



A trio of Windfields Junior High School students will have the banner they designed flutter in an Ottawa park after their creation was one of seven winners in a national contest.

The National Capital Commission (NCC), in partnership with Classroom Connections and the office of the secretary to the governor general of Canada, announced the winners of this year's cross-Canada student banner contest, named Raise Your Voices!, with the seven winning entries exhibited in the heart of the capital from May to October.

Students in grades 5 through 8 were asked to create and submit a one-of-a-kind banner design for the national student banner contest. Designs were to represent issues and topics of importance to Canadian youth.

More than 1,049 submissions were received from coast to coast and the seven winning banners have been professionally produced by the NCC and will be flown in Major's Hill Park until October.

On May 31, the artists who created the Top 3 banners, along with their classmates, will meet with Canadian Gov.-Gen. David Johnston, via video conference, to discuss their banner and how they can participate in building smarter and more caring communities. The Windfields students placed in the Top 3.

Submission for the contest, now in its fourth year, were judged by a three-member panel and looked for both artistic merit and content of the message, said Kerrie Rodier, co-ordinator of school programs and youth engagement for NCC.

"The theme is wide open," she said. "The only guidance they had was to tell something of importance to Canadian youth. There was a lot of concern about the future. We frequently see issues related to the environment, nature, diversity and acceptance, sports and issues that are specific to the parts of the country they're from."

Windfields' Timothy Choi, Truman Wong and Catherine Zhang focused on nature, particularly wild animals.

"We want Canadian youth to be aware of and respect animals in the wild. We would love for generation upon generation of children to be able to appreciate the wonders of Canadian nature," the Grade 8 students wrote of their piece.

The students learned about the contest in art class and thought it would be interesting to submit a piece, Catherine said.

"We wanted to draw something that represented Canadians and Canadian children everywhere," said the 13-year-old. "We liked animals and nature and in Grade 7, we had an art project about the Aboriginal art style of animals, so we included a Haida wolf."

The banner, which also shows the northern lights in the background, took about five days of in-class work to create, along with time spent out of school, she said.

"We all worked really hard," Catherine said, adding the group was shocked to learn they placed in the Top 7.

As for the video conference with Johnston, she said she's honoured for the experience.

"I'm going to ask him a few questions about what he wants the next generation of children to do, and questions about his work," she said.

Rodier said the NCC decided to target the grades 5 to 8 range because youth that age don't always feel their opinions are valued.

"They might not have had a chance to express themselves in a national forum," she said. "Maybe they don't feel people are listening to them."

Banners were created in groups of two to three and winners were informed in late March or early April, she said, adding the NCC will send a copied set of banners to the winners and their school.

"They should feel really proud of themselves, there were over 1,000 entries," Rodier said.

