

## Our City

Is it vain to be proud of accomplishing something no one else around you has? Vanity can be an ugly thing, so I hope not. I say “around” because I have only seen it in teams from California and Texas.

Natalina Sents, a research reporter for the online publication, Successful Farmer Magazine, was the keynote speaker at the opening session of the annual State FFA Leadership Conference last Wednesday in Twin Falls. Prior to her keynote address she had arranged for an interview with me and several of our Chapter’s conference competitors. Her interest in our chapter stemmed from the fact that among most FFA chapters in the west we are unique in our demographic; many schools’ student bodies look like American Falls but very few FFA chapters resemble their schools’. As Sents interviewed the members I couldn’t have been more proud as I heard senior Angelica Hernandez state, “The chapter makes me feel valued and welcome, like I have a real part in its and my own success and future.” “It’s okay, even safe to fail here, to try new things, to make ourselves better,” offered junior, Mitsy Ledesma. Aliyanna Broncho commented, “We can be and do anything we set our minds and hearts to do in this chapter.” And, from a mere freshman, Lily Neibaur, “I don’t see color, I see friends and teammates.”

After the interview with Ms. Sents it was time to compete. As this year’s Ag Issues team of Kimberly Medel, Aliyanna Broncho, Eduardo Ramirez, Trevor Povey, Elizabeth Torres, Mckinnon Bradley and Aleana Cataluna took the stage my last words to them were, leave no doubt. As they competed the freshman Conduct of Chapter Meetings team of Arianna Hernandez, Abby Cortez, Jessica Chiapa, Lily Neibaur, Gracie Nelson, Lili Bell and Nadiezhda Rivas began their written parliamentary procedure test, the first part of their two day event.

The crucible of competition has the ability to bring out the very best in some while often times many are less fortunate, on Thursday the competition continued. Of the 36 members who attended and competed at last week’s State events all excelled in the crucible; perhaps none more so than Parker Funk. The one thing I have always appreciated about our community was that “farm kids” have always contributed to the family farm, at least while growing up. Parker is no different; however, his experience has been unique to any of those I have been previously involved in. Through a series of two interviews last week, countless hours of work previously and exceptional records documenting growth and learning Parker was selected as State Star in Agricultural Placement for his work on his father’s farm. Further, he was selected as the State Gold Proficiency Award winner in Agricultural Service. Yet, I think all those may have paled in light of the internship offer he was given by one of his interviewers from Dow-DuPont. I don’t know of another high school student who has been offered \$20 per hour, a truck, credit card and a potential college scholarship because of the skill set consisting of flying agricultural drones, reading and interpreting satellite imagery of farm fields and writing inventory software that they developed in high school. I was standing next to Parker when the offer was made, it was really cool!

As Thursday progressed it found the Ag Issues team on the awards stage with the other top competitors. As the results were being given I looked across at the other teams, ours vastly different. After the final announcement and the following press pictures we made our way outside to a quiet place. It was with humility of mind and a warmth in my heart that I looked

at them, my face showing every emotion I felt. Their faces like mine beamed with both pride and modesty as tears streaked makeup and bare cheeks. They were the sixth team in seven years from American Falls to win this event a feat matched by no other school in Idaho FFA history. Of all those teams they are the most diverse in every way. In them, as in each of my students, I see the open promise of potential and if intuition is a real thing they may surprise even me.

Read in next week's Press how the entire Chapter fared. Vanity or not, I am exceedingly proud of each of those who competed and grew to be better than even they imagined possible. As a community I think we all should be.

Until next week...