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## When words make winners

“O-C-C-U-R-R-E-N-C-E ... occurrence.”

With that word, Ms. Judy Haddock Swan won the 1962 Gila County Spelling Bee more than 50 years ago.

“Being a contestant in the Gila County Spelling Bee was a wonderful experience. I had gotten there not only by winning smaller spelling contests, but through the support of my parents, friends, and neighbors,” she recalls.

Swan was in eighth grade at the time at George Washington School in Miami, Ariz. She went on to graduate from Miami High School in 1966. “When I think back to all the activities there were to participate in during my growing up years in Gila County, I see family and community.”

Winning a Spelling Bee may not equate to some as a life-changing moment or even be considered an exciting memory. Perhaps they have never experienced the unnerving wait for one’s turn, the blinding spot lights, hearing one’s own voice shatter the silence of the room as letters are poured into a microphone, or that eternal second it takes before the words are spoken “That is correct.”

“I have often thought about the Gila County Spelling Bee and how exciting it was to sit on the stage, waiting for my turn, and look out at the community that was there to observe,” Swan remembers. “There was much excitement in the air; parents were smiling, and leaders of the communities involved were there. We contestants felt very special.”

Spelling bees are a great American tradition; they provide an excellent way to promote and honor academic achievement and excellence. Bees can help students improve their spelling, increase their vocabularies, learn concepts and develop correct English usage that will help them all their lives.

Swan understands the value of possessing such skills. “Knowing how to spell served me well over the years; it enabled me to write successfully in whatever venue I was in and to speak with the correct word in vocal presentations.”

She gives this advice to the contestants of this year’s Gila County Spelling Bee: “Besides my parents, there has always been one constant in my life – education. Never underestimate the education received in Miami, Globe, or any school in Gila County. It has a firm foundation and if used, will take one on an unforgettable life’s journey.”

And to her hometown communities she says, “Support your children, whether you are a parent, friend, or community member. Your attendance at events will be something they remember for the rest of their lives.”

The communities of Gila County will have the opportunity to show their support of academic achievement at two upcoming events. This year’s Gila County Spelling Bee will be held on Thursday, Feb. 20, 2014, beginning at 1 p.m., in the Miami High School auditorium. Then, on Wednesday, Feb. 26, Gila County students will be judged on their critical thinking skills and scientific creativity at the Gila County Regional Science Fair. The science fair will be held at Miami’s Bullion Plaza Cultural Center & Museum and will be open for public viewing from noon until 3 p.m.

Winners at both Gila County events will go on to represent the county at the state level.

The Gila County Spelling Bee and the Gila County Regional Science Fair are public events sponsored by the Gila County School Superintendent’s Office. Everyone is encouraged to come out and show their support of the talented students as they compete to represent their county. For more information, visit [www.gilacountyschools.org](http://www.gilacountyschools.org).

*Written by Holly Sow, Communications & Outreach Specialist of the Gila County School Superintendent’s Office.*