closely connected to the Ithaca City School District (ICSD): Ithaca Teachers Association, ICSD Administration, ICSD Board of Education, ICSD Librarians, Belle Sherman Elementary School PTA, Caroline Elementary School PTA, Northeast Elementary PTA, Ithaca High School PTA, Ithaca High School Math Department, Lehman Alternative Community School, Fine Arts Booster Group, and the Ithaca Council of PTAs.

Teams represented the event sponsors and team sponsors including CFCU, Wegmans, Carol

Bushberg Real Estate, Audrey Edelman RealtyUSA, Ithaca College, Cornell University, Trane U.S, Inc, True Insurance, Harris Beach PLLC, CSP Management, Hunt Engineers, WSKG, UPS Store, Anchor Capital Management, Robert Maciel Associates, Tompkins Insurance Agencies, Avital's Apiaries, and Wordsmyth. Championship Round prizes and new awards for the teams with the best costumes, most team spirit, and highest fundraising were provided by DonorsChoose.org, Steve Ryan, Susan McCutcheon, and Makepeace Candles.

Refreshments were donated by Aladdin's Natural Eatery, B & W Supply Company, Collegetown Bagels, Cornell Orchards, Ithaca Coffee Company, Mark's Pizzeria, Ned's Pizzeria, P&C Fresh, Subway, and Wings Over Ithaca. The silent auction featured 40 items provided by restaurants, museums, retail shops, salons and spas, educational organizations, and inns. In addition, the event program features advertisements from more generous businesses.

Events like the Spelling Bee depend on participation of many. The Bee Committee was chaired by IPEI board member Jennifer Biloski and supported by IPEI Programs and Events Manager Julie Langenbacher. Nora Shang, Karen Yearwood, Ellen Reuben, Michelle Woods, David McMurry, Usha Raman, Marcie Wyant, Connie Patterson and Mary Grainger volunteered as committee members, and IPEI board members were involved with event preparation and production, too. Student volunteers from DeWitt Junior Honor Society, and Ithaca High's Code Red Robotics team assisted at the event. Meira Braun and Grace Blodgett were this year's Bee Fairies escorting teams through all the rounds after words were misspelled.

WRED, Ithaca High School's state-of-the-art television production facility and course, offers Digital Media students the opportunity to produce shows in a real-world environment for the web and for cable. Thanks to Steve Cass, Michael Reiff and their students, the Bee was broadcast live stream and will be available for later viewing. Go to youtube, search for IHSWRED, locate the playlist and find IPEI Spelling Bee.

During the last school year IPEI awarded over $75,000 in grants, benefiting teachers and students at all grade levels in the Ithaca City School District (ICSD). Grants are provided for innovative educational projects including many that promote collaboration between Ithaca schools and the community.

IPEI Spelling Bee teams by round

- Round 1 The LACS Alternative Spellerz The Spell Sesquicentennials Family Buzzers IHS Bee-T-A Ithaca Wegmans The Chomskbees Slightly Better Than Autocorrect
- Round 2 BJM Spell Casters The Spellicans The Bees kNEES Hi-Loehr-ious Spell-Loehrs Parental Prowess Highway to Spell Ithaca Teachers Association
- Round 3 #icsdlibs A Doctor, a Lawyer & a Sea Captain walk into a spelling bee.... y=mx+bee The Bunco Bees Board of Ed Buzz The Eurypterrifics Westhill <Ortho>Graphics
- Round 4 Team Cobra Caroline Bee-tniks We Spell Krazy Good Belle Spellers Ghoti Beankeepers Fine Arts "Word" Boosters

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