

Sons of the American Revolution Rumbaugh Oratory Contest gives students the ‘gift of confidence’

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Glo Cacciato, Northwood senior, shares his winning speech about the lasting legacy of Roger Sherman to the crowd last Saturday at Governors Club as part of the Sons of American Revolution Rumbaugh Oration Contest.

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BY BEN RAPPAPORT, News + Record Staff

CHAPEL HILL — Fifty-three men signed the Continental Association, which called for a trade boycott against British merchants by the colonies. Fifty-six men signed the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Forty-eight men signed the Articles of Confederation, which made the thirteen colonies into one nation. And 39 men signed the U.S. Constitution.

But only one man signed all four documents that formed the basis for the country we know today: Roger Sherman.

Sherman is, in many respects, an unsung hero. He doesn't have the name recognition of Washington or Jefferson, nor the flair of Hamilton or Franklin. But Sherman — like those he stood beside — was steadfast in his commitment to a free country and uncompromising in his principles.

It was those ideals, along with some stellar public speaking, that earned a speech about Sherman the top prize among Chatham County orators at the annual [Sons of the American Revolution Joseph S. Rumbaugh Oratory Contest](#) at Governors Club on March 11.

The winning speech was delivered by Northwood Senior Giovanni Cacciato, who took home the \$250 prize.

“His legacy leaves us with a story of politics,” Cacciato said. “And a refusal to compromise values for political gain. Something modern American leaders often struggle with.”

The Rumbaugh contest, which has been held nationally since 1949, is open to students across the country in 9th through 12th grade. Students must give memorized original, five- to six-minute orations. The subject must deal with an event, personality or document pertaining to the Revolutionary War and show a relationship to America today. Speeches were judged on four categories: composition, delivery, significance and history.

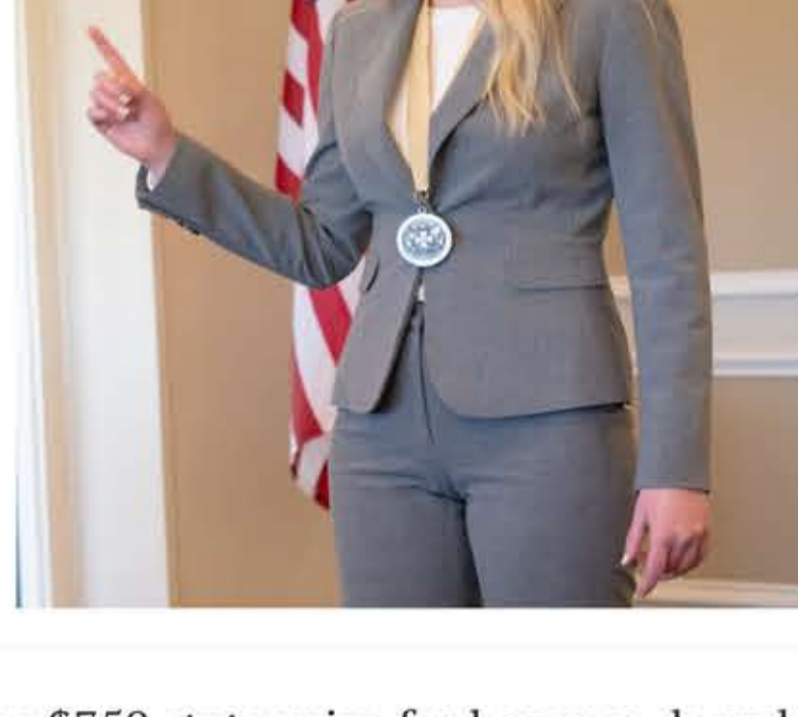
Cacciato's speech also won second place in the state — an additional \$250 prize — last Saturday as he competed against eight other students from the Triangle area.

Other Chatham County orators included Seaforth Sophomores Karl Ferm and Kyle Stinson; and Northwood Senior [Lily Kate Witcher](#). Witcher won third place in the chapter competition for her speech about “Common Sense” by Thomas Paine.



Saturday's contest included members from two N.C. Sons of the American Revolution chapters: [General Francis Nash Chapter](#), which includes Chapel Hill and Chatham County, and the [Raleigh Chapter](#). No orators from other N.C. chapters competed in the state contest.

The top state prize went to Aliza Jankowsky, a senior at Green Hope High School. Her speech was about the life and legacy of Esther Reed, who led the Ladies Association of Philadelphia to provide aid for George Washington's troops during the Revolutionary War.



Jankowsky took home the \$750 state prize for her speech and will present at the state conference in Greensboro in April. If selected as a top-six state winner, she could also compete at a national level in Orlando, Florida.

Lowell Hoffman, N.C. Rumbaugh chairman, helped bring the event to Chatham County and the General Francis Nash Chapter. The local chapter has now competed in the contest for six years. To Hoffman, the event is about more than giving memorized speeches about history, it's about teaching storytelling.

“I see this contest as giving the gift of confidence in public speaking,” Hoffman said. “This is why I do this. The awards and prizes are great, but just by participating, writing, researching, memorizing and delivering an oration, each student will have made progress in developing skills and confidence in expressing ideas and seeking to influence others.”

When Hoffman was in middle school, he was asked by his teacher to lead the Pledge of Allegiance in front of the school. The time came to deliver the iconic words, but his mind drew blank. It was in that moment of choking up that he vowed to become an excellent orator. He's succeeded and now he's passing on that skill to young people across the region.



As the oratory chairman, one of Hoffman's key jobs is marketing the contest and helping to find students to participate. One of the ways he's done that is by connecting with Jill Jackl, an English teacher at Northwood High School. For the past five years, Jackl has recruited students to participate, and frequently win, at Rumbaugh.

“It's not a natural condition for a young person to research intensely, get all dressed up and give a speech on a historical figure,” Jackl said. “So I really appreciate what SAR does to help these kids and bring them into this uncomfortable space in a good way.”

One of the students Jackl recruited to participate was [Riley Shaner](#), who placed second at the national competition in 2019. Shaner, now also an English teacher at Seaforth High School, recruited two of her students — Stinson and Ferm — to compete this year.

From year to year, Hoffman continues to grow the local contest. He credits much of that growth to local support from Governors Club and buy-in from the General Francis Nash Chapter. It helps, too, to see Hoffman's passion for the event, which turns the event from a speech competition into what Chapter President Al Segars calls their “Super Bowl.”

Between each student's speech last Saturday, Hoffman delivers historical orations of his own. He covers the namesake of General Francis Nash, the colonial legacy of Chatham County, the Boston Tea Party and more. It's his way of contributing to the competition and keeping up the energy of the crowd as the master of ceremonies.

“The purpose of our organization is to preserve a respect for our heritage,” Hoffman said. “Part of the way you do that is through youth education. The students who give speeches aren't just talking about their researched topic, they're making the bridge through 250 years of history from the Revolution to today.”

Through the intertwining history, writing and speech, Hoffman believes people better understand the past, and the ways it still influences us today. Segars echoed that sentiment.

“Our society can reach back to the young people and we can start to learn from them what they believe history is all about,” Segars said. “I told the contestants, ‘I learned something from every one of you today and you made my day.’”

National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization dedicated to promoting patriotism, preserving American history and teaching American history to future generations. The General Francis Nash Chapter honors the commander of North Carolina's regiments who served under General George Washington in 1777 at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown, where a British cannonball mortally wounded Nash. For more information, visit

www.ncssar.org/chapters/general-francis-nash.

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