

MACOMB DAILY

Seventh-grader wins Macomb County Regional Spelling Bee

Active in and out of school, winner had limited time to study



Adyson Gifford of Wyandot Middle School reacts Sunday to winning the Macomb County Regional Spelling Bee held at the Macomb Intermediate School District in Clinton Township. DAVID DALTON — FOR THE MACOMB DAILY

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Adyson Gifford was as surprised as anyone Sunday when she won the 2024 Macomb County Regional Spelling.

Adyson, a seventh-grader at Wyandot Middle School in Clinton Township, slowly recited, “T-O-U-T-E-D,” to capture the annual championship and win the chance to compete in the Scripps National Spelling Bee late this spring near Washington, D.C.

Adyson appeared to be in shock in the moments afterward as claps and cheers filled the room, and she embraced family members.

“I’m so surprised,” she said. “I felt like I didn’t study enough. I studied a little bit. I would’ve studied more but I had basketball” after school.

She attributed her win to the luck of getting words she knew.



Anjali Sheth is embraced by her mother, Christy, after Anjali finished as the runner up in the annual Macomb County Regional Spelling Bee held Sunday at the Macomb Intermediate School District Building in Clinton Township. DAVID DALTON — FOR THE MACOMB DAILY

“Sometimes you get easy words, and sometimes you get hard words,” she said, adding the most difficult word was the winning word.

“I didn’t know the word, I didn’t know what it meant,” she said.

She added the rest of the bee was a blur.

Thirty-eight students in grades five through eight participated at the Macomb Intermediate School District building on Garfield Road in Clinton Township. Parents, siblings, and others joined the crowd of over 250.

MISD Superintendent Michael DeVault “touted” the value of the event for students and families in the county. The MISD took over sponsoring the event several years ago after The Macomb Daily staged it for over 15 years.

“We continue to see strong support and interest from our parents and students,” DeVault said. “We are delighted to host this event. It’s another example of opportunities for our students to grow, experience competition and learn.”

Adyson is the third straight girl to win after years of boys winning nearly every year. Two years ago, Lillian Wallace of Kennedy Middle School in St. Clair Shores won and last year Joscelyn Ryan of St. Mary Catholic School in Mount Clemens took the trophy.

Also this year, five of the final six competitors who advanced were girls.

This year’s competition was relatively short as it went only nine rounds, with Anjali Seth, an eighth-grader at St. Thecla School in Clinton Township, finishing as the runner-up. After correctly spelling eight words, she misspelled “pension.”

“I’ve heard it but I’ve never seen it,” she said of pension.

Prior to getting eliminated, Anjali spelled words such as “comedienne,” “avens” and “shoal.”

The heads-up final went only one round.



Adyson Gifford talks Sunday about winning the 2024 Macomb County Regional Spelling Bee held in Clinton Township. DAVID DALTON — FOR THE MACOMB DAILY

The final two words for that final round were “off the list” so they weren’t part of the study list students received, said pronouncer Matthew Brown. He went to a list from the Miriam Webster unabridged dictionary, he said.

Anjali attributed her good performance to her mom, Christy, who helped her study.

Christy Seth said her daughter was nervous.

“She had her friends here,” she said. “She did amazing.”

Spelling talent runs in the family as Anjali’s brother, Deven Sheth, won the Regional Spelling Bee in 2016, his last of four straight appearances in the Macomb bee. He attended Sunday’s event and commended his sister.



Kourtney Acabo of Iroquois Middle School in Macomb Township spells a word in front of the nine others of the top 10 of the Macomb County Regional Spelling Bee held Sunday in Clinton Township. JAMESON COOK — THE MACOMB DAILY

During the spell-off, Deven and his dad, Akash, sat in the front row, engaging with each other after many of the words were pronounced.

Finishing in third place was David Perez of L'Anse Creuse Middle School-North, who misspelled "reimbursable," after spelling words such as "photosynthesis," "megaron," "Puritan" and "allergenic" and "yore."

Tying for fourth place and getting knocked out in the seventh round were Ainsley Gastmeier of Trinity Lutheran School in Clinton Township, Abigail Harper of Parkway Christian School in Sterling Heights and Jessica Makhoul of St. Lawrence Elementary School in Utica.

Abigail, who misspelled "syndicate," appeared shocked in the prior round after slowly reciting, "J-U-B-I-L-A-N-T," and hearing from judge May Manna, "That is correct."

She also spelled words such as "meitnerium," "lymphoma" and "vocabulary."

Ainsley went out on the word, "attrition," after spelling words such as "mumbai" and "criteria."

Jessica misspelled "consul" after spelling one of only a handful compound words in the event, "rooibos tea" and the single word, "elocution."

Tying for seventh place and being eliminated in the sixth round were Koury Acabo of Iroquois Middle School in Macomb Township, Matt Pavelu of Trinity Lutheran School in Utica and Connor Rhadigan of Princeton Elementary in St. Clair Shores.



Adyson Gifford is surrounded by her family Sunday after winning the annual Macomb Regional Spelling Bee in Clinton Township. Accompanying, from left, are her grandfather, Gary Gabriel; grandmother, Linda Gabriel; brother, Ayden; dad, Randy; brother, Anthony; and mom, Amy. DAVID DALTON — FOR THE MACOMB DAILY

In the third round, the crowd cheered after Chloe Lotterman of Richmond Middle School spelled the compound word, "retinitis pigmentosa."

Three-time participant Sochima Ezenwa of Immanuel Lutheran School in Macomb Township went out in the third round on the, “samian,” after spelling “thyroid” and “bilge.”

Last year’s runner-up, Finley Smith of St. Augustine Elementary in Richmond, was eliminated in the first round on the word, “innards.”

With her victory, Adyson wins a free trip for her and a parent or guardian to the six-day national event starting May 26 at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center in National Harbor, Md.

Adyson’s mom, Amy Gifford, also said while she was surprised her daughter won, she said Adyson “is good at spelling.”

She said she believes Adyson’s spelling skills resemble those of her maternal grandmother, Linda Gabriel, who is a good speller and who along with her maternal grandfather, Gary, provides positive influence.

Gary Gabriel shed a rare tear when his granddaughter won.

“I’m so proud of her,” he said.

Adyson’s dad, Randy, said he was not surprised because she does well in so many different things.

“She excels at everything,” Randy said.

He said he believes Adyson’s study method may have helped. Her computer was arranged so each word on the study list was read aloud via Google so she could hear it verbalized, he said. Adyson studied every day before the school bee and every other day before the regional bee, due to her busy schedule.

In addition to playing basketball on the school team, she participates in choir and is an altar server at church. She is running for student council next year.

“Anything she has time for, she does,” Randy said.

Linda Gabriel said her granddaughter is “well rounded.”

Adyson’s brothers, Ayden, 10, and Anthony, 7, also attended.

Adyson also won:

- From Merriam-Webster, a free one-year subscription to Merriam-Webster Unabridged
- From Britannica, a one-year membership to Britannica Online Premium
- The Samuel Louis Sugarman Award, a 2022 U.S. Mint Proof Set donated by Mr. Jay Sugarman in honor of his father.

Judy Pritchett, an MISD consultant and a member of the Michigan Board of Education, provided the opening remarks to the audience, noting the students “challenged” the judges with some difficult questions during the pre-Bee meeting Sunday.

Also attending the event was Theresa Genest, president of the MISD Board of Education.

Pronouncer Brown is an English teacher at the International Academy of Macomb, and judge Manna is an MISD consultant. Assisting in the judging were MISD consultants Melissa Labadie and Lea McAllister, all MISD consultants.

FIND ADDITIONAL PHOTOS OF THIS YEAR'S BEE HERE: <https://jrc-oakland.smugmug.com/MD-2024-Macomb-County-Regional-Spelling-Bee>

Find a complete rundown of qualifiers here:



The nervous spellers wait for the annual Macomb County Regional Spelling Bee to begin Sunday in Clinton Township. JAMESON COOK — THE MACOMB DAILY