



THE WASHINGTON
Informen

40TH ANNUAL SPELLING BEE



THE WASHINGTON
Informen



ENERGY ANSWERS TO MAKE KNOWLEDGE KING.



Washington Gas is proud to work with public officials, business leaders and local organizations to help our children achieve. To learn more about how we are helping create a healthier, more vibrant community, visit washingtongas.com.

**Washington Gas Congratulates
the Washington Informer Spelling Bee Participants**



CITYWIDE SPELLING BEE FINALISTS OUTLINE THEIR STRATEGIES

Sam P.K. Collins
WI Staff Writer

The top three finalists in this year's citywide spelling bee each had the support of family members who helped them study and imparted words of wisdom the winners used to keep their cool while spelling challenging words.

On March 19, Charlie Palmore followed in the footsteps of his older brother, 2019 spelling bee winner Teddy Palmore, when he clinched first-place at the 40th annual Washington Informer Spelling Bee. His winning word was "dyphasia" defined as a language disorder marked by deficiency in the generation of speech, and sometimes also in its comprehension, due to brain disease or damage.

Within a matter of weeks, Charlie will compete against other spellers at Scripps National Spelling Bee at the Gaylord National Resort Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland. While reflecting on his accomplishment, Charlie, who participated in the citywide bee two years ago, said all the hours of sifting through spelling lists and studying countries of origin proved helpful.

"I had a feeling of satisfaction and happiness for having done that," Charlie said. "My brother gave me some useful pointers in helping me study. I definitely knew there were some eyes on me, and I just thought about how maintaining my composure would give me a clear head which would be necessary to do well."

After nearly three hours of competition at the D.C. Office of Cable Television, Film, Music, and Entertainment (OCTFME), Charlie, an eighth-grader at St. Albans School in Northwest, proudly held up his trophy alongside second-place winner Reva Kelly of Washington Latin Public Charter School in Northwest and third-place winner Nina Keefe of Oyster-Adams Bilingual School in Northwest.

Charlie, Reva, and Nina competed against 28 other young people from District public, public charter, private and parochial schools. They stepped to the mic to spell multisyllabic and phonetically challenging words. Participants often requested a definition, pronunciation, and country of origin as their parents and other audience members sat in quiet anticipation.

OCTFME's Cecily Fernandez and NBC4's Justin Finch served as hosts, while David Zahren, a Prince George's County television instructional specialist, pronounced words to contestants. Dr. Elizabeth Primas of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, Jason Moore, city-wide spelling bee coordinator, Mawuena De-Souza of DC Public Schools [DCPS], and author-journalist-poet Jonathan Lewis served as judges.

The number of contestants dwindled throughout the competition as judges rang the bell after a misspelling requiring a participant to leave the stage. Though she would meet a similar fate at the very end of the round, Reva said she enjoyed the process and understands, now more than ever, how the study habits she formed will help her meet her goal of becoming an astronaut.

"I would go through the list for words that seemed more difficult," said Reva, an

eighth-grader who said she used study packets beforehand for the second time in three years to prepare for the citywide bee.

"I'd ask my mom and dad to quiz me, and that would be helpful in just learning how to spell the words. You can learn many words to help you in school later and give you a better work ethic to learn time management and determine how hard to study," she said.

Sponsors of this year's spelling bee included DCPS, Scripps National Spelling Bee, Pepco Exelon, the Safeway Foundation, WGL Holdings, the Washington Nationals, Foundation for the Advancement of Music & Education, Merriam-Webster, and Silver Spring Signarama. Speakers included State Superintendent Dr. Christina Grant, who commended the students for their dedication as they faced a pandemic that forced many of them to adjust to virtual learning.

Nina said the road to third place came with much determination. In her second year back at the citywide spelling bee, Nina aspired to make it past the second round, where she got eliminated as a fifth-grader in 2019. Achieving this goal required her to study for at least one hour a day, focusing on intermediate and higher-level spelling words.

Through it all, Nina's parents continued to encourage her and keep her excited about the big day.

"It's very fun to be on that stage and advance that far," said Nina, a seventh-grader at Oyster-Adams.

"It feels like your work pays off," she continued. "You have to have the skills to be able to study all of these words every day and do the hard part before you can do the fun part. You have to maintain a rigorous schedule that requires you to think a lot every single day for a long period of time," she added.

LaVar Burton, actor, director, educator and lifelong children's literacy advocate, will host the 2022 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

"The selection of Mr. Burton as host aligns with the mission of the Scripps National Spelling Bee. To have such a prominent advocate for children's literacy involved in this special and unique competition is a perfect match. We have the same goals: to

educate tomorrow's leaders and build reading competency in all young people," said Dr. J. Michael Durnil, executive director of the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

The 2022 National Scripps Spelling Bee will make its primetime debut on ION, Bounce and Laff, available free and over-the-air to viewers as well as on cable and streaming. ION will televise the Semifinals on June 1 and the Finals on June 2.

ION, the No. 5 most-watched entertainment network in primetime, and Bounce, America's first and No. 2 most-watched African American-focused over-the-air network, are each available in nearly 120 million households across the country.

SBS
@SamPKCollins



▲ First and second place winners Charlie Palmore and Reva Kelly prepare for interviews after claiming the winning trophies during the 40th Annual Spelling Bee. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



We are defined by our
commitment to excellence.

At Pepco, we welcome and respect people with different perspectives, backgrounds and traits because we know that diverse teams drive powerful outcomes. We take pride in our long history of inclusion and are committed to promoting change that leads to improved economic and social equity in our communities. That's what drives us.

We are proud to support the 40th annual D.C. Spelling Bee, presented by The Washington Informer, and congratulate this year's participants.

pepco.com

© Potomac Electric Power Company, 2022



MEET THE WINNERS!

◀ Reva Kelly (left) and Charlie Palmore stand with Tracye Fun (center), who represents Washington Gas as one of the Bee's sponsors. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)

TROPHY TABLE



Silver Spring | DC North
Signarama
The way to grow your business.

**Innovative Signage Solutions
to help you grow your business**

Official Sign Company of **The Washington Informer**

SILVER SPRING, MD ☎ 301.273.3462
✉ Info@Signarama-SilverSpring.com

WASHINGTON, DC-North ☎ 202.506.2194
✉ Info@Signarama-DCNorth.com

WASHINGTON INFORMER SPELLING BEE CELEBRATES 40 YEARS

Sam P.K. Collins
WI Staff Writer

When Ronald Benson-El became a first place citywide spelling bee winner in 1984, The Washington Informer had been the sponsor of the competition for two years. He said his widely-televised victory not only brought him to regional prominence but sparked interest in the newly-revived annual event.

Ronald, then a student at Miner Elementary School in Northeast, later represented D.C. in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. He would be among the first to do so in several years. During that competition, he went toe to toe with top-notch spellers from across the country, many of whom he studied with and later formed lifelong bonds.

Nearly 40 years later, Benson-El, now an actor who goes by Eli El, continues to relish that moment. Though he admits the frequent acknowledgment from strangers sometimes became overwhelming, Benson-El credited the spelling bee with instilling the spirit of consistency that's pivotal to perfecting his acting craft.

"People recognized me. It made me see things differently," said Benson-El who lives in the D.C. metropolitan area.

"I had a great coach, Mrs. Wilson, who practiced with me," he said. "We took old spelling books from previous years and studied different words and word origins. It was pretty intense. They actually set aside time during the day [for me] to study with her. With that win came a lot of notoriety."

On March 19, The Washington Informer hosted the 40th annual citywide spelling bee at the DC Office of Cable Television, Film, Music and Entertainment. Weeks prior, several dozen students who won spelling bees at their public, public charter and private schools participated in cluster bees at THEARC in Southeast.

After two days of spirited competition, 33 young people clinched a spot at the citywide bee. The cluster bee, held Feb. 9 and 10, preceded the annual citywide spelling bee. During the cluster bee, more than 140 spelling bee champions from 47 public, public charter and private schools participated

in four competitions that brought them face to face with peers from across the city.

At various levels of competition,

judges called on participants, whose grade levels ranged between third and eighth grades, to spell words from a common list. If they spelled a word correctly, the moderator advised the contestant and they were allowed to return to their seat. The ring of a judge's bell followed each incorrect spelling. From there, contestants left the stage while their peers, family members and others cheered them on for their efforts.

Forty years ago, students across the city took similar steps to participate in The Washington Informer's first citywide spelling bee at what was then known as Bertie Backus Junior High School in Northeast. In the years leading up to this event, District public school officials sought to create a platform for students to compete locally after The Washington Star, in its acquisition of The Washington Daily News, declined to continue sponsorship of the citywide bee.

By the time Washington Informer founder and publisher Dr. Calvin Rolark, and his daughter Denise Rolark, then managing editor, coordinated the citywide spelling bee, District students had been unable to compete locally for more than a decade. The father-daughter duo, in conjunction with the late Dr. Mary E. White, then the supervising director of D.C. Public Schools Division of Instructional Services, Department of English, breathed new life into the citywide spelling bee.

Celebrations briefly came to a halt however when Scripps National Spelling Bee officials deemed first place citywide winner John Krattenmaker ineligible because The Informer, a weekly paper, sponsored the local spelling bee. Scripps rules, at the time, limited sponsorship to only daily newspapers. The Washington Informer was and remains a weekly publication.

Dr. Rolark quickly sprang into action, threatening to file an injunction that would prevent the Scripps National Spelling Bee from taking place in the District. Shortly after, Scripps acquiesced but it was too late for Krattenmaker to participate in the national competition. Had Dr. Rolark followed through, the injunction alleged Scripps' discriminated against African-American owned papers,



▲ Nikoloz (nik) Dzimtseishvili, a 4th grader at National Presbyterian School, spelling a word during the 40th Annual Spelling Bee. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



▲ The DC spelling bee organizer Jason B. Moore (left) and the judges, Jonathan C. Lewis and Dr. Elizabeth Primas, celebrate the spellers. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)

► Sara Negatu, a 3rd grader at Hyde Addison Elementary finds comfort in her father's arms after misspelling a word. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



many of which published weekly editions and served majority African-American districts. But it opened the door for Benson-El to become the first speller from the District to return to the national competition.

Several years later, The Washington Informer continues to host a citywide spelling bee that attracts thousands of young people.

Informer publisher Denise Rolark Barnes gives credit to the role NBC4 played in bringing the annual competition to a wider audience. "Beginning in its second year, Aisha Karimah, former NBC4 public affairs director, secured the station as a broadcast partner. For more than 35 years, the station was the home of the city-wide spelling bee and the place where Washington area viewers could cheer on local students," Rolark Barnes said.

When major renovations began at the station's broadcast facility on Nebraska Avenue, N.W., the bee was forced to find a new home. "Thanks to a decision by Angie Gates, director of the D.C. Office of Cable Television, Film, Music and Entertainment (OCTFME) the spelling bee found a new home. For the past three years, OCTFME produces and broadcasts the city-wide spelling bee at its facility and airs it on its DCN and DKN stations," Barnes explained. This year's bee will air on April 10.

In 2015, The Informer began to sponsor the Prince George's County Spelling Bee when The Gazette and Gazette Star declined to keep doing so.

As the spelling bee continues to grow, some people, including Dr. Elizabeth Primas, remain a constant presence in the competition.

Primas, who returned to this year's spelling bee as head judge, started working with The Informer Spelling Bee in 2004 while serving as a director of literacy. She said the bee aligned with her mission to boost literacy among young people. In addition, she strengthened school libraries and showed teachers how to teach students how to read across all content areas.

With the spelling bee's success over the last 40 years, Primas continues to advocate for the inclusion of students from District public schools, public charter schools, private and parochial schools, and homeschools. While participation in the bee has waned in recent years for a bevy of reasons, including rising registration costs, the retirement of spelling bee coaches and the pandemic, The Informer continues to facilitate spelling bee activities.

Primas said she recognizes the spelling bee as an opportunity to celebrate young people's scholastic aptitude and love for learning.

"The greatest thing is seeing the pride that children take in learning how to spell difficult words," said Primas, who's currently the education program manager for the National Newspaper Publishers Association. "When students learn spelling rules for multiple international languages, they increase their ability to spell any word they're given at the bee."

Past spelling bee winner Joseph Goings said he can attest to the thrill of learning new words. Throughout the late 1980s and until 1991, Goings counted among several young people who took part in the citywide spelling bee. In 1991, while in the sixth grade at Leckie Elementary School in Southwest, he placed eighth.

That experience, Goings said, primed him for a career in music and journalism where he had numerous opportunities to utilize his expansive vocabulary to convey important messages. He has done so at The Informer, The Washington Afro-American

Newspaper, and through various independent ventures, including "Breakout Kings Radio" and "Balancing Act Radio Show," which he hosted on WIND-CRadio.com in 2017 and 2018 and 2018 to 2021, respectively.

In reflecting on his spelling bee experience, Goings, who hails from Southeast, said he recognized early on the gravity of his presence on the stage.

"I had a bit of pride representing Ward 8 and doing what I did," Goings said. "A lot of those kids were from Uptown and more of the affluent neighborhoods in D.C.. The good thing about spelling bees is that it fosters healthy competition but you're in competition with yourself because you have to learn how to spell those words." **SBS**

@SamPKCollins



► Ronald Benson-El became a first place citywide spelling bee winner in 1984, The Washington Informer had been the sponsor of the competition for two years.

MEET THE SPELLERS



Abraham Latner
BASIS DC
5th Grade



Melat Abebe
St. Augustine Catholic School
6th Grade



Lena Voss
Janney Elementary School
4th Grade



Hunter Paulson
Maury Elementary School
4th Grade



Nathaniel Ezra
St. Augustine Catholic School
8th Grade



Nyima Ross
Bruce Monroe Elementary School
at Park View / 5th Grade



Taras Tsyganok
Holy Trinity School



Immanuel Brandon
Washington Latin PCS
Middle School / 7th Grade



Charlie Palmore
St. Alban's School for Boys
8th Grade



Sophia Yoo
Stoddert Elementary School
4th Grade



Nina Keefe
Oyster-Adams Bilingual School
7th Grade



Liam Stockton
Hearst Elementary School



Lena Kaufmann
Holy Trinity School
5th Grade



Caiya Murray
Langdon EC
5th Grade

MEET THE SPELLERS



Francisco Jijon
National Presbyterian School
5th Grade



Arabella Bernstein
Lafayette Elementary School
5th Grade



Cecilia Wakely
Maury Elementary School
4th Grade



Marcus Capoccia
Ross Elementary School
3rd Grade



Noah Rowe
MacFarland Middle School
6th Grade



Tseyang Lhamo
Bancroft Elementary School
3rd Grade



Costas Brinkerhoff-Molluzzo
Janney Elementary School
5th Grade



Ethan Crawford
Columbia Heights Educational
Campus / 8th Grade



Sara Negatu
Hyde Addison Elementary School
3rd Grade



Ryan Bohr
Janney Elementary School
4th Grade



Lake Angehr-Sun
Lafayette Elementary School
5th Grade



Eli Trayner
Lafayette Elementary School
4th Grade



Hunde Mulata
MacFarland Middle School



Raviv Pogach
Marie Reed Elementary School
4th Grade

MEET THE SPELLERS



Nikoloz (Niko) Dzimtseishvili
National Presbyterian School
4th Grade



Jasper Kaplan
Oyster-Adams Bilingual School
6th Grade



Ja'Kayla Duncan
Savoy Elementary School
5th Grade



Maleah Queen
Tyler Elementary School
5th Grade



Reva Kelly
Washington Latin PCS
Middle School / 8th Grade

Education



**Education
Spells Success!**

SAFEWAY 
—Foundation—

is proud to support
The Washington Informer
Spelling Bee

2022 PRIZE LIST

First Place Winner:

- First Place Trophy – courtesy of Washington Informer Charities
- \$300 gift Card – courtesy of The Washington Informer and Washington Informer Charities
- Hotel stay for the week of The Scripps National Spelling Bee at The Gaylord – courtesy of The Washington Informer and Washington Informer Charities
- Washington Informer swag bag with assorted gifts from sponsors

Second Place Winner:

- Second Place Trophy – The Washington Informer and Washington Informer Charities
- \$200 gift Card - courtesy of The Washington Informer and Washington Informer Charities
- Washington Informer swag bag with assorted gifts from sponsors

All other finalists:

- Finalist Trophy – courtesy of The Washington Informer and Washington Informer Charities
- Washington Informer swag bag with assorted gifts from sponsors



► Spellers waiting their turn. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)

◀ Nina Keefe a 7th grader at Oyster-Adam Bilingual School was the Spelling Bee's 3rd place winner. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)

▼ Spellers waiting their turn. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



CAPTURE THE MOMENT 1



▲ The audience pays close attention to the words being spelled. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



▲ Remaining spellers waiting their turn. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)

◀ Ciaya Murray a 5th grader at Langdon School was one of the few remaining spellers towards the end. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



**THE DC OFFICE OF CABLE TELEVISION, FILM, MUSIC
AND ENTERTAINMENT
HOSTS**



TUNE IN TO OUR NETWORKS FOR COVERAGE



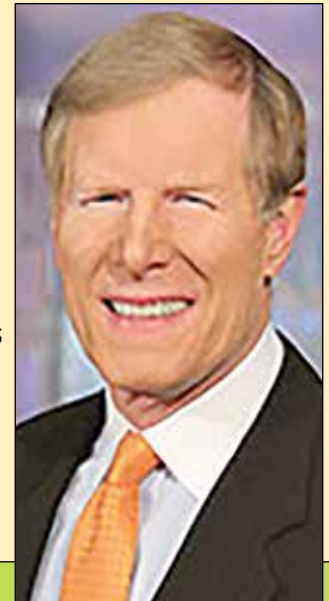
**GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR**

This is his 6th year as the Citywide Spelling Bee Pronouncer.

Mr. David Zahren is currently a television instructional specialist with the Prince George's County Public Schools' Department of Television Resources and Web Services. This is his 48th year with PGCPs. Over the past 30+ years, Mr. Zahren has written, produced, and hosted four award-winning science programs that have aired on cable television: "Give Science A Hand," a hands-on approach to science aimed at elementary school students; "Science Bowl," an interscholastic science game show; "Under the Microscope," a series of staff development programs for elementary teachers that also airs nationwide on PBS stations, and a new series, "Anatomy of a Lesson."

Mr. Zahren is a cum laude graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Pittsburgh and has a master's degree in school administration and human relations from George Washington University. In 1985, after a teaching career that had spanned fourteen years, including three years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nairobi, Kenya, Mr. Zahren was selected as Maryland's Teacher in Space candidate. He was one of 100 teachers chosen from the 40,000 applicants nationwide to vie for a flight aboard the space shuttle Challenger.

Mr. Zahren has received a number of awards, including the CINE Golden Eagle, for his work as a science teacher, a television host and producer, and a space educator. He continues to produce and host public television programs with the Department of Television Resources and Web Services in Prince George's County and has served for 17 years as host of "It's Academic," a high school quiz program that airs on WJZ-TV, the CBS affiliate in Baltimore. He retired in 2015 from Washington's WJLA-ABC 7/News Channel 8 after working 25 years as a part-time weather forecaster.



MEET THE PRONOUNCER

MEET THE 2022 JUDGES

Dr. Elizabeth Primas
Education Program Manager
National Newspaper
Publishers Association

Jason B. Moore
Manager: Elementary
Assessments & Interventions
DCPS

Jonathan C. Lewis
Author, Poet, Journalist

Mawuena De-Souza
Manager: Secondary
Assessments & Interventions
DCPS

► Jonathan C. Lewis and Dr.
Elizabeth Primas. (Roy Lewis/
The Washington Informer)



CAPTURE THE MOMENT 2



▲ Justin Finch of NBC4 and Cecily Fernandez of OCTFME hosted the 40th Annual Spelling Bee. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



▲ Denise Rolark Barnes, Publisher Washington Informer, give the spellers some of their last instructions, before they take the stage at DC Cable and Film in Northeast. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



▲ And then there were three. Ciaya Murray spelling a word before being eliminated. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



▲ Group shot of all spellers. (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



▶ Charlie Palmore (Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)



THE WASHINGTON Informer



Your Link To The African American Community

WINNER OF THREE SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS D.C. AWARDS

THE WASHINGTON Informer

Vol. 57, No. 15 • January 27 - February 2, 2022

Don't Miss
This Month's
WI Bridge
Center
Section

D.C. Students Hold 'Walk Out' with Demands of Stronger COVID-19 Safety Measures in Schools

Sam PK Collins
WI Staff Writer

On Tuesday, Jan. 25, longstanding concerns about insufficient COVID-19 mitigation in D.C. schools resulted in scores of disappointed students to either stay home or leave their respective school grounds during lunch hour.

Young people from at least a dozen public and public charter schools participated in the citywide walkout coordinated by Students 4 Safe Learning (S4SL), a group of DC Public Schools (DCPS) students who continue to advocate for safer learning conditions now and until the pandemic ends.

Advocates of the movement said their demands include greater transparency about COVID-19 cases, metrics which would determine when schools should transition to virtual learning, weekly testing of the entire student body and universal access to KN95 masks.

Some remain frustrated with the death of more informative conversations which collectively advised students, parents, teachers and administrators about the Omicron variant that not only compelled a string of closures in December but would also discipline about the total number of positions.

WALK OUT Page 34

Former Md. Rep. Donna Edwards Announces Bid to Reclaim House Seat

William J. Ford
WI Staff Writer

Just one day after former Rep. Donna Edwards announced her plan to represent the 4th Congressional District, she had raised more than \$100,000.

"I am humbled by the outpouring of support we have received since joining the race," she said in a statement Friday, Jan. 21. "I'm running because our voices have not been heard, our families and workers have been left behind and our children have not been a priority. I want to fix that. I couldn't sit on the sidelines anymore. I'm ready to go back to fighting for our country and using my Congressional seniority to deliver results for our district on day one."

Edwards, elected in 2008, remains the first and only Black

EDWARDS Page 13

D.C. Residents Grow More Vocal with Opposition to District's Vaccine Mandate

James Wright
WI Staff Writer

Some District residents say they're uncomfortable with D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser's executive order mandating that patrons of certain establishments must have a vaccination card for entry or not be served.

"I don't support government mandates and especially in the area of health," said Aimee Thoma, an attorney who lives in Ward 8. Thoma attended the "Defeat the Mandates" rally that took place on the National Mall on Jan. 25.

Thoma said political progressives in their quest to eliminate the coronavirus pandemic have gone too far with the mandates.

As of Jan. 15, anyone in the District who wants to go to a restaurant, bar, nightclub, brewery or fast-food establishment that offers seating must have proof that they have had at least one shot of a coronavirus vaccine.

Known as a vaccine mandate, businesses can be penalized by the District government for not following the order. Additionally, District government employees, especially those in the public

VACCINE Page 34

Celebrating 57 Years of Service / Serving More Than 50,000 Readers Throughout The Metropolitan Area

www.washingtoninformer.com





The Award Winning African American Newspaper
Celebrating Our 57th Year of Service

The Washington Informer and Washington Informer Charities Congratulate our 40th Annual Washington Informer Spelling Bee Winner!



The Bee will air on
District Knowledge Network (DKN)
on Sunday April 10, 2022 at 3 pm



We celebrate all of our finalists and everyone who helped make our
40th Annual Washington Informer Spelling Bee a huge success.



Winner
Charlie Palmore
St. Alban's School for Boys / 8th Grade
(Roy Lewis/The Washington Informer)

Thank You
To Our
Partners
and
Supporters

