

VFW Patriotism Essays Earn Awards for Raton Teens

Story and Photo by Tim Keller – TimKellerArts.com

Is there pride in serving in our military? Raton's recent Veterans Day events resoundingly gave the town's answer, but earlier in the month Raton teens responded to the question in the VFW's patriotism essay contests.

Raton High School junior Marisa McCarty topped the Voice of Democracy contest winners with her essay, which is so moving that we're sharing it below. McCarty receives a \$500 savings bond from the Raton VFW chapter. 2nd place Matthew Ortiz wins a \$300 bond, 3rd place Blake Washburn \$200, and 4th place Callie Wilson \$100. All four receive VFW backpacks, pens, medallions, and certificates as well.

Raton Middle School students competed in the VFW's Patriot's Pen essay contest, with Cy Brower taking top honors, followed by McKenna Valdez, Mabry Requa, and Heather Sandoval. Their prizes are the same as the high school teens, with Brower winning the top \$500 award.

Brower's winning essay joins McCarty's 650-word essay to move on to district competition where after Thanksgiving judges will weigh them against winning essays in their divisions from Las Vegas, Taos, Clayton, and other northeastern New Mexico towns. The two winning district essays will go to the state finals, judged sometime after December 16 but not announced until the VFW's annual state conference in Albuquerque in February.

Should either Brower or McCarty win the state essay contest, they will accompany their essay to the VFW's national competition in the spring, where 50 winning state essays will compete for the \$10,000 national top prize. Last year, Raton's Dante Sparaco won the New Mexico Patriot's Pen essay award and represented the state at the national convention in Texas.

Brower, an avid horseman featured in the September 2011 Western Horseman magazine with his mother, Raton nurse practitioner Marcia Hefker, is also an enthusiastic woodworker and sportsman – he plays baseball, basketball, and football. He and his mother race their Arabian horses throughout the west: in 2010, Brower was ranked number 2 nationally in junior division 100-mile horse endurance racing.

McCarty, daughter of Cindy and David McCarty, approaches her senior year ranked number one in her class with a perfect 4.0 grade average. Active in Key Club and National Honor Society, she's been president of Youth Alive since 2009 and was nominated for National Youth Leadership Forum on Medicine this year. In addition to her busy schedule with school, clubs, and church, she works as a checker at Super Save.

According to Joe Esparza at Raton's VFW chapter, this year's Raton entries in the VFW patriotism essay contests dramatically eclipsed last year's. The middle school's Patriot's Pen entries jumped from 30 to 42, while the high school's Voice of Democracy entries grew from last year's paltry single entry, by Riley Wilson, to this year's more robust 13 entries. Combined with this month's rousing Veterans Day celebrations, it's clear that Raton is feeling its patriotism this year! There is perhaps no better expression of the feeling than Marisa McCarty's winning essay, which we share with you here.