

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **WOW Kicks Off at State Capitol with an Award Ceremony for Essay Finalists**

*Public Libraries Unite to Celebrate Annual Multiethnic Literary and Cultural Extravaganza with a World of Words (WOW)*

Students from Enfield, Hartford, and South Windsor enjoyed the spotlight at the State Capitol on April 7 in a program that matched foreign consulates and Connecticut libraries during the opening ceremony of World of Words (WOW).

World of Words, a program developed by the Connecticut Center for the Book at Hartford Public Library, an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, celebrates the literature and culture of the many ethnic groups that have made Connecticut their home. The Hartford Public Library oversees this program for the state.

A WOW essay contest, which culminated in an awards ceremony during the State Capitol kickoff, required students in grades 6 – 12 to describe, in 500 words or less, their own ethnic identity by responding to the questions: where did your parents, grandparents, or earlier ancestors come from; do you know why they came to America; what cultural gifts did they bring with them that were special or unique; and, how do you share those gifts with the people in your life?

Cash prizes of \$100, \$50, and \$25 were awarded to the first, second, and third place

winners, respectively, of the WOW essay contest “Why We Came and What We Brought.” Prizes were presented by Diane Smith, co-host of the WTIC-AM NewsTalk 1080 radio program, and host and producer of “Positively Connecticut” on CPTV, and author of several books about the state based on the television program. Smith is the

Honorary Chairperson of WOW. Copies of her latest book, *Summer in Connecticut*, were given as this year's gifts for Consular guests.

This year's winners are: 1<sup>st</sup> Place — Elizabeth Serrine, grade 8, Timothy Edwards Middle School, South Windsor; 2<sup>nd</sup> Place — Hakima Issack, grade 9, Bulkeley High School, Hartford; 3<sup>rd</sup> Place — Audrey McKeown, grade 7, Saint Martha School, Enfield.

In his essay, Sanjeev Khadka, whose family emigrated from Nepal in 2003, described elements of the five-day religious festival Thiar which his family continues to celebrate in America. "On the first day we pray to the birds and give them food for making those really good sounds. On the second day, we pray to the dogs by washing them and giving them food because we believe that dogs take care of our house at night and keep us safe."

The WOW opening program, emceed by Connecticut Public Broadcasting president and CEO Jerry Franklin, begins a month-long extravaganza designed to promote reading and appreciation for the cultural diversity within the state through the efforts of participating public libraries. WOW programs specifically celebrate Connecticut's literary and cultural roots while exploring ethnic similarities and differences.

Representatives from the Consulates of Canada, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, and Peru came from New York and Boston and representatives from participating WOW libraries came from all corners of the state. The libraries participating this year and the countries they will celebrate are: Bridgeport Public Library (203-576-7403) — United States, Gulf Coast; Derby Neck Library (203.734.1492) — Ecuador; Enfield Public Library (860-763-7510) — China; Fairfield Public Library (203.256.3155) — Japan; Farmington Library (860-673-6791) — Poland; Welles-Turner Memorial Library, Glastonbury (860-652-7719) — Canada; Hartford Public Library (860-695-6295) — Peru; Howard Whittemore Public Library, Naugatuck (203.729.4591) — India; Somers Public Library (860.763.3501) — Italy; South Windsor Public Library (860-644-1541) — Ireland; The Ferguson Library, Stamford (203-964-1000) — Greece; Waterford (860.444.5805) — Italy.

A full month of WOW events will include exhibitions, author events, film festivals, hand-on workshops, storytelling, lectures, book discussions and displays, literary readings promoted as “Telling Passages,” music and dance programs, and culinary offerings. The statewide schedule of World of Words events can be found at [www.hplct.org/cfb.htm](http://www.hplct.org/cfb.htm).

While most programs are free and open to the public some may require registration; please call individual libraries for more information. For a full listing of events and programs at Hartford Public Library, visit online at [www.hplct.org](http://www.hplct.org).

The Hartford Public Library has more than 500,000 volumes and 700 periodicals in its collection. A provider of strategic programs that respond to citizens’ real needs and interests, the library offers programs for parenting, literacy and language development; programs for technical literacy and competency; and programs for entrepreneurs and small business owners. The Hartford Public Library also provides a cultural and artistic forum that reflects the city’s diverse and vibrant community. For more information call (860) 695-6295.