

The Phoenix

National Recognition for Challenge Seniors
Five Challenge seniors receive College Board and national distinctions
Page 2

Love for a Zombie Love Story
CECHS Theatre puts on a hilarious performance with their first production of the year, "Shake, Rattle and Rot"
Page 3

We're Movin' on Up
A nearly 200,000 dollar grant will allow Challenge to take a huge step forward technologically
Page 4

The Points of Competition
Challenge's Debate Team goes to their first tournament of the year
Page 5

Carnival + Dance = Success
The annual ITS Halloween Dance and HCC Safe Halloween Carnival drew in hundreds...
Page 6

2 0 1 1

Challenge Goes Green

Challenge Green Team kicks off their year of environmental activism with a project to reduce the usage of plastic bags.

By Rachel Lynn Vega

Green Team, a Challenge Early College High School club filled with environmental activists, was started by President Selene Burns and Vice President Dancie Jones. Their first project of the year was called Project STOPP (Students to Oppose Plastic Pollution), an environmental movement to reduce and eventually stop the usage of plastic bags and other plastic materials.

GTA (Green Team America) was started by Gary and Jan Dunham under Al Gore. Stores such as IKEA, Wal-Mart, and Kroger donated 10,000 reusable bags to the organization. The bags were then distributed to various Green Teams at schools throughout Houston to give away in an effort to help reduce and eventually end the usage of plastic bags.

On October 16, 2010, the Green Team met at Kroger on South Post Oak to hand out 300 of the reusable bags. Despite their efforts to improve the environment, the reactions from the grocery store's clientele were not always positive.

Senior Christian Ortiz had some rough moments with them; "Yeah, sometimes the people in the store were really rude or they would completely ignore us," he remarked. "But there were some friendly people who asked us what we were doing, and what was our purpose for handing out the bags."

Despite occasionally receiving the cold shoulder, there was a woman who randomly came up to the Green Team; freshman Trinidad Dominguez said, "A nice lady hugged us; it was nice to feel appreciated."

The Green Team has ambitious goals for the future. They will be involved in future projects such as Project GLOW, also known as The Light bulb Exchange,



Green Team Members (left to right): seniors Christian Ortiz and Joseph Guzman, and sophomores Dancie Jones, Maritza Vazquez-Trejo and Priscilla Ortiz.

in an effort to exchange traditional lightbulbs with more energy efficient CFL's. They also aspire to send a student or teacher overseas this summer to participate in project GLOBE.

In addition, Green Team America will be providing home energy audits, which help to identify areas in the home where electricity is being wasted. They will also suggest low cost ways to help combat the energy losses. These efforts, combined with the rest of CECHS Green Team's future plans, reflect their passion to create a healthier and cleaner environment for the future.

National Recognition for Challenge Seniors

Five Challenge Seniors Receive College Board and National Recognitions.

By Brandi Russell

"I didn't know there was an award for that; I guess it kind of took me by surprise," Isaac Garay remarked casually about his AP scholar award. Tuesday, September 14, 2010, the Challenge Early College High School staff and students gathered for the year's first school wide assembly. The HCC auditorium exploded with applause and cheers as CECHS principal Justin Fuentes recognized five senior students for their academic achievements from their previous school year.

The student body recognized Raquel Azcue, Isaac Garay, and Michael Wiggins-Goff as AP scholars, each student having scored at least a three out of five on three or more AP tests. Isaac took the Spanish Language, World History, and English Literature & Composition exams, scoring a five, four

and three, respectively. Michael scored fives on all three of the exams that he took: World History, English Literature & Composition, and Biology. "It showed that I learned something in the past eleven years of school." Michael said about his achievements.

Also, Noah Gregg and Michael Wiggins-Goff were applauded for qualifying as National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists by scoring in the 99th percentile among Texas students on the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) their junior year; the cutoff score for Texas this year was a 215 out of 240. "Just qualifying as a Semi-Finalist can make colleges want you." Dean Gastonia "Terri" Goodman mentioned, hoping to encourage students to do well on the test.

Luke Jones was recognized as a National Achievement Semifinalist, the second that Challenge has had since the school's inception. The National Achievement award is given to outstanding African American students who score in the 99th percentile of African American students nationwide on the PSAT their junior year; the qualifying score this year was 202.

Challenge has been the graduating high school to many successful students in the past, and this year CECHS is proud to continue that tradition by being the graduating school to these five students.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PSAT

As the date for the PSAT grew closer, juniors studied as teachers emphasized the importance of the test. Juniors of CECHS felt the stress as the realization that this was their final year before taking the SAT sunk in; sophomores were indifferent to testing, but still studied and put in effort; freshman, on the other hand, weren't worried about the impact that it would have on them. "I don't think they understand the importance of it yet," freshman english teacher Mr. Martinez had to say about the freshman PSAT pressure. "We are emphasizing... [and] encouraging the freshmen to prepare for the upcoming year... I feel I emphasized [the PSAT] more with my sophomores last year."

FRESHMAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE PSAT

Freshmen understand that the test serves as preparation for the SAT and can gain them recognition, but to them, the PSAT is just another test to study for that gets them

out of class— nothing for them to worry about. "I'm not really worried because they said for freshman it doesn't really count." Rachel Marchant remarked; another freshman, Eric Cerrato, agreed. However, for the sophomores and especially the juniors, the pressure was on.

SENIOR PRELIMINARY RANKINGS

The PSAT date was approaching, but for seniors, something other than the morning off from high school classes held their attention. On Wednesday, October 6, graduating seniors received their preliminary class ranks. Some proudly rushed to share theirs with their classmates, others stuck it in their pocket to look at later, and some students hid from any mention of class ranks. "I wasn't that excited about my rank, I was confident that I would be in the top ten, so confirming that was good enough for me." Michael Wiggins-Goff remarked about how he felt after reading his class rank. No matter their reaction, senior students were reminded of how close they are to graduation.

Love for a Zombie Love Story

CECHS Theatre puts on a hilarious performance with their first production of the year, "Shake, Rattle and Rot".

By Galilea Perez

Zombies, love, and 90's ballads came in sync to make the CECHS players' performance of "Shake, Rattle and Rot" an extremely amusing show.

Walking into CECHS's Black Box Theatre on Thursday night, I was quickly transported back to 1994. The 90's music blaring through the speakers set the tone for *Shake, Rattle and Rot*, the CECHS Players' first performance of the season. As the play was described as a "Zombie Love Story and Musical", I had no idea what to expect at first; nevertheless, watching the enthusiasm of the parents, students and staff members in the audience changed me from a casual observer to an intrigued audience member.

The beginning of the show was slow, and the opening dance started off stiffly. However, Noah Gregg's dancing along with the rest of the "Zombiettes" saved the first dance and caught my attention, as he was the most expressive dancer in the bunch, and had the noticeably hairiest legs.

After the first dance came Beverly (Maritza Vazquez- Trejo), a flirtatious teenage girl calling out for Roger (Mac Wells). Maritza's performance of Beverly was very natural and well played, having an effortless feel to it as she strutted



Oscar Reyes (bottom left) and Micah Johnson (bottom right) kiss the microphone passionately as the rest of the Golden Girls (top, left to right) Brenda Madrigal, Noah Gregg and Amanda Alvarado gesture towards them at the end of "Earth Angel"

around the stage. Mac Wells' performance was good as well.

As the play progressed, Roger left his current girlfriend Louise (Katie O'Brien) for Beverly, and Louise found new love with a zombie named Andrew (Colin Ostroff). Katie convincingly portrayed the nurturing, sweet character that Louise was supposed to be.

The zombies in "Shake Rattle and Rot" were very entertaining, as there was always something going on when they were involved, so I never grew bored while they were on stage. The two continuously bickering zombies Zeke (Joshua James) and his ex-girlfriend Zsa Zsa (Tamecia Wallace) were always loud and amusing. Zeke was very exaggerated with everything he did, and he stole my attention every time he stepped onto the stage. Zsa Zsa was a crazy complement to Zeke, making them very attention

grabbing characters and a fun duo to watch, however these two were not the only pair to perform so comically.

Billy and Betty (Ernest Ortiz and Jordan Parker) were another humorous addition to the play with their corny jokes and uplifting attitude, but they did not grab as much attention as did the performance by Oscar and the Golden Girls, who were the clear favorites of the audience.

Seeing Noah Gregg dancing in zombie drag, the "Zombiettes" in their bloodstained dresses, and a love story with a human and zombie already seemed like enough to keep me sufficiently captivated, but all of that together was not enough to outshine Oscar and the Golden Girls, (Oscar Reyes, Amanda Alvarado, Brenda Madrigal, Micah Johnson and

*See **Zombies** on Page 7*

We're Movin' on Up

A nearly 200,000 dollar grant will allow Challenge to take a huge step forward technologically

By Michael Wiggins-Goff

Challenge has come a long way since the paper shortage of two years ago. Less than one year after finally being able to replace the desktops in the computer lab and acquiring a set of laptops for Online Credit Recovery and other classes, Challenge has been awarded an approximately 200,000 dollar grant for technology, which will allow teachers to better harness computers and the internet in the classroom.

The grant, initially provided to HISD by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in order to open another early college, was distributed among the five existing early colleges in Houston, including North Early College, East Early College, The Houston Academy for International Studies, South Early College High School, and Challenge Early College. According to Campus Manager Mrs. Connie Alfaro, "HISD requested an amendment to the original grant to allow this, and the TEA agreed, but required that it be used strictly for technology."

Receiving the grant from the district will benefit the school enormously; as Principal Justin Fuentes remarked, "For anything other than professional development, these are

really rare."

Indeed, the few grants that Challenge has received since its inception have all been for the initial establishment of the school, teacher training and professional development, or travel expenses for students to attend the MCNC conference.

Mrs. Alfaro is responsible for ordering all of the different pieces of equipment that the grant will be used for. This process is particularly difficult because certain portions of the budget are allotted only for specific types of supplies. "175,000 dollars are for technology, but 20,000 are for 'other equipment', such as laptop carts, outlets, etc.," she explained. "We have to pay for installation, maintenance, and labor too."

The grant will allow Challenge to provide new equipment for many of the teachers whose classes utilize technology frequently. Freshman English teacher Dr. Fran Guilfoyle, for example, will benefit significantly, as she has been constrained in her Research Writing classes this year by the lack of availability of computers.

"Laptop carts would really solve all of my problems," Dr. Guilfoyle commented. "I have to split up kids between the Go Center and the HCC library... It takes a lot of luck to book the computer lab at HCC, and I can't use the one upstairs at HCC for my 5th



Challenge will use part of the money from the technology grant to purchase three more laptop carts like the one pictured above.

period class, because it doesn't open until nine."

Principal Fuentes hopes that additional laptop carts will give her and other teachers— such as Ms. Billings and Ms. Maltz, whose Guidance classes require frequent use of computers to research schools and work on college applications— the ability to focus more time on lessons and supervising their students, and less on organizing where their classes will have to meet.

To supplement the new laptops, five new wireless contact points will be installed upstairs so that students will not be confined to the areas of the school at which HCC's wireless network is available, as they often are now.

Beyond providing necessities to teachers and students, however, the grant will allow Challenge to implement other more advanced technology within the classroom. According to Principal Justin Fuentes, "We're going to get two of the clicker systems that [former AP World History teacher] Mrs. Chukwu had."

See *Technology* on Page 7



Challenge novice debaters (left to right) Joseph Collins and Ernest Ortiz review strategies with varsity debaters (right to left) Brandi Russell and Emina Halilovic before the competition.

The Points of Competition

Challenge's Debate Team goes to their first tournament of the year

By Maritza Vazquez-Trejo

Suffering from laryngitis, Emina Halilovic whispers apologies to her partner Brandi Russell about the loss of her voice. Joseph Collins stares out the window as the Debate President, Brandi Russell, and Coach Jopowicz struggle to find a solution for the lack of Joseph's partner Ernest Ortiz.

Friday October 15th and Saturday 16th 2010, the Challenge Early College High School Debate Team participated in their first Houston Urban Debate League tournament of the year.

First year debate coach Mr. Jopowicz, who had taught debate but never coached it at previous schools, prepared the CECHS teams alongside

mentors Saraiish Soi and Francisco "Paco" Sanchez, with after school meetings. Coach Jopowicz refers to Challenge Debate as "small but good". He asserts, "We have energy; we have commitment."

Before the tournament began, the novice partners Joseph and Ernest were preparing and going over evidence, last minute detailing for their first debate season. This year's debate topic was United States military presence in the countries of Afghanistan, Japan, North Korea, and Iraq. Varsity partners Brandi and Emina, confident from having past experience, assisted the novice team.

As Saturday morning approached, Emina discovered that her voice was almost gone. After attempting to improve her condition with cough drops, she resolved to continue with the tournament.

Challenge Debate Team members were piling on to the bus with students from Sterling High School when Ernest called Brandi notifying her that he could

not participate in the remainder of the tournament for lack of transportation. Brandi immediately began to search for a substitute debater as Joseph struggled with the decision of whether to forfeit or debate "Maverick" (solo).

Going into the first round of the day debating against a team from Madison High School, he commented that he was "not too terribly confident." Nevertheless, the opposing debaters shook Joseph's hand at the end of the round and complimented him on his boldness to debate without a partner.

Before the final preliminary round, varsity debater Jesus Aguilar arrived to take place as Joseph's partner. Joseph and Jesus waited in the hallway for the next round's judge and opposing team. Jesus, unfamiliar with the case, reviewed strategies and techniques for winning a debate, with the novice debater Joseph.

Emina argued her heart out, though her voice was barely above a whisper, resulting in her and her partner's opponents underestimating them. Yet, the pair of Challenge debaters proved their opponents wrong when the judge went up to Emina and Brandi informing them of their success in the third preliminary round.

Abruptly after hearing this, an unplanned fire alarm rang, disrupting the last of the preliminary rounds. While the teams waited to return inside, Brandi and Emina jumped and smiled at the news they had just received, excited and proud to have a confirmed win. Brandi and Emina pranced back into the school, ready for the next debate. The team who was to debate against Joseph and Jesus forfeited, leaving them with a win for the round, despite having no one to debate against.

The results of the rounds were given after lunch. Holding hands, Emina

See *Debate* on Page 7

Carnival + Dance = Success

The annual ITS Halloween Dance and HCC Safe Halloween Carnival drew in hundreds of students and neighborhood kids to the HCC West Loop Campus on Friday, October 29 for a night of pre-Halloween festivities

By Nathaniel Tedros

The annual HCC Halloween carnival is a safe way for family and friends to enjoy a fun, entertaining evening. Challenge participated by hosting several booths through Community Service Club, led by President Raquel Azcue and sponsors Dean Gastonia Goodman and Dean Dolly Covington.

The team spent countless hours collecting candy and organizing the events. Community Service Club members signed up to volunteer at various booths, as did National Honor Society members as well as other challenge students.

The club held a competition between Advisories to see who could collect the most candy, which generated enough for all of the booths sponsored by Challenge. They also created their own booths, found teacher sponsors, and got everything approved by HCC.

The carnival also had a haunted house, which Mr. Fuentes and Jorge Ruiz-



Challenge physics teacher Mrs. Savitri Ramkisson hands out candy at her sponsored booth at the HCC Safe Halloween Carnival

Rodriguez worked in along with HCC employees. Many students, including senior Jeremiah Wade, thought that it was the best part of the night. "I didn't know it was going to be this scary," he remarked.

The annual CECHS Halloween dance, sponsored by the International Thespian Society (ITS), was held the same night. In order to have a successful event, they had to hire security, gather chaperones, advertise the date, sell tickets, hire and pay a DJ, and gain permission from HCC to remain open after hours.

Although the students were not allowed to wear costumes during school hours due to Stanford testing, they dressed up after testing was over. They showed up in a variety of costumes at the dance: sophomore Oscar Reyes dressed up as a bridge troll.

The dance was a little slow at first but later picked up when the carnival was over and students who had been volunteering began to show up. Oscar initially remarked, "It's slow right now but I feel it's energetic." When the students started to arrive the energy of the dance was at a high level. Even former students came to the dance and carnival to enjoy the festivities.

The night was full of energy, and it was a chance for families and students to gather around for the free festivities. HCC prides itself on holding the carnival annually, as it gives underprivileged kids from the surrounding neighborhoods a chance to have a safe Halloween. The dance was a success as well, raising approximately 700 dollars for ITS. As the night ended, it was clear that the carnival and dance were once again major successes.

Zombies

Noah Gregg) who were definitely the most memorable part of *Shake, Rattle and Rot* for me. Oscar Reyes, dressed as a zombie lounge singer carrying a vintage microphone, stood out more than anyone as he sang along to the 1950's songs "Last Kiss" and "Earth Angel".

I looked around, unsure at first of what was going on, as the entire audience burst into laughter at Oscar and the Golden Girls' performance. As he sang, I noticed Micah Johnson, dressed as a zombie "golden girl" with a long dress, a wig and wonderful red lipstick, dancing along behind him. That is when I knew what all the laughter was about, and my view of the play shifted from really fun and entertaining to over-the-top and hilarious.

Near the end of the play, Micah Johnson walked to the front of the stage and stood face to face with Oscar as he was finishing up his second song "Earth Angel", and they slowly eased their way towards the microphone placed between them, kissing either side of it in unison. The spotlight focused on their lips attached to the microphone, and the entire audience went crazy with loud cheers and laughter.

As Oscar and the Golden Girls faded away, Andrew and Louise re-entered together, and in their love, Andrew miraculously turned into a human again and was able to be with Louise. Likewise, a "punked-out" Beverly returned unexpectedly with big Zeke, revealing that they too were together. Roger, on the other hand, got to spend the rest of his life with crazy Zsa Zsa stuck in a grave. The play ended with the entire cast dancing to "Jail House Rock" and pulling audience members onstage to participate, connecting them with the performers

and making it an overall fun experience for everyone who attended.

Shake, Rattle and Rot was a very delightful and successful play; I would definitely give it four out of five stars, as everyone involved did a wonderful job. Student Director Janay Goodman claimed to be very satisfied with it and proud of the cast and crew. I would recommend attending the upcoming performances by the CECHS players, as I truly enjoyed this play and the originality that the actors and crew members brought to their performance.

Technology

The device allows students to input their answers to quizzes using a remote-control system paired with a computer program, giving students the ability to know their scores instantly. The teacher is also able to see the class average and easily input the student's grades into their grade book.

Principal Fuentes also expects to order at least one "Smart Board", a relatively new device being integrated into classrooms in HISD. "It uses a camera that interfaces with the computer," he explains, "so everything you write shows up on the computer, and what's on the computer can be projected onto the screen."

He expects that this will be particularly invaluable for social studies classes such as freshman AP Human Geography and sophomore AP World History, which frequently use the regular LCD projectors already installed in the classrooms.

While the generous and unexpected grant will clearly bring Challenge to the cutting edge technologically and enhance the

classroom experience for many subjects, having the burden of allotting money for electronics lifted will also finally give the school's administration a chance to relax in deciding how to spend their limited funding.

Debate

and Brandi wait, hoping to enter the Octofinals. "I want to know if I win, I don't want to know if I lose," Joseph said as he waited for the results.

The novice teams that moved on to the Octofinals were announced, but Joseph was not. Brandi Russell and Emina Halilovic were the first team announced to move onto varsity Octofinals.

In the Octofinal round, Emina and Brandi debated confidently and left with high hopes to enter finals. Anxious to hear the results, they once more held hands tightly. Small blue and gold trophies were given to the teams who participated in the Octofinals, but did not make it into the finals.

Emina and Brandi stepped up to receive their trophies, returning to the Challenge Debate team table with disappointment imprinted on their faces. "I feel horrible...but hey, is that smart to debate with laryngitis?" Emina commented to her partner. "I feel like it's my fault that we lost".

To restore the team's confidence, Brandi told Emina and Joseph, "I'm so proud of you guys. Emina, this is our first tournament in varsity and we got a trophy, I am so proud of us."

The sky was orange as the sun went down; the Challenge Debate Team loaded back on the bus, excited for their next tournament.