

Watchung student primed for national spelling bee

By **ERIC HOSTETTLER**
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WATCHUNG – Winning isn't everything, especially when you can have the experience of a lifetime.

That experience will come on Sunday, May 27, for Watchung seventh grader Aashi Mishra, when she competes in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington D.C. The competition is aired nationally on ESPN.

Aashi, 13, earned a berth in the famed competition by winning the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey's (SCLSNJ) annual Spelling Bee Spectacular on Saturday, March 10. The Valley View Middle School student beat out more than 60 participants at the county level.

Though she did admit to "panicking a little inside" during the county tournament, Mishra is a seasoned vet. She's been competing in spelling bees since the first grade.

"Unlike other things that I participated in I actually took a liking to spelling words," Aashi said of her 7-year-old self. "It felt good to be able to spell and use new words in my day-to-day life, and most of all it felt really good to win."

Now, just six weeks away from the world's most famous spelling bee, she is



Aashi Mishra, second from left, took home first place in the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey's third annual Spelling Bee Spectacular on Saturday, March 10, in Bridgewater. She is bound for the Scripps National Spelling Bee in May. Joining Aashi, from left, are Somerset County Freeholder and Head Spelling Judge Patricia Walsh, and parents Susmita and Krishna Mishra.

upping her game.

"Once I won the county competition I realized I needed to put in the extra hours, so I made myself a practice schedule and I rigorously follow it," she said, saying she finishes all her schoolwork during the week so she has time to practice on Saturday and Sunday.

"On the weekends I usually try to dedicate more than three hours, maybe up to five or six, because that's

a time when I don't have to focus as much on schoolwork."

The dedicated seventh grader tried to practice difficult words on her 13th birthday on Friday, March 30, but her parents told her she deserved at least one day off.

"I wanted to but my parents convinced me out of it," said Aashi. "I was a little hesitant, but I realized that there has to be at least one day that you can let it

go."

Hard Work Pays Off

She said her parents' support has contributed to her success in competitions.

"Aashi has been phenomenal – she has been winning all of the competitions she's done and we were always proud of her for that," said her mother, Susmita Mishra.

Susmita said the family

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— she, Aashi and husband Krishna — are excited for a family weekend in Washington, D.C. during the national competition.

"It's fun and I want her to enjoy the whole experience, because it's more of a life-enriching experience than anything else," she said.

The family recently moved to Watchung from Secaucus. Aashi said she appreciates the support she gets from her fellow Valley View students and from Principal Mary Nunn.

Her time at Valley View has encouraged her to partake in more extra-curricular activities, she said, like

soccer, the newspaper club and TREPS, a student entrepreneurship club.

"My favorite club is debate because it helps with my public speaking, and better yet it helps with my spelling, which is great for this competition," she said.

Krishna Mishra said he is excited for his daughter.

"It's a once in a lifetime experience and we talk about it a lot," he said. "We don't think about winning the competition, we think about working the process. Just following the process and working hard is important, because we cannot achieve anything in life without working hard. Everyone is at the same caliber in this competition, so

it's really about who wants it and who works harder."

With her enthusiasm and practice regime, there is little doubting the Valley View student's determination.

"I know I'm definitely going to meet people who are going to challenge me to be better — after all we are all competitive," she said. "I do feel like I can make a friend or two, but we're all striving for the same thing. I am little nervous, definitely because I don't feel like I'm going there to beat everyone else, I'm going there to meet people who want this as much as I do.

"It's really about who works harder for it, so I feel like I have a chance if I work hard enough."