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Loud and clear

KEIZERTIMES/ERIC A. HOWALD
The McNary High School female vocal group, Cm7b9#11, recently won the state title in female vocal performance. FRONT ROW: Veronica Reyes, Ella Garro, Ariana Pippert, Emma Blanco and Mary Dolenc. BACK ROW: Jaden Brunhaver, Sydnie Gould, Grace Condello, Camryn Ronnow, Madi Zuro and Sofia Zielinski.

Celt vocalists win state title

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

The McNary High School girls a capella group, Cm7b9#11, never intended to win a state title in female vocal performance.

In fact, the 11 Celts that comprise the group only went to compete at the district level to get some feedback from the judges. They ended up winning there, and then traveling to the state competition where they proved themselves the best Oregon has to offer earlier this month.

"If we had the mindset to go and win, we might not have won, but we were just there to enjoy the music," said junior Ella Garro.

Truth be told, Cm7b9#11 (it's a jazz chord) only became a fully-formed group in January. Competing wasn't even in the picture at that point.

"We haven't focused on being really showy this year, we focused on making music together," said senior Sydnie Gould. "Now, we're getting introduced as the top group in the state and it's a shock. We're really honored, but we still can't believe it."

The group had its beginnings in February 2015, when some of the current members were delivering Val-O-Grams (mini-concerts) to schoolmates.

"Then Mr. (Jim) Taylor challenged us to do more things and perform for the middle

schools," said Grace Condello.

Some of the students who saw them perform at Whiteaker are now members of the group.

"Seeing the Val-O-Gram groups when they visited our school was really fun to watch. After getting to McNary, and seeing how much fun the girls were having, it made me want to be part of it," said freshman Veronica Reyes.

Freshman Sofia Zielinski echoed the sentiment.

"It was never something I thought I would do, but I thought they were so cool," said Zielinski said.

Garro and co-leader Emma Blanco held tryouts for the group last fall, after deciding on what exactly they wanted the group to do.

"We started out as a pop group doing things you might hear on the radio, and then we figured out everyone was also taking the choral classics class. That's when we decided we weren't just a pop group and we started working on the music that we could perform at the district competition," Blanco said.

While Blanco and Garro had specific vocal qualities they were looking for, Garro said other parts of the auditions were the deciding factor as to who made the cut.

"We put a lot more into getting to know them as people rather than their voice. We wanted to know what their

work ethic was like, what they hoped to get out of being part of the group. That was more helpful than their actual voices," Garro said.

One of the group's first big gigs came at the Rose City Sing-Off in April where they brought home the Best Ensemble Sound award.

Having set the bar incredibly high already, Cm7b9#11 isn't planning on resting on its laurels. The young ladies are looking for ways to continue performing throughout the summer, whether it's for private parties or larger events.

Senior Ariana Pippert said the whole experience is making for a bittersweet end to her time as a Celt.

"It's a reminder of how blessed we are here at McNary to have all this talent. In another place, a similar group might fight tooth-and-nail to get where we are now," she said. "I know I'm going on to other things, but I'm really proud of this group. In the years to come, they are going to do some crazy things."

The other members of the group are Madi Zuro, Mary Dolenc, Jaden Brunhaver and Camryn Ronnow.

Celtic pair takes home 'distinguished' medals

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

A last-minute donation to the Distinguished Young Women of Keizer (DYWK) made for an unexpected surprise during the scholarship program Saturday, May 14.

Instead of one winner, there were two \$1,500 scholarships to be given out. The recipients were Sydney Martindale and Elizabeth Russell, who will go on to represent Keizer in the statewide program in August.

Martindale said she was much more nervous than she expected as the names were announced.

"It was scary, but it was a rush of relief when they called my name. I did the best I could possibly do tonight and it all paid off," she said.

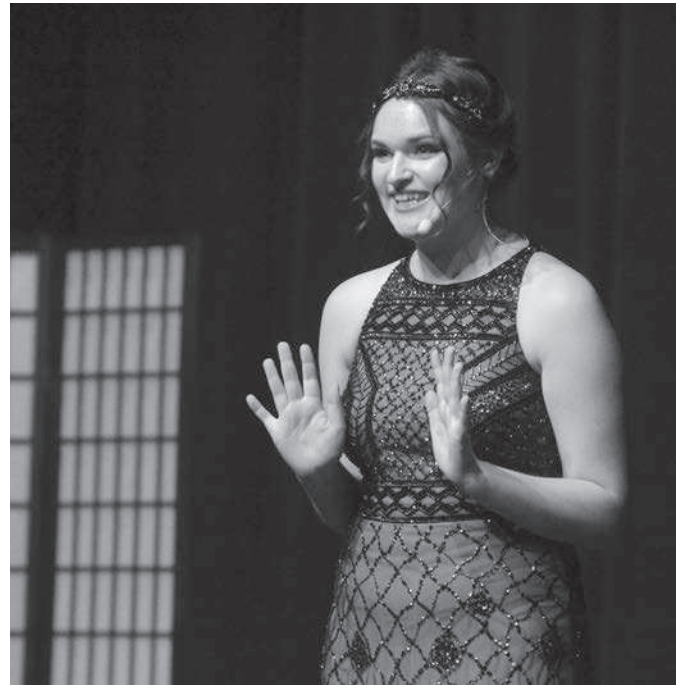
Russell had lowered her own expectations before the winners were announced.

"I thought I did awful and I'd messed up on everything, but then they called my name and I was so surprised," Russell said.

In addition to the grand prizes, Martindale won the fitness portion of the program, which came with a \$300 scholarship. Russell won the Self-expression Award, which also came with a \$300 scholarship.

Despite dancing for the talent portion of the competition, Martindale said the fitness routine was the hardest part of the program.

"It's probably the hardest thing I've done in a long time. It's so much cardio and jogging in place, and I am not



KEIZERTIMES/ERIC A. HOWALD
DWAYK contestant Alayna Sykoski performs a monologue from *The Glass Menagerie* during the talent portion of the scholarship program.

a runner," she said.

Russell, who performed a piano solo for her talent, said that was the most stressful. Russell's mother competed in the Junior Miss program (the precursor to DYWK) in high school and said that was her inspiration for giving it a shot.

"Even as a kid, I would look at her pictures in her scrapbooks and she looked like such a princess. I wanted to be like her, and being able to be part of this has been amazing," she said.

For both distinguished young women, one of the real prizes was simply getting to know schoolmates on a deeper level.

"I've known these girls for so long, but I hadn't gotten to know them. I definitely didn't realize how much I would love them," Russell said.

Martindale added, "They have a special place in my heart and I will always remember them. We've become so close, and I will cherish our memories together forever."

Madi Zuro was named first alternate in the competition and won the talent portion for a combined total of \$800 in scholarships. Rebecca Amerino won the \$300 Scholarship Award. Cambrian Partridge won the \$300 Spirit Award.

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