

## Consider Debating

from Elaine Miller,  
PA State Debate Representative

[This article first appeared in Issue 68 (Fall 1999) of the *PA Homeschoolers* newsletter.]

Pennsylvania homeschoolers have taken on a new sport this year with great enthusiasm and success. This sport, known as policy debate, is teaching eager students how to research, listen, develop critical-thinking skills, analyze and argue in a God-honoring way. The Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) introduced policy debate in 1995, believing it to be an effective discipline able to equip students for successful living and more importantly to become effective communicators for Christ.

Debating's benefits are best expressed by a seasoned debater, Thane Rehn from California:

In the years since I began my involvement in speech classes and competitions, I have been greatly blessed by it in almost every area of my life. When standing for my beliefs among friends, in the classroom, or while witnessing, the ability to shape and articulate ideas and arguments has been fundamentally necessary to get the Christian message across. In everyday life, when somebody asks you, 'Oh really? Why do you believe that?' you are not given two hours with a pastor and a catechism to formulate your answer. You have to be ready and willing to back up what you are saying right there, on the spot, and basic communication skills make the difference between a potent witnessing opportunity and a pointless disagreement. Because of this, I believe very strongly that the lessons of rhetoric and public speaking can have an impact on the world, an opportunity which we, as Christians, must not pass up.

Pennsylvania students began debating in January through a Debate Seminar. Jonathan Hammond, one of Cedarville College's top debater's and President of Miriam Maddox Forum, came out to Downingtown, PA to teach Debate Theory and lead the students in a Debate Tournament. Despite Pennsylvania's first major snow storm, 65 students and parents attended.

By the end of January six teams traveled to Cedarville College in Cedarville, Ohio for their first taste of competitive debate. There they met 14 other homeschool teams from Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. Pennsylvania students came home with Speaker and Team Awards.

In March, Pennsylvania hosted its first Debate Tournament with teams from York, and Ohio. Following that, in April, were the PA Open Regional Debate Tournament and the second Qualifying Pennsylvania State Debate Tournament.

HSLDA's National Debate Tournament in Purcellville, VA, was truly outstanding for many reasons. It was encouraging to see 40 homeschool teams representing 17 states, as well as parents, siblings, friends, coaches, and judges. There was a marked spirit of camaraderie evidenced in happy reunions among students, anxious parents and coaches helping their students in any way possible - be it running for water bottles or giving encouraging words and hugs - most importantly, it was not uncommon to see students, parents and coaches

huddled in small groups praying before each round. Truly there was a spirit of God-honoring competition.

The final round encapsulated the spirit of debate. This round proved to be the highlight of the evening. Joseph Rose and Janai Hess debated against Thane Rehn and Chris Stollar. It was tense, exciting, humorous, and enriching. At the conclusion of the round it was one big hug among four friends who deeply cared about each other. Joseph Rose and Janai Hess recaptured the National title. Thane Rehn and Chris Stollar came in second place. Missy Hurter, from Honey Brook, PA, took 10th Place Speaker Award. This was an exciting win for Missy. She gives the Lord all the glory for her accomplishments. She and her partner are coached by Missy's Dad, Steve Hurter.

Debate will continue in Pennsylvania. In October, Teresa Moon and her National Debate Winning Teams are coming to PA to offer instruction in debate. (See the calendar on page 32). This is an excellent opportunity for interested students and parents to learn about HSLDA style policy debate and become better communicators. The first day of this conference will focus on public speaking and is open to all students ages 7 - 18. The following two days will deal exclusively with Debate instruction. Reservations are required.

Pennsylvania is also planning several debate tournaments. There will be two non-qualifying tournaments on December 4, 1999 and March 18, 2000. We are looking forward to our Regional Qualifying Tournament on April 7- 8, 2000 and our second State Qualifying Tournament on May 11- 12, 2000. Winners of these tournaments will go to Nationals. This year we are requiring all teams to compete in at least two non-qualifying tournaments before they are eligible to compete in Pennsylvania qualifying tournaments.

We encourage all serious debate students to attend as many tournaments as possible, both in state and out of state. We are looking forward to renewing friendships through participating in tournaments with teams from Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, Indiana, and Michigan, and hope that many new teams will join us!

If you have any further questions about Debate or are interested in attending the "Communicators for Christ Conference", please contact me, Elaine Miller (105 Anthony Lane, Honey Brook, PA 19344, 610-273-9088, or email: .edm@chesco.com). All the Pennsylvania teams wish you a hearty welcome to the sport!!