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Stars align

Ten Finalists chosen for this year's Teen Star

By TED MILLS, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT
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Ten young singers took a giant step closer to their dream Sunday night with the announcement of this year's Teen Star line-up.

Now in its seventh year, the popular singing competition continues to attract hopefuls from area high schools from Carpinteria to Santa Maria and helps fund arts education programs in the county through its finale show at the Arlington Theatre on February 27.

Co-sponsored by Deckers international, the auditions on Sunday were the final day of three. The first was held Thursday at Pioneer High School in Santa Maria, while Saturday and Sunday events took place at Deckers' corporate offices off Hollister Ave. in Goleta.

The judging team, including opera singer Eduardo Villa, KTYD DJ Lin Aubuchon, and Director of News Operations for the News-Press Don Katich, joined Teen Star's executive producer Joe Lambert in hosting the auditions. The judging panel, as has been a policy since the beginning, offers constructive advice rather than curt dismissals.

"We want the kids to get an educational experience out of auditioning," said Mr. Lambert. "So we try to make it as friendly as possible. For some of these 7th graders, for example, it's the first time they've auditioned for something."

This year the finalists are: freshman Ava Burford from Santa Barbara High School; sophomore Kaitlyn Chui from Cabrillo High School; juniors Jackson Cociolone and Jillian Garnett of San Marcos High, senior Megan Wilson of San Marcos High; sophomore Daniel Geiger from Pioneer Valley High School; junior Rachel Guron from Cabrillo High School; freshman Hunter

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La Colina Junior High 8th grade student Sage Streeter listens to feedback from the judges during Teen Star auditions Sunday at the Deckers' corporate offices in Goleta.

NIK BLASKOVICH/NEWS-PRESS
PHOTOS



Executive Producer Joe Lambert speaks to contestants at the start of the auditions.



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Hawkins from Laguna Blanca; and sophomres Chloe Schwartz and Claire Velez from Bishop Diego High School.

Teen Star also chooses alternates as understudies, and those three winners are junior James McKernan of Bishop Diego, 7th-grader Jake Gildred from Jonata Middle School and 8th-grader Jericho Guron of Vandenberg Middle School.

For Kaitlyn Chui, 15, this is her fourth year auditioning. She made it to the final round of three last year. Currently she's in her high school's production of "Mary Poppins."

"Teen Star really helps me focus on my music," she said. "And the judges really help you out."

This year there's been a lot of Adele songs and Sam Smith ballads being chosen as audition pieces. Many are coming from the theater departments of various schools, and one of last year's finalists was accepted into PCPA.

Though the show tapped into the American Idol craze when it started, the competition is finding fans among musical theater students now. And one of the constant surprises are the powerful, adult voices that project out of these often nervous and shy teens.

With kids coming in from junior high onward, there's always next year if they don't make the cut. In the case of Sydney Shalhoob, last year's winner, it took her two years to make it to the Granada stage, where she was crowned Teen Star 2015.

"I didn't even think I was going to get into the top three," she said. "I think it was my song choice, I took a rock song and made it my own. The judges give really good feedback and they really helped me carry on singing."

Miss Shalhoob, who will sing at this year's Teen Star as a send-off to the past year, continues to sing in a cappella at San Marcos High, where she is a sophomore.

"It's such a great experience," she said, offering advice to this year's finalists. "Don't focus on winning. Focus on what you can improve for the next time and try out again. And try out as many times as you want."

For more information about Teen Star, go to www.teenstar.us/.

For ticket information, contact the Arlington ticket agency at 963-4408.

email: news@newspress.com



Ava Burford



Kaitlyn Chui



Jackson Cociolone



Jillian Garnett



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