

ORATORICAL PROGRAM

At the National Oratorical Finals 4-6 April 2014 held in Indianapolis, IN, we were told that 53 students would receive a total of \$136,500 this year. That information seems remote to Vermont. So what is the importance of the Oratorical Program and what has happened in Vermont?

Supporting Post Unknown

Department Winner 1957

Frank Mahady

In 1992, Patrick Leahy said of Frank Mahady ". . . a lot of people aren't going to realize until later what a tremendous judge he was and what a great deal he gave to the state of Vermont". Originating in White River Junction, Mahady was the Department Oratorical winner in 1957. Graduating from Dartmouth College, he went on to get a law degree from Georgetown University. In 1994, the VT Legislature named the new Addison County courthouse in memory of Judge Mahady, noting in the resolution, "despite considerable public criticism, Judge Mahady repeatedly emphasized and upheld the Constitutional rights of all Vermonters, regardless of their age or station in life, . . ."

Pierce-Lawton Post, Bellows Falls

Department Winner 1976, 1977

Leroy Watson

Leroy Watson Watson is a native of Vermont, where he still owns and operates his family's farm. He has a degree in political science from the University of Vermont, and a law degree from George Mason University in Arlington, VA. He also studied administrative law at the University of Exeter in Exeter, England, and is admitted to the Bar of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

He says of the Oratorical Program, "My participation in the American Legion Americanism programs was not limited to the oratorical contest. I was a delegate from Bellows Falls to the 1976 Boys State program. One of my co-delegates, who would become a lifelong friend, was former VT Lt. Governor Brian Dubie. Even today Brian will joke that I ran his first campaign for "governor", which he won that year at Boys State. I ended up serving as Speaker of the House of Representatives at Boys State and our "party" swept five of the six statewide offices and controlled both houses of the legislature. . . I can say with complete confidence that my participation in the American Legion Americanism programs had a profound and direct impact on my life, that continues until today. I gained confidence in speaking and presenting. I learned about public policy issue management. I have made lifelong friends from my participation in these programs. And the overall reputation of these programs for their selfless commitment to public policy and civics education created a halo effect that has followed me throughout my career. Anybody can take a speech class. Anybody can memorize an "elevator speech". Anybody can parrot a "sound bite". Anybody can "tweet" 140 characters in a message. Our modern society places a premium on simplistic answers to complex issues and questions. However, the American Legion Oratorical Contest is the gold standard for participatory public policy education and advocacy."

Post # 14, Vergennes
Department Winner 1978, 1979
Stephen Farnsworth

Stephen Farnsworth states "The oratorical contest played a key role in helping me prepare for college as well as helping to finance my education at Dartmouth." Now Professor of Political Science and International Affairs and Director of the Center for Leadership and Media Studies at the University of Mary Washington is no underachiever. Dr. Farnsworth received a Ph.D. and an M.A. in government from Georgetown University, a B.A. in history from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and a B.A. in government from Dartmouth College.

He is the author or co-author of five books: *The Global President: International Media and the U.S. Government*; *The Nightly News Nightmare: Media Coverage of U.S. Presidential Elections, 1988-2008*; *Spinner in Chief: How Presidents Sell Their Policies and Themselves*; *The Mediated Presidency: Television News and Presidential Governance*; and *Political Support in a Frustrated America*. He is also author or coauthor of dozens of scholarly articles on the presidency, the mass media, U.S. public opinion and Virginia politics. His political commentary has appeared in a wide range of media outlets, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *PBS NewsHour*, *Politico*, *C-SPAN* and *BBC World*.

Post # 14, Vergennes
Department Winner 1981
Robert Irion

The July 2013 National Geographic cover feature, *Our Wild, Wild Solar System*, was written by Robert Irion, the 1981 Department Oratorical winner. Irion recently co-authored "One Universe: At Home in the Cosmos". He has a B.S. in earth and planetary sciences from MIT. He worked as a newspaper reporter in Boston before graduating from the Science Communication Program in 1988. His articles have been published in Smithsonian and Discover. He is currently Program director and Senior Lecturer at University of California, CA. Program Director and Senior Lecturer (Reporting and Writing Science News, The Science Feature, Multimedia Reporting) as well as a freelance magazine journalist and former U.S. correspondent in astronomy and astrophysics for *Science*.

Supporting Post Unknown
Department Winner 1995
Clark Baker

Clark Baker is a past Department Oratorical winner as a student at S. Burlington HS. Co-founder and Technology Director of SchoolSpring an internet-based employment source for all teaching positions in primary and secondary schools in VT plus several other states. SchoolSpring was just sold to Netchemia and Clark remains their technology director. Clark began his career at General Electric developing and leading web applications projects for e-commerce, supplier extranets and document management. Clark was project leader for the development of a proprietary careers website, including online résumé creation, job search, and an internal job posting and application management system.

He graduated summa cum laude from Syracuse University with a degree in Information Management and Technology.

For more “testimonials” and further detail on these and other Department winners, request a copy of a pamphlet presented at the 2014 June Convention.

Congratulations is in order for our 2014 Department winner. Under the golden dome of Montpelier on Mar. 1, Hannah Hatch was selected to represent Vermont at the American Legions’ 77th National Oratorical Contest. The daughter of Jason and Jennifer Hatch of Ferrisburgh, Hatch is a junior at Vergennes Union High School. Her Prepared Oration, “The Power of 9: Article 3 and the Supreme Court”, was completed in the 8-10 minute time limit. One of 5 judges, Rep. Diane Lanpher summed the accomplishments of both student orators by noting that it takes concentrated focus and knowledge of subject to speak 8-10 min. without notes or a microphone (contest rules), challenging even to a legislator. Though representing VUHS in the Brain Bee, the Math Team and a member of the National Honor Society, Hatch acknowledged that this was the most difficult competition thus far.

Of the experience in Indianapolis, Hatch stated that she was grateful to represent Vermont at such an honorable event. She plans on participating in 2015.



National Commander, Daniel Dellinger VT Department Winner, Hannah Hatch

National Americanism Commission Chairman, Richard Anderson