

In 1987, Sir John Templeton initiated the Laws of Life Essay Contest in his hometown of Winchester, TN. His vision was to encourage young people to write about their own "laws of life." Contests now take place in communities and schools throughout the United States and worldwide. Each contest is sponsored by an individual or organization concerned with the values, ideals, and spiritual principles of our youth.

Laws of Life

E S S A Y C O N T E S T

Contest Benefits Local Civic Groups

By Kathleen H. Holman

One of the strongest supporters/endorsers of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is Sanford McDonnell, Chairman Emeritus of McDonnell Douglas Corporation and member of the Clayton, MO, Rotary Club. Mr. McDonnell believes character education is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children. Working tirelessly with school districts throughout metropolitan St. Louis to create programs for character education, he helped to establish an essay contest in 1998 through the Clayton Rotary and the School District of Clayton.



Kathleen H. Holman
Clayton, Missouri
Rotary President-Elect

Mr. McDonnell and I believe the contest can be adapted to any organization for sponsorship. It is a natural fit with the goals of Rotary Clubs, and many other service organizations, such as Kiwanis, will find that the contest nicely complements their objectives and programs. Many contests are also launched from partnerships between community schools and local businesses. These partnerships are especially vital in communities without service organizations such as the Rotary Clubs.

Character education is vital for the youth of our nation. The *Laws of Life* Program allows a broad number of students to focus on their values and to express them on paper. The thinking, creating, and writing process is very valuable in itself, and the pride the students feel when their work is singled out as

extraordinary is fabulous!

In Clayton, our judges are constantly astounded by the quality of our young people's submissions and their depth of thinking. Selecting the top three essays in each category is never an easy task, but those of us who have had the privilege of judging continually look forward to reading and reflecting on the *laws of life*.

Our contest awards ceremony serves as one of our local annual Rotary luncheon programs, and our members comment on how much they look forward to the program each year. This year, the first place winners in each category read their essays aloud to an audience of Rotarians, proud parents, and teachers, making the program even more memorable. It is a tradition we look forward to continuing.

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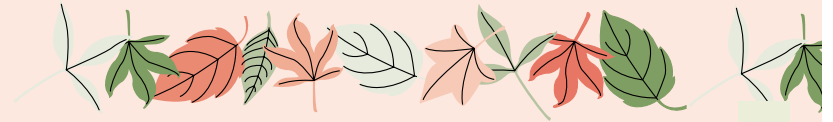
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To learn more about the essay contest, call 800-245-1285 or 610-687-8942, or e-mail Peggy Veljkovic at veljkovic@templeton.org

College Contests



Casper College in Wyoming Spearheads Statewide Essay Contests

By Paul Howlick and Rhonda Zimmerman

Under the leadership of the Casper College Business Division, the Wyoming *Laws of Life* Essay Contest has experienced significant growth in the past three years. Faculty member Lisa Scaling decided to bring the contest to Wyoming after hearing Sir John Templeton give the keynote address at the college's Business Awareness Day in 1996. Professor Scaling encouraged her students to think about how reflecting on their values might lead to success in their future. Rhonda Zimmerman, a community social worker, also wanted to see the contest come to Wyoming. She had been working with adolescents at the time, and felt that it was critical to foster more positive interactions between youth and the community. Today the contest is offered to all Wyoming high school students and is the first statewide contest of any kind.

The contest's growth is a direct

result of its promotion through a state Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) convention. FBLA students have submitted half of the essays written across the state. Another successful strategy involves sponsors, who are given the opportunity to support very specific components of the contest. This strategy more fully involves them in the *Laws of Life* Program. For example, one local business provides the first-place award each year and proudly presents the prize to the winner at the awards banquet.

This year, a delightful banquet was held at the Casper Petroleum Club. Governor and Mrs. Jim Geringer were present for the second consecutive year and said a word of congratulations to all who participated. Governor Geringer endorses the contest with a letter that is printed on the inside front cover of the winning essays publication. The publica-



tion is prepared by Casper College.

The Business Division and Steering Committee of Casper College have watched the program grow steadily over the past three years, and students from more than half of the high schools in the state have written essays. Clearly, the Wyoming *Laws of Life* Essay Contest is meeting the needs of many young people and is encouraged and appreciated by parents and communities across this large state.

FSU and Tallahassee Democrat Support the Contest

By Crystal Irby, Florida State University

Florida State University, in collaboration with the *Tallahassee Democrat*, sponsors and conducts the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest in Leon County, Florida. 1999 marks the second year of the contest.

In 1998, more than 2,000 students from eight high schools submitted *laws of life* essays, and 55 community members served as judges. A coordinator, who acted as a liaison between the participating teachers and the contest director, was designated at each of the local high schools (public and private). The school coordinator was in charge of disseminating all information about the contest (posters, packets, etc.), collecting essays, returning information to the contest

director, and making sure the contest ran smoothly at his or her respective high school. The local *Tallahassee Democrat* simultaneously sponsored a "Newspapers in Education" publication on character education, which was delivered to high schools. The 16-page booklet was titled "Stories from the past — lessons in character for the future" and focused on six character traits exemplified through incidents in world history. This publication was an excellent way to get students interested in the contest.

Judging the essays was a three-tier process, beginning at the schools. First, each school submitted the top 20% of their essays to the contest coordinator. Each essay was then sent to three different members of the Tallahassee commu-

nity along with a score sheet. After the essays were returned to the contest coordinator, the scores were averaged, and the top 50 essays were again read by three different members of the Florida State University's Center of Civic Education and Service staff. Finally, the scores from the second and third tiers of reviews were averaged, and the top essays were chosen.

The contest culminated in an awards reception on the campus of Florida State University. Contest participants shared their stories, their values, and their lives with the community. Whether the lesson was learned through serving the community or a life event, the students' essays reminded us that we all share a similar need to develop



College of the Ozarks Incorporates Contest into Character Camp

By Larry Cockrum, Dean of Admissions

A student's introduction to character development begins the first day he or she arrives at College of the Ozarks in Point Lookout, Missouri. This 1500-student liberal arts college kicks off each fall semester with a two-week Character Camp.

Character in young people is best developed from an education which includes the head, the heart, and the hands.

The purpose of Character Camp is to provide not only an orientation to the College but a total educational experience and a realistic look into life at College of the Ozarks. This is a comprehensive program designed to enhance the development of character and good citizenship.

In so doing, Character Camp reflects the principle upon which College of the Ozarks was established: that character in young people is best developed from an education which includes the head, the heart, and the hands.

New to C of O this year is the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest. This segment of Character Camp is now a requirement of all incoming freshmen. The essay gives them a chance to express their personal ideals and what the *laws of life* mean to them.

C of O English faculty members judge the essays, and winners are announced at an Honors and Etiquette Banquet held during Character Camp. Students use the modest cash awards to help pay for their textbooks.

The essays will become a permanent part of each student's portfolio. The compositions can be used both as an assessment tool and as a first writing sample of incoming students. When these students graduate, they will be provided with a copy of their essay and asked to respond to the question, "Are these values still most important to you?"

In addition to the essays, students at Character Camp examine character case studies and have numerous discussions regarding character and leadership development.

Character Camp and the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest do more than pay lip service to character development. At



During the Honor and Etiquette Banquet, students sign an Honor Code card.



College of the Ozarks, it is critical to have more positive interactions between youth and the community. The idea is to put character on the front burner from the time students first arrive and to keep drawing attention to it throughout their college careers.

"When students graduate, they will be provided with a copy of their essay and asked to respond to the question, 'Are these values still most important to you?'"

Student Essay — Journey from Russia

Christina Frye was the first-place winner in Blair High School's essay contest, which took place in the spring of this year.

Life is amazing enough because it can grant you a second chance. Most people believe that the life you are granted is what you have. You might have thought that life brings you no surprises. You might just change your mind after you read my story.

It was a cold November day in St. Petersburg, Russia. On the river Neva stood a children's orphanage, #31. There were many like it all over the city and the country, but this one was different. This orphanage was for special children, children that were smart and had a chance very few Russian orphan children had: A chance to go to America, a chance at a new life. It was a big issue for everybody to know about going to America because just maybe you would get the chance to go. Orphanage #31 specialized in American adoptions; it had the elite children of St. Petersburg which most American families wanted to adopt.

It was on a cold November day that I got called into the office. We all knew they (the Americans) were here to pick their new children. When my brother and I were invited into the office I thought, "Wow, here is my chance to go to America." I was introduced to a woman named Maria. She was single with no children. We talked with the interpreter and played games. They wanted to know how smart and alert I was. I was eight then and in the 3rd grade.

A month passed and Olga, from the adoption office, came back alone. We all knew it was her car because we memorized the license plate. I was told the bad news later on. The woman could not adopt me because she had no husband and I had a brother. I was very devastated but soon got over it. I figured life in

Russia wasn't too bad. I loved my friends and the things we did and the places we went.

Two years passed, and it was again November. I was called into the office. Olga was there again. She had been visiting a lot during the past two years. Many of my friends had gone to America. They all promised to write and send gifts, but of course they didn't. They were all too wrapped up in their great new lives. This time, when we were called into the office, pictures were taken of my brother and me. Olga said it was for the Americans to see. We were overwhelmed! A few months later Olga said that they had found a family for us: the Frye family.

On my birthday, May 21st, 1994, my

I guess the law of life that I'm trying to tell is that life works in mysterious ways, and you don't know what it has in store for you.

new father came to get us. It didn't hit me until then that I was really leaving. I was happy and sad at the same time. We left the orphanage, and I said my goodbyes and promised to write everyone. When we arrived at the Los Angeles airport, there were so many people to greet us! I got to meet my new mother, grandmother, and little sister. As we hugged and kissed, I thought, "It finally happened! I can't believe it was just a year ago that it was all a dream. Now it is a dream come true."

I guess the law of life that I'm trying to tell is that life works in mysterious ways, and you don't know what it has in store for you. If you look hard enough you may find what is to be your new life just around the corner or across the Atlantic.



*By Christina Frye
Blair HS,
Pasadena, CA*

*"After a storm,
fair weather;
after sorrow, joy."*

— Russian Proverb

Featured Contest Champion: Neil Sawyer

By William Schuler



Neil Sawyer
Contest Champion

Mr. Neil Sawyer has managed the highly successful *Laws of Life* Essay Contest in Winona, MN for the past three years. The fact that he accepted this responsibility and made it such a success is a reflection of the way he lives his life.

In high school, Neil had opportunities to exemplify many of the *laws of life* about which today's students are writing (possessing a strong work ethic, perseverance, enjoying the fruits of one's labor, etc.) when he held

various summer jobs: washing windows, sweeping floors, changing tires, helping mechanics, and doing construction work. In his spare time, with the help of his father, he built a sailing iceboat that he sailed on a nearby lake for many winters.

Neil went on to graduate from Hamline University (St. Paul, MN) and the U.S. Naval Reserve Shipman's School at Northwestern University (Chicago). The Navy assigned him to the new Light Cruiser U.S.S. Boise in June 1941, serving in the

Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbor. The U.S.S. Boise participated in the first successful U.S. Navy action in World War II.

A career in banking followed Neil's service in W.W.II, and he eventually retired from his position as VP and Trust Officer in charge of the Trust Department of Norwest Bank (Winona). Neil then returned to college to receive his Master's Degree in Psychology. He is a founding member of the Holistic Health Association (San Diego).

Neil's sense of community and the importance of giving back are demonstrated through his tireless work as superintendent of Sunday School at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and past president and president-elect of the Golden Kiwanis Club. Neil is also a member of the local Junto Club, which sponsored the first contest in Winona in 1997. The Golden Kiwanis Club co-sponsored the contest in 1998 and 1999, and both clubs have pledged to continuing their support.

The entire community of Winona would like to extend a big heartfelt THANK YOU to Neil for his commitment to our youth. Not only has he helped give them this opportunity to write about the character qualities that are important in shaping who they are, but he has also unwittingly provided them with an exceptional role model.

Contest Benefits Local Civic Groups

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The *Laws of Life* Essay Contest helps students focus on the essential modes of conduct, beliefs, ideals, values, and aspirations that are at the heart of good character. The opportunity for reflection afforded by the contest promotes the development of individuals who embody the Rotarian ideal of service in personal, business, and community life. It also sends a positive message to young people about our faith in their ability to make value judgments and good decisions based on their internal convictions. Participants in the contest receive affirmation from the adults in their community that adhering to personal values and developing good character is truly a worthwhile pursuit.



Peggy Veljkovic
Program Coordinator
Laws of Life Essay Contest

The John Templeton Foundation is proud to share with you that Peggy Veljkovic has joined the Foundation as the new coordinator of the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest. Peggy comes to the Foundation from the College of William and Mary where she was an instructor of French and the supervisor of the undergraduate TA program. She has also been a graduate lecturer in the Department of French at Penn State University. From 1991 to 1994, she taught French and English at Intercollege, located in Nicosia, Cyprus. Peggy brings to the Contest her commitment to young people and her conviction that an education is a collaborative effort involving

school, family, and community. We welcome Peggy to the Foundation and invite you to do the same. Peggy may be reached at 1-800-245-1285 (US only), 610-687-8942, or via e-mail at veljkovic@templeton.org.

Writing About My Laws of Life: Just Beyond the Shallow

Kenny Kang has participated twice in West Catholic High School's essay contest and has won awards for both of his essays. In the spring of 1998 he was a first-place winner in his freshman class, and in the spring of 1999 he won honorable mention in his sophomore class.



Kenny Kang
West Catholic HS
Philadelphia

It was the beginning of July, and I unexpectedly received a phone call from the John Templeton Foundation. I was asked if I would be willing to write about my experiences related to participating in the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest for an upcoming newsletter. As I was agreeing to their request, I could already envision the remainder of my summer being spent in the subtle glare of my word processor. However, at the time I did not realize that this piece would unexpectedly be the highlight of my summer.

Even before hanging up, I was already pondering what to write. Should I mention how the contest enabled me to grasp the considerable influence of family upon my life? Or would I describe the various aspects of the contest that made it truly great — how individual schools hold their own writing contest and winners are chosen from within the school. I could have also explained how our essays were left completely open to our imaginations. As I was preparing to submit this composition, I reread it for the last time. In it, I praised the Foundation for promoting this program, which allowed me to convey my convictions about a society without repercussions. But then I realized that the description of my experience was rather shallow,

and everything I wrote could have appeared in an information packet on the contest. There was no mention of any profound influence upon my life. What good was there in all the time I spent thinking about how I changed? Then suddenly, I realized how I matured from this contest . . . and I simply deleted the file.

As the idea for my new newsletter essay was coming to me, I actually laughed at how absurdly simple it was: All I could attribute to this contest was the many days I spent with writer's block! This was because I took seriously the task of reexamining my life up to that point to find ways in which I was influenced. I was amazed to realize that I have developed a lot, particularly in recent years. I am important and do have an impact on others' lives. This is what I have received from the essay writing experience. I discovered that I was never fully appreciative for all the experiences in my life. All the good that has happened to me is as equally significant as all the turmoil I have seen. The contest has given me a deeper understanding of myself. It has placed me in this world. When I write of what I have learned from the *Laws of Life* Essay Contest, I can only say that it was a decisive moment in my life.

So, yes I am stating that the contest was instrumental in letting me interpret what I see of society. And I do praise the program for this uncommon experience. However, the most significant influence that the essay contest has had on me was to make me into a fuller human being.

The brand-new Essay Contest logo is now available electronically to anyone who is interested in incorporating its design into their individual contest materials (certificates, promotional flyers, announcements, booklets, etc.). Please contact Peggy Veljkovic, who will send the logo design to you on disk or as an e-mail attachment.



The contest has given me a deeper understanding of myself; it has placed me in this world.

laws of life
E S S A Y C O N T E S T

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