

Whittier senior is finalist in essay contest

HAVERHILL -- A young man who lost his leg fighting on the Iraq war inspired Chantal McGovern to write an essay about the sacrifices soldiers make. The senior at Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School was thrilled to find out she was a state finalist in the Voice of Democracy contest.

"I was shocked to be chosen," she said. "Especially since many of the finalists are going to college at places like Yale and Harvard. I couldn't believe it." She and 12 other state finalists were honored at an awards dinner at Doubletree Hotel in Milford. The theme of this year's essay was "Does America still have heroes?"



"The man was limping on crutches and half of his leg was amputated," she wrote. After speaking to him, he said his biggest regret was, "I'll never be able to run with my daughter again. Immediately I realized that soldiers sacrifice so much for the people of this great country, both now and in the past," she wrote.

The Voice of Democracy scholarship program is a national audio-essay contest for high school students created by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1947. Chantal and the other entrants read their essays aloud and submitted tapes to the judges. More than \$3 million in scholarships are awarded annually through the program, with the first place winner receiving a \$30,000 scholarship

Writing comes natural to Chantal. "I really like to write and I thought this would be a great way to prove myself," she said. "However when I got into writing the speech it was much more than just writing for me; it was telling the story of soldiers and what they do for us."

She also wrote about Whittier graduate Evan O'Neill, who joined the army before he graduated in 2002. "Evan left behind the only home he knew to travel thousands of miles, across oceans to foreign soil to defend our country for us," she wrote. "His days started at the crack of dawn in scorching temperatures. He would head out in the pouring rain, dust storms and into the horrid heat. Evan could have stayed home but he wanted to fight for us for our freedom."

Evan was killed in Afghanistan in 2003 during combat. He was 19.