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Wheatley Idol reaches 10th year

By Bryan Jessop

The success of a local outdoor talent show has been a full decade in the making. The 10th annual Wheatley Idol, the largest Sunday attraction for the annual Wheatley Fish Festival, was once again well-attended and made up of a lengthy list of talented vocal performers representing four age categories. The Wheatley Optimist Club-sponsored event was led by organizer Darla Janzen for the eighth consecutive and final time, as the local volunteer will hand the reins over to Susan Fulmer — one of her assistants this year (which also included Melissa Paine) — for next year's installment.

For her final year as the event's lead organizer, Janzen was greeted by approximately 400 spectators and 30 high-calibre vocal acts.

"It's looking really good this year," Janzen said at about the midway point of this year's Wheatley Idol, held Sunday, Aug. 4 and again hosted by the Two Creeks Conservation Area. "We've got all kinds of ranges with our performers."

This year's competition was judged by local celebrities Nicole Barron — herself an accomplished musician — radio personality Cordell Green, and Amber Dubois — the overall winner of the 2012 and ninth annual Wheatley Idol. Once again, the event's registration reached maximum capacity within 24 hours of officially opening the doors to competitors.

This year's winners were selected by the panel of three judges as follows:

- six- to nine-year-olds — Emma Wright (Meadford), first place; Hayley Doucet (Tilbury), second place; Larissa Porteous (Harrow), third place;
- 10- to 12-year-olds — Summer Ellis (Essex), first place; Cassidy Tiessen (Leamington), second place; Melissa Martens (Ruthven), third place;
- 13- to 16-year-olds — Chelsea Malott (Leamington), first place; Hannah Renaud (Kingsville), second place; Maddy Vasey (Chatham), third place;
- 17- to 29-year-olds — RJ Latter (London), first place; Amy Papineau (Woodsee), second place; Nick Tiessen (Leamington), third place.

Latter, who had recently returned from performing at the CMA Festival in Nashville, was chosen as the overall winner of this year's Wheatley Idol, an honour that included a lengthy list of prizes including studio recording sessions at SLR Studios in Windsor, a makeover, new clothes and a photo shoot for the CD's inside jacket.

"It feels amazing," said Latter of winning this year's top prize. "Ever since I was a kid coming here, I've always wanted to win it. I've watched the winners from past years and said to myself 'I want that to be me'. It's awesome to be recognized like this, especially with the amount of talent that was here today."

Malott was selected as this year's overall runner-up, for what has been dubbed the 'Rising Star' award.

"I'm just shocked," she said. "I rehearsed for this for a long time, but I had no idea this (finishing second overall) was coming."

Several of this year's contestants made a short trip to Two Creeks this year, including Hayley Doucet, Rebecca Murphy and Onisha Labonte from Tilbury, Melissa Martens from Ruthven, Cassidy Tiessen, identical twin sisters Mackenzie and Madison Grineau, Mykayla Tiessen, Chelsea Malott, Eriana Verissimo, Nick Tiessen and Melissa Scott from Leamington, Jessica Desantis and Hannah Renaud from Kingsville and sisters Julia and Leanna Bueckert, Corrine Jackson, Judy Wiebe, Jeremy Blatz and Nicole Shanks from Wheatley.

Between age groups, the organizers and behind-the-scenes volunteers were recognized, from a team of junior emcees up to Janzen.

"She's been pretty well a one-lady show," Wheatley Optimist Club president Larry MacDonald said of Janzen. "We've (the Optimist Club) just been in the background. She's done a great job of getting sponsors to make this happen over the years."

Wheatley Idol was once again supported by a list of local sponsors who donated time, equipment, funding and door prizes to this year's widely-anticipated event.



From left to right, Nicole Barron, Cordell Green and Amber Dubois were the three celebrity judges of the 2013 Wheatley Idol competition, held Sunday, Aug. 4 at Two Creeks Conservation Area.

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Clockwise from top left: From left to right, first to third place finishers of Wheatley Idol's 13- to 16-year-old division were Chelsea Malott of Leamington (also overall runner-up), Hannah Renaud of Kingsville and Maddy Vasey of Chatham.

From left to right, first place Summer Ellis, second place Kassidy Tiessen and third place Melissa Martens accept their prizes in the 10- to 12-year-old division of the 10th annual Wheatley Idol.

RJ Latter of London was chosen as the 17- to 29-year-old category and overall winner of the 10th annual Wheatley Idol.

From left to right, winners of Wheatley Idol 10's six- to nine-year old category were Emma Wright of Meadford in first, Hayley Doucet of Tilbury in second and Larissa Porteous of Harrow in third.



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