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first," she said.

But with a drive to do better, she began to grow not only in her research skills as a Lincoln-Douglas debater, but in herself, she said.

"I had a motivation to do well, and we had a lot of senior members of the team who were able to guide me in that process," said Kaitlyn, explaining an incredibly steep learning curve with Lincoln-Douglas.

Lincoln-Douglas is a form of debate which focuses on conflicting values of social and philosophical issues by examining questions of morality, justice and democracy, among others.

Kaitlyn, who has attended Laurel since kindergarten, started placing her freshman year, and has continually amassed accolades ever since.

She was invited to the prestigious World Schools debate last year and recently capped off her season with an 11-0 record at the State Tournament, where she was named the Lincoln Douglas Debate State Champion.

A national qualifier, Kaitlyn will travel to Phoenix in June to take the debate stage, and is anxiously awaiting the topic it will center on, which is unveiled in early May.

Also, as one of the top two Lincoln-Douglas Debaters in the state, Kaitlyn was invited earlier this month to the City Club of Cleveland's annual High School Debate Championship where she debated on the topic "Justice Requires Open Borders for Human Migration," and placed runner up.

She is currently one of six Lincoln-Douglas debaters on her school's team.

Lincoln-Douglas is one of the most difficult events in speech and debate, Rachel Rothschild, Laurel's Director of Speech and Debate, noted, and requires a great amount of effort.

"It involves the highest level of work and commitment," she said, since Lincoln-Douglas debaters have no partner with whom to split the work.

Often, Kaitlyn and her teammates are at school preparing late into the evening, she added.

Despite the demands, Kaitlyn remains not only a stable presence on the team, Ms. Rothschild continued, but is a mentor for others.

**"She is constantly available to help others with their cases and do that back and forth," Ms. Rothschild said. "She is definitely one of the mentors in the upper class who helps facilitate the transition in for young kids, helping them learn the ropes."**

Kaitlyn also serves alongside another student as coach of the Middle School team on Extemporaneous Debate.

"I share my experience in speech and debate (with them)," Kaitlyn said, "and how much it has taught me about policy-making and

morality."

That aspect of Lincoln-Douglas, which focuses on the philosophies of policies, whether moral or not, is what holds her interest, Kaitlyn said.

One of her favorite topics of debate was during sophomore year, she said, where she delved into the labor unions' Right to Strike. In the state tournament, she would debate on whether Supreme Court justices had to be term-limited, diving into different moralities associated with this as well as rules of law and the function of the court.

She approaches her research like a funnel, Kaitlyn described, starting pretty broad, first learning the basics, then going deeper and connecting it to philosophy.

Kaitlyn has also focused for the past couple of years on biomedical research, garnering awards at the Northeast Ohio Science and Engineering Fair at Cleveland State University.

"My extracurriculars are very heavily researched-focused," Kaitlyn said, adding that, as a result, time management is a "tricky thing." She makes sure she uses her time, including her free periods at school, wisely, she said.

"Sleep is important to me," Kaitlyn said with a warm smile. "I chunk out my work for speech and debate, setting aside dedicated time to work on it and do my research."

"I'm definitely hoping to pursue research long term," she continued, whether it be biomedical- or economics-focused. "I hope to be involved in research in 10 years."

By SUE REID

Despite capping off Laurel School's Speech and Debate season by being named the Lincoln Douglas Debate State Champion, Hunting Valley resident Kaitlyn Ernst would not call herself a natural from the start.

"I was very shy in middle school, like a lot of kids," Kaitlyn, a 17-year-old junior, recalled. "I would not say



Ernst

I was a natural."

But through speech and debate, which she began her freshman year, she came out of her shell, she said.

"I remember my first-ever round," described Kaitlyn, who also took part in Model U.N. in middle school, "and

it didn't go well."

She talked about Social Contract Theory and kind of went in "feet

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She is confident that speech and debate will serve her well in the future.

"A lot of the topics we focus on each season have a different subject matter, if you will," she said, with her becoming proficient in them all.

When she is not researching or at school, Kaitlyn is like all normal teenagers, she said, hanging out with friends or enjoying a romantic comedy.

Ms. Rothschild noted that speech and debate is like a sport in itself. It is considered one of the few extracurricular activities that require the same time commitment as sports. For about six months, team members are gone every Saturday for several hours a day.

"Laurel has really provided me with an excellent platform to take an interest in this," said Kaitlyn, whose mother, Lynn, is a Laurel alumna.

She said she is grateful for great faculty like Ms. Rothschild who lend constant support.

"It's not like we have fans in the stadium cheering us on," Kaitlyn said. "It's really a student-by-student base."

Kaitlyn did have her whole school cheering on from afar, though, Ms. Rothschild said, when her City Club debate was live-streamed to a crowd in the school's chapel.

Kaitlyn said she sees her ongoing involvement in the club as a great benefit overall.

"Speech and debate helps young women step up to a more assertive role," Kaitlyn said, "and learn more about themselves in the process."