



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

REL Debate Team Fares Well

The Robert E. Lee High School Forensics team made another great showing at the Brenham High School Speech and Debate tournament on Nov. 26.

Seniors Hector Vela and Elizet Alvarez took third place in the cross examination or team debate events. This was their first debate tournament win. Vela debated last year at the district debate tournament in Barbers Hill, but he did not place. He has also debated for the Hispanic Debate Institute during his summers. Alvarez just transferred to Robert E. Lee High School from Houston and has done individual interpretation and speaking events such as Prose and Poetry and Duet Improv before this year, but she has never debated. Together they went undefeated through three rounds and lost in the semifinals.

Also winning debate rounds were freshmen Meridith Gibson and Tara Bevers, who both participated in their first tournament and their first experience as partners.

Seniors Hector Vela and Elizet Alvarez were also semifinalists in Extemporaneous Speaking. This is a demanding event that requires students to draw a topic about current affairs, write a five to seven minute speech over their topic, and then give the speech to a judge without their notes. It truly tests their knowledge and forces them to be better public speakers.

Additionally, senior Luisa Perez was an interpretation semifinalist in the Prose and Poetry contest. She presented two pieces of prose and read them from her own interpretation of the pieces. This activity combines a student's speaking and presentation skills with the intellectual interpretation of the pieces that they read.

This is the second winning weekend for the Gander Debate Team this season. Several weeks ago the team travelled to Little Cypress Mauriceville High School and the team of Miroslava Zendejas and Kimberly Bourne finished in second place. The Gander Debate team hasn't had this kind of season since 2001 when debate partners Rory Keul and Suzanne Nelson won the district tournament and advanced to state, and in 2003 when James Ponder and Kivan Polimis won district and advanced to State in University Interscholastic League and then to the Texas Forensics Association State Tournament, which is the "tournament of tournaments" for students competing in speaking activities.

"We have a small squad this year, but I have several strong leaders, like Hector Vela and Elizet Alvarez, who are pushing and teaching their peers to be successful. The kids are having fun and we are being successful. They are amazing," said Kurt Bouillion, REL speech and debate coach. "Characteristically, the debater loves school, they love learning, and they love being intellectuals and talking about meaningful issues in meaningful ways, which is absolutely required of the debate student. The neat thing about these kids is their motivation. We often leave for a tournament at noon on Friday, arrive back at school at midnight, and leave again at 5:30 a.m. Saturday morning only to return sometime that night. We maintain this schedule from September to April. These kids make time to do academic things on their weekends, while other teenagers are sleeping or working – these kids are debating, learning and representing Lee High School in the academic arena."



Robert E. Lee High School seniors Hector Vela and Elizet Alvarez took third place in the cross-examination or team debate events at the Brenham High School Speech and Debate tournament on Nov. 26. This was their first debate tournament win.

In the end, it pays off. The Gander Debate team has graduated students, like Rory Keul who received his degree and is now a commercial airline pilot, Kivan Polimis who graduated from Lee High School after debating for four years and went to Princeton and is now working on his PhD at the University of North Carolina and Jenna White who is finishing her degree at the University of Texas, where she is active in the Young Conservatives and is looking to Law School.

"We have sent kids to some major universities where they have been successful students," said Bouillion.

The Gander Debate team will compete next at the University of Texas, which is a regional tournament that draws schools from Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and elsewhere. It is a very demanding weekend for these kids. The week after the UT tournament they wrap this semester in Sabine Pass and they will look forward to a Jan. 7 invitational at Hamshire-Fannett High School.

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