

Community Comment April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013

By Jon Sapper  
Making the Grade

“Humboldt County high school students don’t achieve anything close to what high school students do elsewhere.” You’ve heard that before, haven’t you? And you might even believe it. But nothing and I mean nothing could be further from the truth. The achievement of Humboldt County high school students from public, private and charter schools is stellar and was displayed in grand fashion last week at the River Lodge in Fortuna where students from throughout the county were recognized for their achievements.

The event was the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Stellar Student Awards sponsored by the Rising Stars Foundation. These students have demonstrated exceptional talents in the arts, sciences, mathematics and humanities. Every one of them has a global perspective combined with a passion for making their local community a better place to live.

Previous students are already making their mark on the world. One has completed her Masters Degree in Economics and International Relations. She worked with the U.S. State Department and is now writing on-line economics curriculum for Pearson Education. Another graduated from MIT with majors in physics and planetary science and is now in graduate school working on a degree in astrophysics. Another is majoring in bioengineering working on brain implants for paraplegics and the blind. Another worked closely with Jane Goodall in primate research at the age of 15 while still in high school. Another travelled Europe showcasing their musical talents. Another is working on his PhD. in engineering at Berkeley developing new technologies for food production in third world countries. He also happens to be an accomplished jazz musician playing with touring professionals.

Current high school students have competed at state culinary competitions. Others have built an energy efficient home that was featured on the cover of a national magazine. Local students have taken first, second and honorable mention awards at this year’s state science fair. One student has developed a prototype for an innovative jet engine propeller that is being given national attention by the aeronautics industry.

This generation of young people will find the cure for cancer, solve the world's hunger problems and develop cost effective ways to meet the energy demands of an ever growing population. Yes, these students are from Humboldt County. The community is working very hard to ensure all students are successful so they can be contributing members in our society and economy. It's important work and there is much that needs to be done.

Education is alive in Humboldt County. How many of you knew that in 2010, Newsweek magazine ranked a Humboldt County high school number 23 in the nation for quality out of over 25,000 schools. And in 2011, this school was ranked number 12 in the nation by the Washington Post. There are certainly challenges, no question about it. But they can and are being addressed. It will take all of us working together. Are you up to it? I trust the answer is yes.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.