



JOINT LIBRARY AND CIVIC ARTS AGENDA REPORT

May 24, 2021
Item 2

TITLE: APPROVE THE APPOINTMENT OF NIKITA JAYAPRAKASH AS THE PLEASANTON TEEN POET LAUREATE FOR THE 2021/2022 SCHOOL YEAR

SUMMARY

The Teen Poet Laureate provides poetry at civic events and aims to raise awareness of the importance of poetry toward the development and enhancement of the lives of Pleasanton teens. Past Teen Poet Laureates have pursued meaningful endeavors in the community, in collaboration with the Pleasanton Library and the Firehouse Arts Center. In April 2021, the Civic Arts Teen Poet Laureate subcommittee began the recruitment for the Teen Poet Laureate for the coming 2020/2021 school year. Candidates participated in interviews with City Commissioners and City staff and provided writing samples and community references. From the pool of applicants, a candidate was selected on May 17, 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve the appointment of Nikita Jayaprakash as the Pleasanton Teen Poet Laureate for the 2021/2022 school year.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The City Teen Poet Laureate receives no remuneration. Any expenses related to the Teen Poet Laureate program such as supplies for workshops, poetry readings and teen events are allocated in the Civic Arts budget #00150407-433154, in an amount not to exceed \$2000.

BACKGROUND

On November 17, 1998, the City Council approved the Civic Arts Commission's recommendation to create the position of a Pleasanton Poet Laureate, to provide poetry at civic events and promote the appreciation of the literary arts in the community. These Poet Laureates established a tradition of poetry readings and community programs, such as television broadcasts and the Poetry, Prose and Arts Festival. In 2001, the City's Poet Laureate Program won an award from the National Conference of Mayors.

With the success of the adult Poet Laureate, the City started the formal process to recruit and appoint a Teen Poet Laureate in August 2012. The mission of the Teen Poet Laureate Program is to raise awareness of the importance of poetry toward the development and enhancement of the lives of Pleasanton teens. The Teen Poet Laureate is invited to share poetry and literary pieces at public events and dedications, as well as conduct workshops, poetry readings and events. In January 2013, the first two students from Amador Valley High School and Foothill High School, were appointed to serve as the City's Teen Poet Laureates for the 2012/2013 school year. Since the appointment of the first two students, there have been 14 Teen Poet Laureates. Their collective projects and initiatives have included readings on school campuses, open mic nights, readings at civic events, afterschool library pop-up poetry sessions and creative poems set to music in collaboration with the Firehouse Art Center's High School Music Collaborative.

Past Teen Poet Laureates include:

- Arany Uthayakumar (2012-2013)
- Diana Fu (2012-2013) & (2013-2014)
- Nive Raghavan (2013-2014)
- Nicole Tsuno (2014-2015)
- Maya Lyubomirsky (2014-2015)
- Frances Tang (2015-2016)
- Kyler Juarez (2015-2016 and 2016-2017)
- Kyle Mular (2016-2017)
- Irene Sha (2016-2017 and 2017-2018)
- Nithya Swaminathan (2016-2017 and 2017-2018)
- Yasmin Ghaemmaghani (2017-2018)
- Varsha Vaidyanath (2017-2018)
- Sandra Chen (2018-2019)
- Kanchan Naik (2019-2020)

The most recent Teen Poet Laureate, Kanchan Naik from Quarry Lane School, conducted several programs during the 2019/2020 school year. Highlights of Kanchan's year as Teen Poet Laureate included hosting a booth at the signature City arts and innovation event, Ignite! in October 2019, as participants of all ages were encouraged to "connect with their inner poets" through a photo display. In January 2020, Kanchan opened the Pleasanton Community of Character Collaborative (PCCC) 20th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Fellowship Breakfast with an original poem. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, Kanchan converted her in-person poetry slam into a digital experience. In April 2020, she developed virtual content for Earth Day and Arbor Day, sharing original poetry.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, City staff recommended pausing the recruitment for the 2020/2021 Teen Poet Laureate, citing challenges in connecting with remote students and interviewing in a virtual environment. At the February 2021 meeting, the Civic Arts Commission expressed support for a recruitment for a 2021/2022 Teen Poet Laureate and a subcommittee was formed, led by Commissioner Stephanie Pellegrino.

In April 2021, Library and Recreation staff began the formal recruitment process for the Teen Poet Laureate position for the 2021/2022 school year. Incoming high school juniors and seniors who enjoyed writing, inspiring others and were interested in contributing to their community were encouraged to apply. Applications were accepted at the Pleasanton Library through April 30, 2021.

City Commissioners representing the Civic Arts Commission, Library Commission, and Human Services Commission joined City staff on an interview panel on May 17, 2021, to select the City's next Teen Poet Laureate from a pool of four candidates. The successful candidate was chosen based on experience in the field of poetry, community engagement and innovative program ideas for elementary school students and older adults.

DISCUSSION

The Teen Poet Laureate subcommittee recommends that the Civic Art Commission and the Library Commission appoint Nikita Jayaprakash from Amador Valley High School for the school year term of 2021/2022. Nikita is a Pleasanton teen who is actively involved in her community. She has volunteered at the Pleasanton Public Library as a Kid Power volunteer and at the Senior Center as a Leader in Training. She has also received the district Award of Excellence, the state Award of Merit, and has been published in two anthologies. Nikita became interested in the position while she was still in middle school, after attending an event of a former Teen Poet Laureate and being encouraged and inspired to provide poetry recitations and events for the community.

With the recommendation of the Civic Arts Commission and the Library Commission, the Teen Poet Laureate will read an inaugural poem at the June 15, 2021 City Council meeting and will serve from August 2021 through May 2022.

The Civic Arts Commission and the Library Commission are encouraged to support the Teen Poet Laureate through their community connections and by providing marketing ideas that would assist the incoming Teen Poet Laureate.

Submitted by:

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Tamara Whitney
Recreation Manager