River Quest adventures captured in award-winning prose & poetry

Awards were presented earlier this summer to two area sixth-graders whose entries took top honors in the 2014 Captain Ray Skelton River Quest Writing Contest.

Coriella Sheetz, who is homeschooled in the Cloquet-Carlton area, won first place in the essay competition while Shay Callaway from Ordean East took top honors in the poetry division with her poem entitled Wizards of the River. Runners-up were Elizabeth Emmel from St. James Catholic School and Sarah Mason from Ordean East in the essay and poetry categories, respectively.

Below are excerpts. To read award-winning essays and poems in their entirety, visit www.seagrant.umn.edu/riverquest.

Winning Essay: Coriella Sheetz

Have you ever looked out at Lake Superior and seen just how majestic it is? ... It seems unlikely that something so gigantic, so majestic, so big and powerful could possibly be harmed, but the truth is it can. Lake Superior and the land, rivers and streams around it as well as the creatures that live there are a carefully balance ecosystem ... We do things that harm the Lake Superior ecosystem, such as introducing invasive species, destroying natural habitats and polluting. However, we can also learn to change our behavior in order to help protect the Lake Superior ecosystem.

Winning Poem: Shay Callaway

Wizards of the river
keep the St. Louis River clean.
Otherwise, without them,
The river'll be polluted and green.
All the helping companies
at River Quest have a goal.
Such as Duluth Sail and Power Squadron
who have safety in their souls . . .
WLSSD keeps all the water healthy
especially where the river and Lake Superior meet
at the great big estuary ... Learning more about where you live
and maybe help by doing your part
Let nature be your motive
I hope you have learned a lot.

First-place winners of the writing contests received “traveling plaques,” that will remain on display at their schools for the next academic year. Prize packages included gift certificates to area attractions and restaurants, plus promotional items from several learning station sponsors at River Quest 2014.

St. Louis River Quest is a community-based, volunteer organization created in 1993 to provide students with hands-on learning experiences that enhance their awareness and understanding of the interrelated commercial, industrial, recreational and environmental values of the Duluth-Superior
Harbor - the estuary of the St. Louis River. The writing contest, now in its seventh year, was named in memory of Captain Ray Skelton – one of the program’s founders, a master mariner, and a longtime member of the Duluth Seaway Port Authority staff. A poetry category was added in 2012. Previous River Quest Essay Contest winners include:

2008 – Lauren Johnson, Ordean Middle School
2009 – Pentti Hanlon, Marshall School
2010 – Eleanor “Ellie” French, Woodland Middle School
2011 – Paul Foldesi, St. James Catholic School
2012 – Marina Melby, Marshall School (essay) & Grace Cannon, Woodland Middle School (poetry)

A record 1,433 students participated in River Quest this year. During their 2½ hour adventures, those sixth-graders learned all they could about the St. Louis River ecosystem at a dozen different stations staffed by volunteers who covered topics ranging from pollution prevention and stopping aquatic invaders to personal water safety and commercial shipping. Over 19,000 students from the greater Twin Ports area have participated in River Quest since its inception.

River Quest 2015 has been scheduled for May 11-14.