



**For Immediate Release**

February 12, 2016

Contact: Lee Wilson, Commander, Avon VFW

860-798-3562

## **Two Avon Middle School students and one Thompson Brook School student win local Avon VFW essay contest**

The Avon Gildo T. Consolini VFW Post 3272, along its Auxiliary, congratulates both Allison Kijanka and Rachel Pastore, 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at Avon Middle School (AMS) and Gabrielle Richmond, 6<sup>th</sup> grade student at Thompson Brook School (TBS) for winning First (Richmond), Second (Kijanka) and Third (Pastore) place in Connecticut's VFW District 3 Patriot's Pen contest. Patriot's Pen is a nationwide youth-essay writing competition that gives students in grades 6, 7 and 8 the opportunity to write essays expressing their views on democracy. Nationally, more than 120,000 students participate in the contest. This year's theme was "***What Freedom Means to Me.***" Contestants write a 300-400 word essay based on an annual patriotic theme. The first-place national winner receives a \$5,000 savings bond and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington D.C. The top national winners each receive a savings bond anywhere from \$100 to \$5,000.

Rachel Pastore's essay focused on the safety she feels living in this country and ends with the following, "America is home to the most proud people in the world. Words can never truly describe just how proud I am to be free in this nation of red, white and blue, and the home of the brave." Allison Kijanka's essay focused on the valor of veterans to fight for freedom. She ends her essay with the following, "The pursuit of happiness, isn't that the ultimate goal? Well, that's what freedom means to me, the ability to be happy, and thanks to these unbelievable people, the veterans that I'm proud to call my heroes, we are able to always be in reach of that ultimate goal." Gabrielle Richmond, a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at TBS School, comes from a family with four generations of service in the military including three cousins currently serving as officers in the United States

Navy. Richmond writes “Freedom is the liberty we acquire from the bravery of all who are fighting for our country, and from our veterans who have defended our nation. Their history and consistent bravery will never be forgotten.”

In receiving their awards from the Connecticut VFW department, Commander Lee Wilson of the Avon VFW stated, “this is the first time in recent memory that so many Avon students won a district essay contest. We are very proud of these students, and their parents, for taking a stand for democracy.”

The National Association of Secondary School Principals has placed this program on the NASSP National Advisory List of Contests and Activities for 2015-2016. The Patriot's Pen program is designed to foster patriotism by allowing students the opportunity to express their opinions based on an annual theme. A copy of the entry form and rules can be found at <http://vfw.org/Community/Patriot-s-Pen/>

For more information, please email to [commander@avonvfw.com](mailto:commander@avonvfw.com).

###