

Rural Awareness Annual Essay Awards Recognize Franklin Township Students

Winners of the 14th Annual Rural Awareness Scholar Award competition were announced in a video awards presentation by Franklin Township School on June 16. Rural Awareness sponsors the annual essay contest for all Franklin Township School students in grades 3, 4, and 5. The third grade did not participate this year. Judges determined which essays of the 58 entries best responded to the year's theme.

Students were challenged with this subject: You are an artist. Using only words, "paint a picture" of what you think is the most beautiful scene in Franklin Township. Describe that scene in vivid detail and also explain how it makes you feel when you see it.

Students submitted essays that spoke to either the literal or the idiomatic interpretation of "paint a picture." Most chose the Capoolong Creek Trail as the most beautiful site in Franklin. Others selected the farm at the northern gateway to the township, their own backyard, or one of Franklin's historic buildings.

The Grand Champion and first place winner in the fourth grade is Erich Strauss for his essay, *The Beautiful Capoolong Creek Trail*. "Being on the trail," he writes, "makes me feel...like I am part of nature and all its beauty." He loves to visit it in all seasons, but especially in winter when "snow crunches" under his feet and he can "look up into a deep blue sky and sometimes see a red-tailed hawk." The creek "bubbles" and "giant icicles hang on the sharp edges of the rocks."

Second place honors in the fourth grade went to Colby Hender for an untitled piece extolling the beauty of Franklin's preserved Frazee farm, the land between Routes 617 and 513 at the northern point of the township. He describes a scene of "crystal blue sky, cotton like clouds, the sun's rays gleaming on the big black cows...and rolling hills that appear to go on for miles." Then later "the cows' black silhouettes against the darkening sky create a sense of calmness that can bring peace...to anyone passing by."

Honorable mention for the fourth grade was won by Taylor Witkowski for *Peterson's Farm*, which he thinks is "most beautiful at Christmas time." The big barns "decorated with wreathes and garlands"...and the welcoming Petersons make him feel "happier than anywhere else....and like everything in the world is peaceful and perfect."

First place winner for the fifth grade is William McDonald for *Strolling along the Capoolong*. The site is beautiful, he writes, with flowers and vines and green grasses, with the sounds of water flowing over rocks and chirping birds. He "smells the refreshing

spring air”....puts his hand in the freezing water.... and “across the creek a fish leaps above the water, splashing as it drops into its icy world.”

Fifth grade second place winner is Cole Kober for *The Most Beautiful Place in Franklin Township*, also about the Capoolong Creek. “Painting a picture of the Capoolong Creek, I would use a variety of colors,” he writes, going on to list a rainbow of shades and tints to describe the flora and fauna there. His visits to the creek leave him with “feelings of contentment.”

Honorable mention honors for the fifth grade go to Liam MacKinnon for an untitled piece about his backyard, which appeals to him in all seasons for its flowers, trees, and space for the family’s mini-farm with goats and chickens. “I look up towards the sky and see the beautiful layers of colors and I am reminded just how blessed I am to be living in Franklin Township.”

Teachers of the winning students are Tracy Strycky, Jeff Weinhold, and the late Lynn Johnson.

Prizewinners all receive gift certificates donated by The Book Garden in Frenchtown. First place gets \$50; second, \$30; and honorable mention, \$10. The grand prize winner is selected from the first place winners and additionally receives a gift certificate for a pizza night donated by Frank’s Italian Restaurant in Clinton, a long-time partner with Rural Awareness. All entrants receive a certificate of participation.

The six winning essays will be posted on the Rural Awareness website at ruralawareness.org.

Rural Awareness, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to preserving the rich history and rural character of Franklin Township.

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NOTE – ESSAYS BY THE GRAND CHAMPION AND THE OTHER FIRST PLACE WINNER ALSO ARE ATTACHED

ERICH STRAUSS, FIRST PLACE, FOURTH GRADE AND GRAND CHAMPION

WILLIAM McDONALD, FIRST PLACE, FIFTH GRADE