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**NEWSLETTER / NEWS RELEASE
From the Office of the Mayor**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARCH 2, 2021

**THE VIRTUAL POETRY OUT LOUD REGIONAL FINAL WAS
RECENTLY HOSTED AT THE GARY R. GAYDOS AUDITORIUM AT JJE**

On Wednesday, February 24, 2021, the St. Louis Regional Poetry Out Loud Contest judges submitted their ballots to the Florissant Civic Center Theatre Poetry Out Loud Coordinator, Nancy Crouse. Due to restrictions surrounding COVID-19, the event was held virtually for the first time in its history.

Each contestant recited three memorized poems in three separate rounds as a part of this national poetry recitation contest, which is a collaboration of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation, The Missouri Arts Council, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Missouri Association of Community Arts Agencies and at this level The City of Florissant. Originating in 2005, the contest is open to high school students in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam.

At the end of the judging, Regional Coordinator Nancy Crouse announced the top three winners: in third place, Fatima Rehmani from Parkway West High School, Andria Benmuvhar school coordinator; in second place, Liam Taylor from John Burroughs School, Eleanor Des Prez school coordinator; and in first place and representing St. Louis County in the state finals is Hayley Knapik, Nerinx Hall High School, Raeann Eschmann school coordinator. Other contestants were Elena Logusch from Whitfield High School, Tom Herman school coordinator; and Emily Seidelman from Affton High School, Troy Kozak school coordinator

Contestants from other virtual regional competitions throughout Missouri will have their videotaped entries submitted to the state final judges, and the state winner will be announced at a virtual pizza party March 10th by zoom. The zoom meeting will only be for contestants and invited guests, but the results will be made public in a televised broadcast. Finalists will talk about their POL experience in this unique year as well as participate in a Poetry Slam, using either an original poem or choosing one of their favorite poems. The state winner will represent Missouri in the virtual national finals in the Spring, but the exact plan has not been announced.

The judges for the St. Louis County Regional, Renee Fenner, Pam Geppert, Noelle Jones and Trish Nelke evaluated the contestants on their physical presence, voice and articulation, dramatic appropriateness, evidence of understanding, accuracy and overall performance. This is the seventh consecutive year for the City of Florissant and the Florissant Civic Center Theatre staff to sponsor and facilitate the St. Louis County Regional Poetry Out Loud.