

Local students make it to states in nat'l geography bee

By **PATRICK J. BUECHI**
Staff Reporter

A couple local students are putting Buffalo on the map. Zachary Hawley and Brigid Benson, both eighth-graders made their way to the state finals of the National Geographic Geography Bee held April 8 in Albany. They joined 100 students from across the state.

The National Geographic sponsors the contest to encourage teachers to include geography in their classrooms, spark student interest in the subject, and increase public awareness about geography. Schools with students in grades four through eight are eligible.

At the New York State Museum in Albany, the contestants were placed in small groups and asked eight preliminary rounds of questions about national capitals, natural resources and history, as well as current events. So, it takes a well-rounded student to be able to compete. The top 10 students advance to the final round, which is a mix of oral and written

questions. The two finalists go to the championship round.

Hawley, from Immaculate Conception School in East Aurora, got six out of eight questions correct in the preliminary round.

"I thought I did pretty good in it," he said. "There were a lot of good questions there, very hard questions about countries that some people haven't even heard of."

One of the questions he got wrong pertained to a sunken submarine, the ARA San Juan. "I was a country off, like one to the right," he said. "It stinks. I had a chance to get in if I didn't get that wrong."

The East Aurora resident is no stranger to foreign cities. His hockey team has taken him to Pittsburgh; Columbus, Ohio; Indiana's Notre Dame University, and soon Boston. He enjoys traveling and seeing different cultures. Known as an avid reader who enjoys English and Science, Social Studies is his favorite subject in school. "I like the diversity of all the different people," he said.



PATRICK J. BUECHI/STAFF

Immaculate Conception eighth-grader Zachary Hawley points to Albany, where he competed in the National Geographic Geography Bee. Hawley represented his East Aurora school in the state championship in April.

"There are so many stories to tell from all around the world. Everyone has their own path, and it's great to hear what people have."

He credits his love of reading and his school instructors for helping him get so far in the geography bee.

"I read a lot of books. I have Atlases in my house, but a lot of it was here," he said. "I had good teachers."

Benson, from St. Andrew Country Day School in Kenmore, also made it to the preliminary rounds in Albany. She was proud to represent her school, and a little surprised to be chosen.

"I really never studied geography. I just kind of know it," she said. "My father used to tell me stories when I was little, mostly about history, and that helped me understand locations."

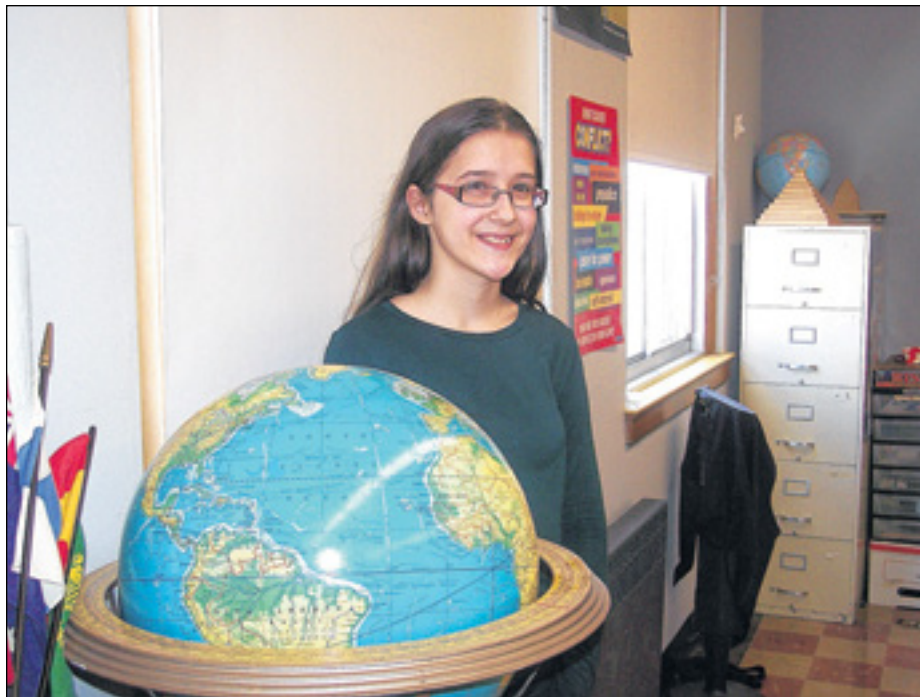
The straight-A student remains modest in spite of her achievement. "I'm not really that important. There's nothing really special about me," she said.

Her Social Studies teacher

sees things differently. "She a fantastic participator," said Daniel Johnson. "Brigid has a real passion for history and geography and her faith. She's an all around nice person."

Benson has already been accepted into Cardinal O'Hara High School in Tonawanda next fall. Hawley will attend St. Francis High School in Athol Springs.

Each year thousands of schools in the United States participate in the National Geographic Bee. Local competitions take place in schools. Representatives of those schools then take an online test to qualify. Fifty-four state and territorial champions will compete in the national championship in Washington, D.C., May 20-23. The champion will receive a \$50,000 college scholarship, a lifetime membership in the National Geographic Society, and an all-expense-paid expedition to the Galapagos Islands. The second-place finisher will receive a \$25,000 scholarship and a \$10,000 scholarship will go to third place.



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Brigid Benson, from St. Andrew's Country Day School in Kenmore, competed in the National Geographic Geography Bee in Albany. She was one of 100 students from New York accepted into the competition.