Wins Special Award in African American History

Patrick Ostermann-Healey, a student at George Washington Middle School in Alexandria recently competed in the National History Day Contest, held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, June 14-20. He received the special award in African American History sponsored by the National Park Service.

The 2020 contest theme was Breaking Barriers in History, and this year’s unprecedented circumstances added an extra layer of meaning to the theme. Patrick joined more than half a million students globally who completed projects in one of five categories: documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website. Patrick created a paper project titled The 1939 Virginia Library Sit-In: Breaking a Barrier to Read at a Public Library. He was inspired by the Alexandria Library Sit-In Descendants Panel hosted by Alexandria City Public Libraries as part of the year-long commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the event. Already an active volunteer with the Office of Historic Alexandria’s Gadsby’s Tavern Museum, Patrick also interviewed staff at the Alexandria Black History Museum as part of his research.

After completing a project, students compete in a series of contests beginning at the local level. The top students from all 50 states, D.C., U.S. territories, and international schools are invited to compete in the National Contest. Patrick’s entry was one of five from Virginia recognized at the National Contest.

“To make it to the National Contest in a normal year is a remarkable achievement,” said NHD Executive Director Dr. Cathy Gorn. “Given the added challenges facing students because of the coronavirus and nationwide school closures, I am even more impressed by what they have done this year. They have shown an incredible level of perseverance amid adversity, and I am confident we will see Wins Special Award, Page 12
A Senior Year Unlike Any Other

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rising senior Fina Osei-Owusu is banking on taking her SAT in August after having her first one canceled in April. But there’s no guarantee that it will be feasible.

“My last year of high school has been the worst that I’ve ever had,” said Osei-Owusu.

Despite the pandemic, Pozo argues the barriers many disadvantaged students face when applying to college will persist.

“A lot of low-income people and undocumented people experience the college process in a little bit of a different way,” Pozo. “The college process itself shows how inaccessible college education is.”

The Scholarship Fund of Alexandria has taken new measures to connect with seniors over the summer and into the fall. The annual workshop for financial aid documents is scheduled as a virtual event in October. Seniors will have access to a texting platform that gives reminders about college and application deadlines.

“We’re very worried about the students,” said Lovain. “But at some point, it all will go back to normal.” But Osei-Owusu doubts things will return to normality anytime soon.

“A lot of things will change,” she said. “Our lives will never be the same. Next year’s high school is going to be really different; I don’t think it’s going to be normal. I don’t think anything’s going to be normal.”

Fun Things to Do this Summer

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Alexandrians Sit on Edge of Eviction

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and at risk of eviction.

Many Horner, Staff Attorney for the Legal Services of Northern Virginia, who handles these eviction cases for the City of Alexandria, breaks down the eviction situation into three phases. She says phase one eviction cases were filed pre-COVID when people had fallen behind in their rent, due to March 4. “Some judgments against them are pretty high because although the courts were closed the rental payments kept accumulating.”

Phase two is people who have fallen behind in rent payments due to the impact of the coronavirus job loss. It is difficult to estimate how many cases are in this phase. Horner says these cases are much more manageable because the rents have not been accumulated.

She said the cases tend to be filed by lawyers in waves. “Just yesterday there were over 100 cases, many from Southern Towers, a 4,000 unit complex.” Horner says the number of cases filed for Southern Towers between mid-March to present is triple the number of cases filed between January to mid-March. Southern Towers is one of the few affordable housing that is not subsidized in Alexandria and thus not under the protection of the CARES Act on evictions. It is a less expensive place to live but quick to evict.

Horner says she anticipates phase three will come in about two months when the CARES Act protecting people from eviction has expired and the 60 day continuance period has run out. She says when people come to court because they have fallen behind in their rent, they will not have any furniture available to delay eviction for 60 days but it requires people to file out an affidavit. Legal Services has been successful in getting some tenants in danger of eviction to fill out the forms but a number of people are unaware of the law, terrified of court or feel going to court is currently unsafe.

Horner says Legal Services usually has a table outside the courthouse Monday-Thursday offering general legal advice and information as well as information and food distribution. “We just helped 22-22 people fill out an affidavit to delay eviction. The 60-day continuance is good because it gives time to work on solving the problem, to get the unemployment benefits or to find a way to pay the rent.”

Horner says she has been compiling court data since May. “This allows us to reach out. Horner says one of the relationships that is part of the Alexandria team effort is with the Sheriff’s office.

“No one wants to be evicting people right now. Believe me. The sheriff agrees to wait until the last minute so there is enough time to help solve the problem.”

Horner says due to the implementation of the new laws some attorneys are uninform about the CARES Act protections for tenants living in subsidized housing. As a result they were able to get a dozen cases dismissed the last couple of days.

But she adds that unfortunately when tenants receive an eviction notice to vacate in 5 days (even if it was based on misinformation), many self evict and then they can’t find them.

Gray says, “Reflect on what you might do. Every dollar counts.

Horner adds, “We have boots on the ground. We are triageing emergencies. This partnership with the City of Alexandria, the faith-based community, and the unique work in particular judging categories.

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continue to see great things from all of these students. The critical thinking and research skills learned through competing in NHD, especially now, will help these students achieve success in college and their careers.” More than 300 historians and education professionals served as judges for the students’ work, and as with all other aspects of the contest this year, the judging was conducted remotely online. More than 100 students from across the country were awarded cash prizes between $500 and $2,000, each, for superior work in particular judging categories.