

DEAF STUDENT POETS TO VISIT JAPAN

April 11, 2005

Last year, Sam Sepah, a deaf student from Rochester Institute of Technology, was thrilled when he learned that, as a winner of the Robert F. Panara Haiku/Tanka Competition, a video of him performing his Haiku would be shown on a giant outdoor screen in Tokyo's business district.

"I only wished I could have gone there to see it myself," he recalled.

This year, Sepah will get his wish.

Five student poets from RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf, including three-time winner Sepah, will visit Japan in May, courtesy of the Postsecondary Education Network-International (PEN-International), a grant program housed at NTID and sponsor of the annual competition.

PEN-International aims to share 21st century educational technology with deaf students at colleges and universities worldwide, and has partnerships in Japan, China, the Philippines, Thailand, the Czech Republic, and Russia. It is funded by The Nippon Foundation of Japan.

Combining an ancient Japanese poetry form with the expressive beauty of American and Japanese Sign Languages, the Haiku/Tanka Competition is open to students from NTID and Japan's Tsukuba College of Technology, one of PEN-International's partner institutions.

The competition began in 2000 as a way to honor Panara, NTID's first deaf faculty member, who regularly incorporated Haiku into the English classes that he taught to deaf and hearing students. Panara retired in 1988.

This year, a record 244 poems—both three-line Haiku and five-line Tanka—were submitted by 28 students from NTID. Winning poems were selected by two judges, and three of the winning poems will be published in an upcoming edition of *Red Lights*, an international Tanka journal.

Competitions are staged separately at both colleges, but video conferencing allows the students to watch each other's performances.

This year's NTID student winners are Stephen S. McDonald, Sam S. Sepah, Jessica A. Thurber, Jack R. Williams, and Christopher J. Zahniel. Honorable mentions were given to Leon Lim, Michelle Peterson, and Cassie Haynes.

TCT's five student winners and four faculty members visited NTID in March, and will welcome NTID's student winners to Japan in May.

NTID is the first and largest technological college in the world for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. NTID, one of eight colleges of RIT, offers educational programs and access and support services to its 1,100 students from around the world who study, live, and socialize with 14,400 hearing students on RIT's Rochester, N.Y., campus.

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