

Local students prepare for Oratory competition

By **FRANK KONKEL**
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PORTLAND — The Ionia County Right to Life will host a high school oratory contest on Sunday, March 16 at St. Patrick Parish Hall in Portland.

The contest, which kicks off at 3 p.m., allows students to speak for 5 to 7 minutes on one of several major topics facing the nation in front of three judges for the right to represent the area in the state competition on May 3.

For students, it's a lot of work on top of already busy schedules, but it's worth the effort.

"I'd never really done anything like it before, so I thought it'd be cool to write a paper and discuss my opinions," said Ionia High School student Anna Green, who won the competition last year in Ionia, speaking against abortion. This year, Green will discuss embryonic stem cell research. "It's kind of a way to give your opinion, research it and back it up."

This year, the Portland and Ionia Right to Life organizations teamed up in hopes to increase competition. The judges for the competition

will be State Representatives Brian Calley (R-Portland) and Judy Emmons (R-Sheridan), along with Portland Right to Life founder Mike Cook. As far as content and presentations, they'll have a lot to judge.

According to Portland Right to Life president Pam Brown, on the list of potential topics this year include abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, cloning and infanticide.

Judges grade presenters — who can only use notes, no props — on their speeches by virtue of content, memorization and strength of argument.

The top four contestants will receive \$100, \$50, \$25 and \$15 respectively, while the winner will go on to state competition.

Despite being a pro-life organization, the Right to Life presentations aren't regulated, meaning any viewpoint is welcome.

"Any student can enter it, there's the possibility that someone could present opposing viewpoints," Brown said. "This competition is geared towards introducing teens to do some research on their own for the life movement. They're encouraged to

get several sources, regardless of their views."

Students back up their views in a very serious manner.

"I'm going to be talking about how pointless embryonic stem cell research really is," said Green, who is preparing for the competition by vigorously researching scientific evidence. "We can get the exact same information from adult stem cells. We might not be able to get it right now, but if we spend some money we'll be able to do the exact same things with adult stem cells and with embryonic."

That's the beauty of the competition, said Ionia Right to Life president Dick Wolthuis.

"Last year was the first year for us, and we hoped the students would do some serious study on the subjects so they have some ideas of why we have convictions one way or another," said Wolthuis, who has been impressed by students so far. "It's great to see them do the work and be rewarded for it."

For more information on the Right to Life oratory competition, call Pam Brown at 517-647-7439.



Courtesy

Last year's Right to Life oratory contest winner Anna Green, who spoke on abortion. This year, Green will speak on embryonic stem cell research in the contest, to be judged by State Reps. Brian Calley (R-Portland) and Judy Emmons (R-Sheridan), as well as Portland Right to Life founder Mike Cook.