



CHRIS WARE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

From left, Alisha Davis Lukas of Broadview Middle School in Danbury, Christo Popham of Old Greenwich Elementary in Greenwich, and Rahul Malayappan of Broadview Middle School in Danbury, stand as the three finalists of the 2010 Hearst Connecticut Media Group Spelling Bee at Western Connecticut State University Wednesday.

Winners — WINNERS — winners

By Vinti Singh
STAFF WRITER

DANBURY — Christo Popham, 10, only started studying a couple of weeks before Wednesday's spelling bee on the campus of Western Connecticut State University.

"It would be good if I win, but I don't dream about it," Christo said before the competition. "I mean, I don't dream of being president, but it would be good if I became president someday."

When he spelled "impetuous" correctly, Christo won the 2010 Hearst Connecticut Media Group Regional Spelling Bee. The Greenwich student and two winners from Danbury will go to the 2010 Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington.

"I'm definitely going to study more for the next one," he said.

Christo studies Spanish at Old Greenwich Elementary School, which came in handy when the pronouncer, Danbury News-Times columnist and opinion editor Brian Koonz, asked him to spell "cedilla."

Alisha Davis Lukas, 13, of Broadview Middle School in Danbury, actually did daydream a lot about going on to the national spelling bee in June.

"I would imagine myself going to Washington. I would picture myself on the stage," she said.

Visualizing her goal, as well as a lot of studying, won her a spot in the national competition.

"I love words," Alisha said. She also plays guitar, basketball and soccer, and enjoys painting.

The remaining spot went to regional spelling bee veteran winner Rahul Malay-

appan, 10, of Broadview Middle School, who has gone to Washington twice before, but was eliminated in the preliminaries both times.

"I will probably spend two hours a day studying" to prepare, said Rahul, who plays the violin, basketball, baseball and chess.

Thirty-eight students from Fairfield County and Willington competed in the spelling bee.

"This is important to us because it is helping our future readers learn the words that are in the newspaper," organizer Patti Passarelli said.

After six preliminary rounds, seven students remained for the elimination round. Besides the three winners, they were: Anjali Pai, of Rogers Park Middle School, Danbury; Shai Wallman of Whisconier Middle

School, Brookfield; Hannah Kim, of Scotts Ridge Middle School, Ridgefield; and Ayushi Bhalla, of Broadview Middle School, Danbury.

After Pai and Wallman were eliminated, five students remained for the spell-off round. Bhalla was the next to go.

Both Christo and Hannah spelled their words wrong, leaving Rahul and Davis Lukas with guaranteed trips to the U.S. Capitol.

Christo and Hannah had to square off for the last spot.

Hannah was eliminated when she misspelled "diphthong."

"I can barely believe it," Christo said after the competition. "Mom, can you pinch me?"

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