Teen represents RHS at Model U.N.

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Every November, schools from all over Arkansas and surrounding states participate in the Arkansas Model United Nations in Conway. This year, Russellville High School was represented by sophomore Ashlyn Holeyfield.

Last month marked the 38th annual conference, a multi-disciplinary educational program that provides students with the opportunity to sharpen their communication and critical thinking skills and enhance their understanding of world diplomacy. The Arkansas Model United Nations provides students with a setting much like the actual U.N., complete with observers, pages and delegates. Holeyfield served as a delegate.

The question-and-answer segment of the conference was aired on the Arkansas Educational Television Network and hosted by AETN commentator Steve Barnes, who asked such thought-provoking questions as "Do you feel the U.N. still has a place in our world?" and "Do you feel the United States, being a superpower, still has a need for the U.N."

The delegates were articulate with their answers. Holeyfield fielded the questions with grace and experience, although this was her first trip to the Model U.N. Her answers reflected thought and consistency. She said she believes the U.N. still has a place in our world because it helps people who cannot help themselves and is there when no one else is.

Holeyfield was selected by Paul Gray, her teacher for International Studies, because she is a sophomore and could attend these conferences in the future, but also because she would prepare well for it and would not be intimidated by the fact that the conference was televised.

"She [Ashlyn] did a good job. She might have been nervous, but she didn't show it," Gray said. "There's no way I could have done what she did."

The only preparation Holeyfield had before the conference was a videotape on United Nations secretary general Kofi Annan and his role in world politics. The student delegates watched the video and thought of questions that might be asked.

Holeyfield was joined by students from schools around Arkansas as well as Tennessee. She was the only sophomore delegate, all of whom were female.

"It's nice to see more girls joining classes having to do with international politics," Gray said.

Holeyfield said her interest in foreign relations and international politics started in part because of the events of 9/11. She became interested in how other countries and cultures think and perceive the U.S. She enjoys learning the different aspects of other cultures such as the stance on small arms, nuclear weapons and everything that a country represents.
As a Model U.N. delegate, Holeyfield had to be able to not only think quickly, but to help create policy for her "country."

"We would study the country, adopt its views and write resolutions based on those views," said Holeyfield.

Holeyfield's plans on her future are tentative, but she has a good idea of what she wants to do.

"I would like to study international relations or something in a related field at Georgetown (University) and then become an ambassador's aide or something similar," said Holeyfield.

To get into top-flight school like Georgetown, a student needs to not only have the academic standing (Holeyfield currently has a 4.0 GPA), but also a host of extracurricular activities. Holeyfield is on the softball and volleyball teams, plays the bassoon in band and recently stopped competing in gymnastics so that she could concentrate on her other endeavors, such as working at Manna House Outreach and with the youth group in her church.

The pressure Holeyfield feels is self-imposed. Her parents, Annette Holeyfield and Robert Holeyfield, say she pushes herself to succeed.

"We both just support whatever she decides to do," said her mother. "When she quit gymnastics, that was completely up to her."

Both Holeyfield and her mother believe that gymnastics helped to prepare Holeyfield for being in front of large crowds and performing alone.

"In gymnastics, you are a part of a team, but you are doing each skill by yourself," Annette Holeyfield said. "That really helped (Ashlyn) to prepare for this forum."

Her teachers say that Holeyfield is a deep thinker, and her parents agree.

"Ashlyn has always been identified as a deep thinker. I think the thing that impresses me the most about her is her tendency to ask a lot of questions so that she thoroughly understands an issue from many angles," said Robert Holeyfield. "She has a genuine desire to help people and she believes that by understanding international relations (as well as local, state and national politics) she has an opportunity to create positive change in the world."

The trip to the Model U.N. wasn't an easy one. Gray said the district only pays for delegate fee and transportation; the rest (room and board and food) comes from the students.

"The kids pay their own way, the meals and hotel fees," he said.

There are roughly 350 students who attend this conference from all over Arkansas and surrounding states. The next trip is in February at Rhodes College in Memphis. The students will have to raise money themselves for this trip since it is an out-of-state event - the district won't
pay for the transportation, which could be $1,000 just for the bus to get there.

The students work to raise money, Gray said, and some of their parents have already written checks early for the event.

Holeyfield will continue at the mind-numbing pace she is currently working, and she will enjoy preparing for the next opportunity to talk about her passion for international affairs. Just ask her, she will give you a well-thought-out response.