No Debating These Champs

By Alan Dale For the Plain Talk

If you get into an argument with Vermillion High School junior Erika Moen be warned: The young lady is a state champion in debate and it would behoove one not to disagree with her on that fact.

Moen, won the Class A state title in Lincoln-Douglas Debate and along with teammates Joe Miller and Sowmya Ragothaman, who won the Foreign Extemporaneous policy state title in Harrisburg last weekend, she has helped carried the standard for the high school debate team in 2014-2015. Her hard work not only paid off in capturing a state crown, but Moen has also been named as an alternate from South Dakota for the National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA) finals that take place in Dallas on June 14-19. Moen earned that place in Lincoln-Douglas by finishing third in a national qualifying event three weeks ago in Sioux Falls, one spot out of an official place in Dallas. This year's topic was a debate on the merits of a minimum wage. "It's a little disheartening to get to the final round and not actually make it after putting so much work into it," Moen said of her national qualifying finish. "I did lose that round. But I am ready to come back next year and go to nationals."

Lincoln-Douglas debate protocols are based on the 1858 Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas debates that focused on slavery and the morals, values, and logic behind it. They are designed to center on a proposition of value. A proposition of value concerns itself with what ought to be instead of what is. A value is an ideal held by individuals, societies, governments, etc. Debaters are encouraged to develop argumentation based upon a values perspective.

"It's probably one of the most rewarding activities to do," Moen said. "To see all the work pay off was just fantastic. It's also a great educational experience. I've learned more about research, philosophy, public speaking, and logical analysis all just from debate.

"Thinking on your feet, those types of skills, have been very valuable."



Vermillion High School's debate team, consisting of (left-to-right) Adam Jensen, Kaleb Blue, Joe Miller, Sowmya Ragothaman, and Erika Moen, brought home some serious hardware from the recent state meet. **COURTESY PHOTO**

The team building from scratch again

First-year coach Joseph De La Rosa a third-year law student, graduate assistant, and Masters' degree candidate in history signed on when the debate coach at the University of South Dakota told him about the opening at the high school. Historically coaches for the Vermillion High debate team would be students at USD and would ultimately leave upon graduation. "The season had already started

and they hadn't found a coach," De La Rosa said. "This past year their coach had moved back to Sioux Falls and when I heard they were struggling to find a coach, I had a lot going on I still thought I would be able to pitch in and help. I was able to recruit an assistant coach who would be able to help and I brought in Josh Jorgenson. So then I got the team

signed up in some events." The Vermillion team had a fluid nature to things this season as Moen was the only permanent fixture among a rotating roster door as debaters came and went and came back again. Combine that with athletic sports, show choir, dancing, and other activities that draw attention, it

was hard to keep the debate roster fixed. Other debate team members that

joined Moen, Ragothaman and Miller at state were Annaliese Taggart, Adam Jensen, and Kaleb Blue, but it was the junior Lincoln-Douglas champion that was there from day one. "Erika is the one person who has been dedicated and practiced regularly and never missed a tournament that we've done," De La Rosa said. "We would have preferred to have as many students as possible because that makes the program more competitive.

"We had such a small team so we weren't really in contention for any overall team award." Moen said that a lot changed when a nice cadre of involved seniors off of last year's team graduated.

I am used to having a much larger team than we have currently," Moen said. "We all saw this coming that we weren't going to have much of a team so I decided that I really needed to compete as hard as I could this year and go to all the competitions this year and it really paid off. I am really glad that (Joseph and Josh) came along due to the fact I wouldn't

Not really having anyone to do research when we used to divvy up research between four us and now it was me doing all the research. "Last year it was definitely more of a social event...this year it was more about me applying my own debate style and applying what I've learned over the years. Most of my motivation was also to do well and to keep the program

alive." De La Rosa knows how big a role Moen played for the debate program this year. "Erika was the captain of the team

and at times she seemed like the captain of the life raft," De La Rosa said. "She kind of motivated Joe and I. She was able to recruit and we will have some young people that are excited to be back next year. She was also innovative with some new approaches that coaches said they hadn't seen before."

Why Debate at All?

Moen would put hours of work into her craft, especially before major competitions and she saw the fruits of her labor pay her back tenfold.

Moen even admits she saw the team debater she had become when some of the habits formed with the team started to bleed

over into her daily life. "I know I am going into debate word when I start using words like 'essentially' or 'basically,"

sounds like I am in a debate round.' It comes so subtle that I don't even notice it most of the It definitely takes a lot of work and a certain level of patience.

Moen said. "That I'm like 'it

"Once you starting practicing daily, hitting the research, the format, the procedure, the policy...people want it to be easy," De La Rosa said. ""As more time passes, the more work you have to do. The more research you do, the more effective you were able

"Sometimes you have to work hard and sometimes you have to work harder."

Also one must have a level of integrity and savvy that portends an ability to convince the judges that the debater is the real deal in a particular discussion.

"You have to think on your feet and make up arguments," Moen said. "If you don't look confident judges will assume you are losing. You have to be a good speaker and be able to adapt to the judges who might not understand the argument. You should be confident, your opponent." De La Rosa said sarcasm doesn't usually work for most competitors, especially in Lincoln-Douglas where there is a certain decorum and etiquette that allows for both sides to have equal billing.

"The most difficult thing is adapting to judges because you don't know what they are judging," Moen said. "The most enjoyable thing is going to tournaments and feeling confident in your evidence and your cases and knowing what the person might say and know exactly what you might say in response to that."

What Made Moen a Champ?

"She learned a lot from those who came before her," De La Rosa said. "They have a lot of tradition in debate. She has learned from that and her work ethic is phenomenal."

On the way back from the Sioux Falls national qualifier, Moen had just gotten beat out of a top two spot and was already inquiring about practice the next Monday. "I told her to take a day off and relax," De La Rosa said. "She's dedicated and she cares about the program. She is definitely invested and what's to see this succeed. It's important that she is willing to take feedback and adapt and is not rigid...there is a fine." That's what helped make Erika Moen a state debate champion. "It was a great way to end the year and say I was a state champion," Moen said. "Then I was able to drop everything saying debate season is done, it ended on a high note and now I am going to take a nap and go watch Netflix. "(The title was) very rewarding because if I had done it last year I would have also had four other solid Lincoln-Douglas debaters who would have also done that research. Doing it by myself this year was really rewarding." Last year, Moen was a part of the process where this year she was the process.

"Essentially, yeah," she said. Now she hopes she can be the centerpiece of a bigger, better debate team next season.



"Probably like Batman's," Clark

said, describing his super look.

"I would probably wear boots,"

Ashlynn said. "I would have a

cape and I would have pants and

a blue shirt. My hair would be in

With the lineup of Marvel and

DC Comic movies, the world is

wondering what would happen

if superheroes start to fight each

would probably get red."

Vermillion's

Children

planned out.

a ponytail."

have made it as a far as I did. Just To Be Super!

By Sarah Wetzel For the Plain Talk

If As superhero comics and movies dominate our society, the younger generation can scarcely miss the excitement of people with amazing powers who swoop in and save the day. Ivan, 3, likes Superman because he flies. If Ivan could fly, he said he would fly to Sioux City. "A superhero is somebody who saves people," said Ashlynn, 7.

"They have super powers. Super powers are something people don't have and they use it to save people." Clark, 5, would disagree because

his favorite superhero is unique. "Batman," Clark said. "He doesn't

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have any powers but he can still save people."

According to Clark, you don't need a super power to be a hero. In general, though, Clark knows that super powers are important to a superhero. "He flies around saving people,"

Clark said. "If he can't fly then he has to walk."

So what does Batman use instead of powers?

"He uses his arms," Clark said. "He probably uses his hands too." According to Clark, powers or not, Batman saves a lot of people. Ashlynn's favorite superhero, Supergirl, represents the female side of the spectrum. "She's superman's cousin,"

Ashlynn said. "She saves



Ashlynn, 7, and Clark, 5, know what it means to be a super hero and know which power they would pick if it fell to them to save the day. SARAH WETZEL / FOR THE PLAIN TALK

people too. She can look through walls and she's strong and she can fly. She can also run really fast." Though Supergirl is one to be admired, Ashlynn is not hoping to meet her anytime soon. "She's not real," Ashlynn

said. "No one has super powers." Clark also knows that Batman is fictional.

"Because Heavenly Father didn't make him," he said. Though men and women that fly and jump over buildings are not

super help? "Not really," Clark said.

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part of our reality doesn't stop us from wondering, if they were real would they help us with something like cleaning our rooms? "Probably not," Clark said. "He would probably go around saving people like you know he does." Is a homework crisis enough for

Ashlynn knows she has other places she can turn to for help. "I can get help from my brothers and my mom and dad," she said. "So I don't need Supergirl. She probably wouldn't come to clean

my bedroom." If there ever was a super-worthy emergency, Ashlynn said she would call the local super on the

phone. Ashlynn and Clark, like most kids, often find themselves dreaming of what power they

would have if they could choose Both of them would choose to fly. "It's fun," Ashlynn said. "I would

probably go to Oregon to see my grandma and grandpa. I would jump off buildings and fly away." "I would probably pick flying because you can go super duper high," Clark said. "Big heights i'm afraid of. I would fly on tiny heights not big ones." When it comes to saving people

though, Ashlynn is unsure. "I don't know how," she said. Ashlynn knows that she could learn if she had the chance like other superheroes most likely did. Supergirl for example. "Maybe Superman taught her how to save people," Ashlynn

Every superhero needs a costume and Ashlynn and clark have theirs



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Superman and Batman for example. Superman would win because Superman is really strong," Ashlynn said. Clark, however, is on team Bat. "Batman would win because he can knock people out," Clark said. What about Captain America and Iron Man? "Captain America because he can throw a shield," Ashlynn said.

Though we have to find out through films how those fights will end, Ashlynn and Clark see heroes saving people in real life. "Be an ambulance driver," Ashlynn said. "Police and Firefighters save

people," Clark said. "Firefighters can save people by putting out fires and police can save people by taking people to jail." Ashlynn and Clark also do their part to save the day. "If someone's hurt I can go tell my

mommy and daddy so they can take care of them," Ashlynn said. Clark agrees. "I can tell my mommy if my

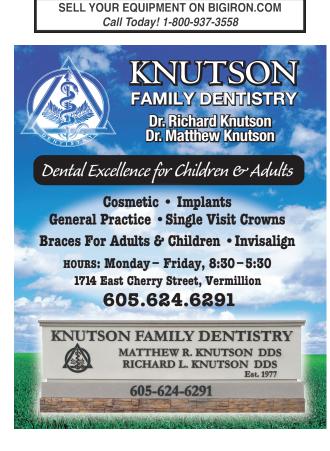
brother got beat up," he said. Both Clark and Ashlynn agree that makes their parents superheroes.

We are telling her but she does all the work," Ashlynn admits. Mommy and Daddy do save the

"My dad helps me with my homework so I don't get in trouble and have to stay in at recess in school," Ashlynn said.

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