

State geography bee has its first girl winner

By Lonnie Shekhtman CORRESPONDENT



Old Rochester Regional seventh-grader Dante Cusolito of Mattapoisett, far right, is ready to answer the first question of the final round of the 2015 Massachusetts Geographic Bee at Worcester Academy, as his competitors Aidan O'Keefe, Markus Elbert, Rahul Yohhan Kumarasinghe and Scott Clewley watch on Friday. (T&G Staff photos/CHRISTINE HOCHKEPPEL)



WORCESTER — A female student won the state National Geographic Bee on Friday at Worcester Academy, a first in the competition's 27-year history, organizers said.

"We are really psyched," said Rosalie Sokol, 20-year moderator for the event and former geography teacher.

Lucy Chae, a seventh grader from Charles E. Brown Middle School in Newton, defeated runner-up Michael Izdal, a sixth grader from Wilson Middle School in Natick by answering correctly that Australia is the country that includes the islands of Melville, Mornington and Bathurst.

The state's most precocious geographers participated in the competition Friday, winnowed down throughout the day from 103 students to 10 who had correctly answered clever geography questions

like: "A scientist came up with the idea of Velcro when he saw burrs stuck to a dog's fur. ... This invention occurred in which country that borders the Jura Mountains — Switzerland or Slovenia?" (Switzerland)



Though most of the young competitors — fourth through eighth graders — seemingly have been cartophiles, or map lovers, since birth, Ms. Chae said that's not a requirement for winning.

"You hear about these kids studying maps from when they were 3, and I started last year, so it's not impossible," she said.

Her preparation strategy, Ms.

Chae explained, included carrying around a small atlas, which she flipped through in between classes. It also helped that she likes "Googling things," she said.

In May, Ms. Chae will travel to National Geographic Society's headquarters in Washington, D.C. to compete with winners from each state for a \$50,000 college scholarship, a lifetime subscription to National Geographic magazine, and a trip to the Galápagos Islands.

If she wins in Washington, she'll be the second student from Massachusetts to do so in recent history. Sathwik Karnik of Plainville won in 2013.

The Worcester Academy has hosted the bee for three years, though the school's connection to National Geographic dates back to 1899, when Gilbert H. Grosvenor, who graduated from Worcester Academy in 1893, became the first full-time editor of the magazine, and eventually president of National Geographic Society.

Besides Ms. Chae and Mr. Izdal, the competition finalists yesterday were third-place winner Markus Elbert, a sixth grader from Oak Hill Middle School in Newton; Dante Cusolito, a seventh grader from Old Rochester Regional Junior High School in Mattapoisett; Scott Clewley, an eighth grader from McCall Middle School in Winchester; Rahul Kumarasinghe, an eighth grader from the Bromfield School in Harvard; Timothy Vaughan, a seventh grader from Dedham Middle School; Bartosz Mamro, an eighth grader from St. Joseph School in Webster; Fayza Jaleel, a seventh grader from Jonas Clarke Middle School in Lexington; and Aidan O'Keefe, an eighth grader from Glenbrook Middle School in Longmeadow.