Winners Announced in Olive Garden's Pasta Tales Essay Contest

Thirteen students around the country recognized for sharing stories of teachers who inspired them

ORLANDO, Fla., May 27, 2010 /PRNewswire via COMTEX News Network/ -- Jim DeLong, a teacher at Bret Harte Middle School in San Jose, Calif., is a true inspiration to his students. Just ask Grace Lee, who was awarded the grand prize in Olive Garden's 14th-annual Pasta Tales essay writing contest for her entry, recognizing his unique teaching style and enthusiasm for education.

(Logo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20070926/CLW047LOGO)

Lee’s essay was chosen from more than 11,000 entries written by students in first through 12th grade who were asked to “Describe a teacher who has inspired you in school and tell how he or she has impacted your life.”

In her essay, Lee, a senior at Leland High School in San Jose, paints a vivid picture of her former English teacher and the special way he engaged her and her peers in their studies. "If your English instructor leaps onto desks waving yardsticks, gives weight-lifting demos using textbooks, and feigns madness as the speaker from the 'Tell-Tale Heart', you know that he is either very interesting or absolutely insane," Lee wrote. "I was in awe of this man. For most of my life I was an introvert, apathetic towards education in general. But, when Mr. DeLong actively combated my ignorance with great vigor, I couldn't help but feel more animated in his class. It is because of him that English is my favorite subject, that I developed a more positive view of school, [and] that I started participating in class. His enthusiasm is contagious."

The essays are reviewed by the Quill and Scroll Society of the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Iowa. According to one of the judges, Lee’s essay was “beautifully written with an obvious respect and regard for her instructor. She captured the quirks and caring that make Mr. DeLong so important to her, in a way that any reader can understand.”

As Olive Garden’s Pasta Tales grand prize winner, Lee will receive a $2,500 savings bond, a trip with her family to New York City and dinner at an Olive Garden in Times Square.

“At Olive Garden, we're focused on delighting every guest and having a positive impact on the community,” said Terry Stanley, Olive Garden's executive vice president of marketing. “The educators highlighted in these students' essays are an inspiration to us all, and we recognize them for making such meaningful differences in the lives of so many children.”

Olive Garden also named a Pasta Tales winner in each of 12 grade categories. These winners each receive a $500 savings bond and dinner with their family at their local Olive Garden:

Grade 1: William Lourcey, Texas, Mrs. Melody Sample
Grade 2: Trystin Hottel, Colorado, Ms. Michelle Bedan
Grade 3: Dylan Quick, Georgia, Coach Percy Charlton
Grade 4: Evan Hess, Colorado, his father Mr. Eric Hess
Grade 5: Grace Song, Florida, Mrs. Julie Carrillo
Grade 6: Kathryn Mahoney, New Hampshire, Mrs. Elaine Hebert
Grade 7: Edna Alanis, Texas, Senora Leticia Rodriguez
Grade 8: Marta Frell, Illinois, Mrs. Nancy Fedor
Grade 9: Hina Macadam, Texas, Mrs. Brenda Patterson
Grade 10: Allyson Kiefer, California, Mrs. Gerri Lonergan
Grade 11: Katharine Aten, Texas, Mrs. Vangie Bielke
Grade 12: Kelsey Ford, Pennsylvania, Mrs. Cathy Bauer

Pasta Tales entries were judged on creativity, adherence to theme, organization, grammar, punctuation and spelling by Olive Garden and the Quill and Scroll Society at the University of Iowa. Full copies of the winning essays are available upon request.

Olive Garden is the leading restaurant in the Italian dining segment with more than 700 restaurants, more than 87,000
employees and $3.3 billion in annual sales. Olive Garden is a division of Darden Restaurants Inc. (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest company-owned and operated full-service restaurant company. For more information, visit Olive Garden's Web site at OliveGarden.com.

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