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Eighth-grader proves she knows her history

By Jennifer Calhoun

Staff writer

Quick. Answer this: What was the first nation to abolish slavery?

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Hey! No cheating. Put the laptop down.

OK, enough of that. The answer is England. And if you didn't know that, well, maybe you should.

Things that may seem like trivia to some are actually important facts that could change the course of a child's life.

At least, that's the point Joe McGee is trying to drive home.

McGee is the organizer of the annual Black History Quiz Bowl, which took place Saturday in Kristin's, McGee's new restaurant in the Prince Charles Hotel.

McGee, who also is the director of a nonprofit mentoring program called GOTDAD, started the quiz bowl five years ago as a way to help children learn more about black history and the contributions of African-Americans.

McGee said he believes today's generation may be too removed from the struggles of the past, and he wants to make sure they don't forget so history doesn't repeat itself.

This year, participation was down. Only three girls competed for the \$100 first prize, but the competition was tough.

Cymone Bennett, a 14-year-old eighth-grader at Anne Chesnut Middle School, won the competition by beating schoolmate Jordan Knox, 13, by one point.

Competitors answered questions on everything from "Who was the first black elected governor?" to "Who invented the dustpan?" (Answers: Douglas Wilder of Virginia and L.P. Ray, respectively.)

Tiffany Randolph, a seventh-grade teacher at Anne Chesnut, said the competition was important because it empowers black children to know about all the contributions black Americans have made.

"I believe it's significant," Randolph said. "It teaches them to have pride in who they are."

Randolph said she didn't learn much about black history until she went to college and took courses in African-American studies.

"It made me stronger," she said. "When I left, I was more mature. I was proud, and I had a solid foundation. It helped me."

Dennis Carter, a social studies teacher at Anne Chesnut, said the competition was important in other ways, too.

Carter said studying black culture and history will help prepare children for the future.

"The world is a lot smaller now," Carter said. "They need to be able to compare cultures and see the similarities in their own culture."

Winners of the Quiz Bowl:

First place: Cymone Bennett, 14, Anne Chesnut Middle School - \$100

Second place: Jordan Knox, 13, Anne Chesnut Middle School - \$50

Third place: Tayler Knox, 15, Seventy-First High School

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