

Singing their way to the Big Apple

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/022813/limitedSM.png> **Members of Port High's vocal jazz ensemble Limited Edition earn the group's third trip to a cappella championship with inspired semifinal performance**

For the third time in four years, the Port Washington High School vocal jazz ensemble Limited Edition has won the Varsity Vocals International High School A Cappella Midwest semifinals and is headed to New York to compete against the best groups in the nation.

The 14-member ensemble topped five other groups from high schools in Iowa and Illinois on Saturday in DeKalb, Ill., and will vie for the prestigious championship in the Big Apple on Friday, April 19.



In addition, two Limited Edition members won individual awards. Senior Perry Schaefer, a three-year member of the group, was named outstanding vocal percussionist for Limited Edition's entire three-set performance. Junior Danielle Dawson, who joined the group this year, received the outstanding choreography award, also for all songs.

"This is almost unprecedented," Port High Choral Director Dennis Gephart said. "To my knowledge, only one other group has qualified for the finals three times."

Limited Edition not only qualified for the finals in 2010, but won the championship. Last year, the group won the Midwest semifinals and finished third in New York.

This year, Gephart said, the group seems to be peaking at the right time.

"This was a great and rather unexpected victory," he said.

Unexpected not for want of talent but for a lack of time to prepare to compete against elite high school vocal groups. While many schools start practicing for the a cappella competition in September, Gephart said, Port High's group doesn't begin practicing until it has finished its holiday season Madrigal Dinner performances. This year, that gave Limited Edition about seven weeks to turn 14 voices into a winning a cappella group.

"We had to work our butts off," Dawson said.

Gephart said, "We really didn't start looking seriously at our a cappella pieces until mid-January, which caused a lot of stress and tension, but the kids step up because of that. It's what separates us from other schools."

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“They’ve had so much put on their shoulders with the Madrigal Dinner that by the time January rolls around they know what’s expected of them and they know how to handle the pressure.”

And that they did at the semifinal competition. Limited Edition performed its three-piece set first, then waited to see how they measured up.

“When third place was announced and it wasn’t us, our hearts jumped just a little,” Schaefer said. “Then second place was announced and it wasn’t us and you think, ‘Holy crap, either we won or we didn’t do well at all.’”

Gephart noted that the group had a legion of fans in attendance that included parents and other relatives, friends and Limited Edition alumni.

“When first place was announced, the place just blew up,” Gephart said. “It was fantastic.”

Started in 2002, Limited Edition has become an institution at Port High and a nationally recognized high school vocal ensemble.

“What’s really nice is that we’ve reached a point where we have a lot of alumni coming back to help with things like (musical) arrangements and choreography,” Gephart said.

Members must try out for Limited Edition every year — a requirement that helped inspire the group’s name — and the competition is fierce.

“Just because you’re a member one year doesn’t mean you’re part of the group the next,” said Gephart, who added that between 60 and 70 students try out every year for the group, which typically has 16 members but is slightly smaller this year.

“This shows that kids at this school love music and want to do more than just the basics,” he said. “They really want to take advantage of all this school, with the help of a supportive community, has to offer.”

This year’s group includes six returning members, one of whom said he can’t describe how important being a part of Limited Edition has been.

“It’s one of those things you just can’t walk away from,” said Schaefer, who plans on joining or starting a similar group in college next year. “Competing for the championship is a life-changing experience.”

For Dawson, singing in New York will be a special gift.

“We’re competing on my 17th birthday,” she said. “I’m so excited.”

But there is a lot of work to be done before Limited Edition takes the big stage. In addition to practicing, the group must raise money for its travel and lodging expenses in New York.

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Besides collecting donations at Port High concerts in March and hosting fundraisers throughout the community, Limited Edition is selling "The Best of A Cappella" CD, a compilation of music performed by the best high school and college a cappella groups produced by Varsity Vocals. What's special about the album is that it features a piece performed by last year's Limited Edition group.

To order a CD or make a donation, call the high school office at 268-5500.

Image Information: FLASHING NO. 1 signs symbolic of their first-place finish in the Varsity Vocals International High School A Cappella semifinal competition Saturday were members of Port Washington High School's vocal jazz ensemble Limited Edition (front row, from left) Brianna Bolinski, Alex Becker, Perry Schaefer, Danielle Dawson, (second row) Carly Pruzina, Natalie Howard, Victoria Micketti, Maggie Goodwin, Kasey Berger, (third row) Triston Williams, Cody McCaughn, Dan Gardner, (back row) Brian Arvai and Aidan Wojciehowski.

Photo by Bill Schanen IV