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Orchestra Achieves Perfect Contest Scores

By NORA WAHLBRINK
Associate Editor

For the first time in nine years, the RHS Symphonic Orchestra received all superior ratings March 10 at the MCPS Orchestra Assessment Festival.

The festival was held over several days between 30 different orchestras, some from MCPS and others from private schools around the county. Schools performed three prepared pieces on stage in front of three judges and then read and performed a brand-new piece

of music for the first time in front of a fourth judge. The ratings go from one to five, one representing a superior rating; RHS received all ones.

"The students in the Symphonic Orchestra take a lot of pride in putting a quality product out there for people to hear," instrumental music director Phillip Barnes said. The orchestra students received the music in December after their winter concert, and have been working on it ever since.

"We were all really nervous because we missed so many rehearsals because of snow days," senior violinist Zora Williams said.



When the orchestra got on the bus after their performances, Barnes shared the good news. "We all screamed and clapped and hugged each other," Williams said. "This hasn't happened to Rockville since 2006."

With the festival over, orchestra will now begin prepping for their spring concert, in good spirits after this achievement.

"We always give Mr. Barnes 110 percent of our focus in class. I felt very accomplished," senior cellist Tim Slingluff said. "We killed it like we always do."

The symphonic band also did well, receiving two superior scores and two excellent scores (second highest rating possible), at their festival on March 12. This was one of the best performances from the band in five years.

Administration Responds to Water Quality

By XAVIER RIVERA
Contributing Editor

After high levels of lead that surpassed EPA action levels were found in RHS water fountain samples collected on Jan. 26, administration responded with an official water flushing program starting March 4 to decrease the amount of suspended metals in school drinking water.

"I put a work order in for maintenance and they requested that we go start doing water flushing in the morning," Building Services Manager Victor Bhandari said. "We do all the water fountains in the morning, and it's official from the county, so we log in every morning and put the time and date."

The fountain-flushing directly addresses the issue of suspended metals found in the water. Some fountains are not run as frequently, which leads to rust build-up.

"I've been through this before in another school, and the numbers were much more dramatic, and we found that making a conscious effort to run the water fountains has made a significant difference," Principal Billie-Jean Bensen said.

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Photos Courtesy of Lifetouch

Top right: junior violinist Carlos Piedrasanta practices his music for the RHS Symphonic Orchestra. Bottom left: the orchestra performs, led by music director Phillip Barnes.

Loss of Student Pains Family, Friends

Sophomore Yiching Cheng, Part of RHS' LFI Community, Died of Illness at Age 17

By GRETA ANDERSON
Editor-in-Chief

Sophomore Yiching Cheng had an optimistic, open heart. Although it was hard for her to communicate verbally, Yiching was always giving hugs, smiles and waves to her friends in RHS' Learning for Independence (LFI) program and projecting her bright personality with her family. Battling Mitochondrial disease since birth, Yiching struggled with maintaining her energy levels, vision, hearing and muscle mobility and had a second-degree block heart problem.

As a result of her disease, Yiching died peacefully March 4 at Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C. at the age of 17. She is survived by her mother Haochien Chen, father Chifeng Cheng and sister Jamie Cheng, a freshman at Winston Churchill HS. A memorial service will be held March 28 at Tree of Life Church in Gaithersburg at 2 p.m. for friends or community members who would like to support the family.

Starting at Rock Creek Valley ES, Yiching moved up and was completing her second year of the LFI program at RHS. Though her family lives in Potomac, RHS was the best option for her because it offered daily schooling, unlike other programs and properly met Yiching's needs. She also enjoyed being able to see her friends every day and going on community trips.

"[One of my favorite things was] her smile and [how] she loved to hug others," Chifeng Cheng said. "It was her way to show her appreciation since it was difficult for her to speak. It

was a way to express her openness."

Yiching loved reading, travelling, swimming and talking. She was very observant, remembering names, restaurants, food, birthdays and things that happened during her day, which she would often share with her family. Another big part of her life were family trips, including several to visit relatives in Taiwan.

Her trademark grin was seen in the RHS hallways. "Her courage for life inspires others," Haochien Chen said. "Her desire to survive inspired others."

However, her illness presented her with many difficulties. Yiching was confined to a wheelchair when not at home and required around-the-clock care, which was hard on her devoted parents and sister. She always needed someone to help feed her and help with her homework, which was mentally and physically exhausting for her family. But there was something unique about Yiching despite her disabilities - she had an unfaltering will to live and love.

"She knew that she had this illness; it was apparent to her and she knew she's different from other students," Jamie said. "[But she] also knows that we love her. She knows that even though we can't do anything, she still had that hope that someday it was going to get better."

Chifeng Cheng, too, said Yiching always thought she could recover. However she was also very aware of her mortality. Before her death, she started saying things like "her heart was dead," or that "she can't find her heart," and her family thought she was referring to her heart problems. The weeks leading to her death, Yiching urged her family to take more pictures with her and did



Photo Courtesy of Jamie Cheng

Posing for her family, sophomore Yiching Cheng enjoys Centennial Park in Ellicott City, Md. in October 2009. Yiching's family will remember her as a cheerful and loving daughter and sister.

not express interest in school.

"She didn't really act scared," Jamie said. "I think she accepted that it was time for her and she knew that she would be OK."

Even though Yiching was not expected to live past a certain age, her family did not think her death would be so sudden. She had gone through periods of time before when she was overly tired and missed school due to a lack of energy, so they did not think their trip to Taiwan this past year would be Yiching's last.

However, once she grew weaker, Chifeng Cheng expected Yiching would not live past March.

"Having her presence not with us is very different," Jamie said. "It's slowly, over time, getting used to the fact that she's gone ... She was really a blessing, even though I didn't know it [sometimes]. I loved how she was really happy and never sad. Even though she would yell at me and fight with me sometimes, we always got over it. She loved me, and I loved her."

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