



February 3, 2008

Talent search in Spring Valley draws teens

*Christina Jeng
The Journal News*

SPRING VALLEY - □ The six teenagers fidgeted in their seats as they waited for the judges to make their decision.

All six, hailing from different parts of the county, had just performed their various talents, which included song, monologue and comic bit.

"I was really scared, like my heart was beating really fast," 14-year-old Pascale Jean-Gilles said of her performance.

The Nyack teen, who performed "On My Own" from the musical "Les Miserables," and the other contestants were at the Louis Kurtz Center on Main Street yesterday.

Some had their heads bowed, others covered their faces. Nervous giggles peppered the silence.

Each was competing to represent the Xi Lambda Lambda chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. at the fraternity's annual Second District Conference in Atlantic City.

The judges, who had been in deep discussion for about 15 minutes after the contestants performed, finally broke apart.

One by one, they declared each competitor a runner-up, who then went up to receive a trophy, until finally, Jean-Gilles was the last one sitting. She was declared the grand prize winner.

"Really like excited and scared in a good way, really happy," she said afterward.

Jean-Gilles' parents, Daniel and Myria, said they were proud of their daughter, who they considered a superstar with or without the talent competition.

"She's been singing for the longest time in the house," Myria Jean-Gilles said. "She really put herself into it and her voice just trembles me inside."

Aspiring actress Jessica Butler, 14, of Pearl River had convinced two pals, Ashley Niedelman, 15, of Spring Valley and Melissa Neils, 14, of Chestnut Ridge, to compete.

The teens said this would not hinder them from competing in the future.

"I'm just glad I got to participate at all," Butler said. "It's a great experience and I'm definitely coming back next year and I hope I win then."

Niedelman, who got a taste of the spotlight, agreed.

"I'll come back next year, give it another try," she said, "It was fun being up on stage."

Neils, whose humor was evident in the comedic bit she performed, was more ambivalent.

"If I'm not asleep, I'll try again next year," she said.

Before the announcement was made, Neils' beaming mother, May, had already declared her daughter's performance a success.

"I'm very proud of her for stepping up and getting up there because it was a last-second thing," she said. "She wasn't prepared for it, and I think she did a beautiful job."

The two other performers were Tyric Maufin, 16, of New City, and Wendaline Demorin, 14, of Wesley Hills.

Shirley Crabbe, a jazz artist who regularly performs at L'Artista Restaurant & Bar in Orangeburg, was one of yesterday's three judges.

"We have so many kids just in this time who need to have opportunities to develop their talent," she said, "and I think that having talent shows like this is such a great way to really help kids gain self-confidence."

Dennis McGloster, president of Xi Lambda Lambda, said yesterday's competition was a first for the chapter, adding that the group hoped to expand the talent search in the future.

"We do this so we can give exposure to kids with various talents in the arts field," he said.
