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## Five DCHS students wrap up competition for scholarship;

### *Dixie County Rotary Club hears 30 great speeches this school year*

#### Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © April 5, 2019 at 9:09 p.m.

**CROSS CITY** – Five Dixie County High School seniors gave speeches Wednesday (April 3) during the regular weekly meeting all of the Rotary Club of Dixie County.

The topics included the history of volleyball; what it takes to be a teacher; making choices when confronted by a tough set of life circumstances; and value from being a member of the future business leaders of America; and a building a community.

The five young ladies on Wednesday are part of the group of 30 DCHS students competing for an academic scholarship from the Rotary. The method to determine which students speak to the Rotary Club this year changed. Previously, students were chosen by teachers. This year, the students who volunteered were selected.

Dixie County Rotary Club President Anne Hodges opened the meeting and carried it through each point of the afternoon. Heather Smith, a former president of the club, served as emcee to introduce the five students who spoke.

Smith spoke about each student before they gave their speeches, by sharing who their parents are and what each student considered as the most valuable thing they have learned.



**Elecia Carter (left)** started the set of speeches with some of her ideas for molding young people in Dixie County through opportunities for them to experience hands-on exposure to different forms of art – from the performing arts of karaoke, through dance and onto classes in pottery.

Dixie Youth Sports is an excellent program within Dixie County, Carter said.

After speaking with other students, she found that they believe it will be beneficial to have some sort of program dedicated to the arts as well as the one for

sports.

“I was slightly surprised,” Carter said, “but most importantly happy to hear that many share

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the same point of view as I. There were the suggestions of karaoke nights, dances, maybe a class that taught pottery -- events requiring the kids to be the source of creativity.”

Students prefer to see their brothers and sisters participating in safe activities in safe locations, she said, rather than turning to alcohol or other drugs as a result of boredom.

Carter ended her speech by saying that young people need advocates -- someone to rally for them.

A career choice that she is listing is as a child psychologist, because today's youth play an important role in the future.

“I am passionate about the ability of our community to be the best that it could possibly be,” she said. “We are family, and where there's family there is love. With love comes loyalty, fellowship, kindness and integrity. And if we expect the world to still be standing in the next few decades, we have to start now, with our youth.”



**Chelsey Lord (left)** spoke next.

She shared with the Rotarians the history of volleyball and mentioned it is among the sports regulated for statewide ranking by the Florida High School Athletic Association.

She expressed her belief that volleyball is the perfect sport for friends to participate in as they enjoy competition.

Like several of the speakers that day, she linked her topic with The Four-Way Test, which states “Of the things we think,

say or do 1. Is it the TRUTH? 2. Is it FAIR to all concerned? 3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? 4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?”

Volleyball allows participants to enjoy themselves, as well as to play a fair and truthful game, Lord said. Volleyball is fair to all concerned, because all players abide by the same set of rules, she added.

Had she not played this sport, Lord said, she would not have made as many friends. The game is beneficial to all concerned because of the exercise from participating in the activity, she said.

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**Julia Chesser (left)** spoke next. Her speech centered around the tough job of being a teacher.

She dispelled myths about how the choice to be a professional educator results in high pay or that it involves few working hours, or that teachers only work nine months a year.

She mentioned near the conclusion of her speech that with the difficulty encountered daily by teachers, there are fewer people making that choice as a profession. In fact, she said, the

University of North Florida is offering free tuition for high school students involved with dual enrollment to be teachers.

What Chesser shared is the truth, she said, because her facts are documented in trusted sources such as the National Education Association.

Fairness is found, she said, because teachers, parents and children all need to work together to solve the problems teachers face daily.

It will build better friendships, Chesser said, as people work together to find solutions to these problems that are causing fewer people to choose teaching as a profession.

And it is beneficial, Chesser said, because if there are solutions reached to solve issues such as low pay, lack of professional support and long hours, then there will be more and better teachers in Florida.



**Georgia Downing (left)** spoke next. Her life story may have moved some members nearly to tears.

A woman from the Florida Department of Children and Families came into Downing's home, and told the 10-year-old girl to "Pack your clothes because you're going away for the weekend." That "weekend" turned out to equal eight years, she said as she began her speech centered around overcoming obstacles.

Her mother chose drugs over her own children. Added to that, she said, was her father killing his girlfriend,

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which led to her being taken out over house.

She shared examples of horrible parenting actions and inactions.

During her speech, Downing said that she, like anyone in this type of situation could go one of two ways. She could choose to turn away from God, or to grow closer to Him as she faced her sudden change in environment away from her biological parents, who did enough for the state workers to be forced to remove her from them.

Downing said that by growing closer to God, she gained the ability to forgive her parents for their actions.

It has been eight years now since that fateful day in November when she was taken away from her biological parents.

“God saw that I was in the wrong family for 10 years,” Downing said, “and that is why He decided to give me a new one.”

Since then, she has grown up in a loving household. In two months, she continued, she will be graduating from high school. This is not something she foresees as having been impossible if she had stayed with her biological parents.

After high school, Downing said she intends to continue learning and to become a psychologist who specializes in studying criminal behavior.

When she was most in need, Downing said, she found the people of Dixie County gave without measure. And now, whenever she can, she gives back to the community.

She concluded her presentation by saying each question and answering the question.

“Is it the truth?” Yes, people can tell a sob story rather than to show what they have learned to better themselves from experiences such as this, she said.

“Is it fair to all concerned?” Yes, everything can be used as a blessing, she said. This part of her life was used for the greater good. Whether an individual chooses to change obstacles into opportunities for the greater good, she added, is up to each individual person.

“Will it build goodwill and better friendships?” Absolutely, Downing said. In the past eight years, she has seen people who served as excellent examples of how humans should be. From this, she has become inspired to be the best person she can be – so that others will want to emulate her behavior in the future, just as she wants to follow in those footsteps she is choosing as her path.

“Will it be beneficial to all concerned?” Yes, she concluded. Many people want to see bad events in their lives as excuses for not living a good life, she said. By meeting and overcoming challenges, it benefits all concerned.

“Life is not always butterflies and rainbows,” Downing said. “It never has been. It never will be.”

She said that God has chosen people to be a blessing to many. If things go wrong, she said, don't be discouraged or panic. Just wait. Be patient. Hold onto God. Everything has its season, she concluded.

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The final speaker of the day was **Kyndall O'Steen (left)**.

O'Steen became the president of the Future Business Leaders of America District Five, which includes Cross City and Mayo.

FBLA has helped O'Steen in her development as a student, she said. She shared some of the history of the organization. Today, there are chapters in 47 states and seven countries.

It is the largest student-oriented career organization were students in the world, O'Steen said.

There are 25 FBLA DCHS members, she said, and FBLA opens doors for

opportunities and experience.

O'Steen, whose diction and delivery of the speech was the clearest, with the best enunciation, told listeners that before joining FBLA she had been introverted and afraid to speak up.

The confidence she has gained through participating in this organization, including the preparation for conventions, has helped prepare her for life beyond high school. O'Steen said.

Early exposure to business, she said, gave her lessons that can be applied for interview for jobs, for college and other matters.

Through her efforts, the ability for students to join FBLA became easier from this year and forward. Prior to this year, students were required to first take a pre-requisite class before being allowed to join FBLA, she said.

After seeing discouragement in students who were unable to join in 2018, O'Steen approached the faculty advisor for the club and that led to the doors being opened for more students to enjoy this opportunity.

She said FBLA adheres to The 4-Way Test. It is a club that any student can join – fairly. The experiences in the FBLA lead to building good character and strong friendships, as members meet other kids all across the nation, she said.

O'Steen said she endorses adults encouraging students to participate in activities such as FBLA to help maintain a good social structure for America's future.

Members of the Dixie County Rotary Club will be having a meeting or two to confer about all of the 30 students who volunteered this year to give speeches.

Before the meeting, Rotarian Katrina VanAernam, who was club president in 2014 and 2015, told HardisonInk.com that the club's close involvement with students from DCHS in this program is sustainable.

"And it has sustained this Rotary Club," VanAernam added.

"There have been times when we've said, the club has too few members to continue. But then we say we must go on for the students."