

# Greeley Tribune

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## « NORTHRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR wins school's first speech and debate state title



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**HARRISON PEPIN, 17, LEFT**, Stephanie Pumphrey, 17, middle, and Zylar Pranke, 16, sit in a classroom at Northridge High School in Greeley. Pumphrey became the school's first state champion in speech and debate.

# HISTORY MADE

By Tyler Silvy  
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Joshua Seematter had a problem. He knew he had his first state champion in his career as speech and debate coach before anybody else.

He knew even before the state champion, Stephanie Pumphrey, a 17-year-old senior at Northridge High School. The problem was, Seematter couldn't say anything before the awards ceremony, which didn't come until 20-30 minutes after he found out, and the title, obviously, was a big deal: It meant Pumphrey was the first state champion in Northridge history.

Despite being an acting coach, Seematter knew he wouldn't be able to act normal. So he avoided Pumphrey before the awards ceremony.

"I couldn't (talk with her), or I would wear it all over my face," said Seematter, who has been at Northridge for eight years. "It's the hardest conversation ever to not say something about it."

Debaters Harrison Pepin, 17, junior; Zylar Pranke, 16, junior; and Pumphrey will travel to Birmingham, Ala., in June for the national tournament. The three qualified in another tournament that's separate from the state tournament. It will be Seematter's fifth trip with students to nationals.

Pumphrey won for program oral interpretation, a new event that combines drama and poetry. Pranke and Pepin took second in the national qualifying tournament.

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A6: Forensics

### » A little more

**Stephania Pumphrey, 17, senior:**

» First state forensics champion in Northridge High School history.

» Won for "program oral interpretation," which mixes poetry and drama.

» Dad, University of Northern Colorado Police Chief Dennis Pumphrey, won state championship in drama in 1984 (Skyline High School).

» Not only won state (Mountain Vista High School in Highlands Ranch), but won national qualifying tournament at Fossil Ridge High School in Fort Collins.

**Harrison Pepin, 17, junior:**

» Public forum debate with partner Zylar Pranke, 16, junior.

» Has been doing debate since seventh grade, various kinds.

» Tied for second at national qualifying tournament.

» Enjoys being the "bad cop" to partner's "good cop."

**Zylar Pranke, 16, junior:**

» Public forum debate with partner Harrison Pepin, 17, junior.

» Doing debate since freshman year, when he "joined everything" while on the hunt for scholarships.

» Tied for second at national qualifying tournament.

» Says public speaking has really improved since joining the team.

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**HARRISON PEPIN, 17, LEFT**, Stephanie Pumphrey, 17, middle, and Zylar Pranke, 16, pose for a photo in a classroom at Northridge High School in Greeley.

## Pumphrey's winning piece is about being an outsider

« FORENSICS  
From A1

Improvement is my favorite part because I thought I was never going to be successful.

— STEPHANIA PUMPHREY, speech and debate state champion

Pumphrey won the state and national qualifying tournaments. When she won the state tournament, Pumphrey didn't know she was the first state champion in Northridge's history. Neither did Seematter, at least until he reached out to former coaches at the 16-year-old school.

So how does it feel? "Awesome," Pumphrey said, laughing. "Amazing."

The short responses are unusual for Pumphrey, who says she likes everything about public speaking. She probably gets that from her dad, but not because Dennis Pumphrey is the University of Northern Colorado police chief.

"My dad won state in 1984," Pumphrey said. "So it's kind of a historical thing."

Pumphrey, the chief, qualified for nationals twice in drama while attending Skyline High

School in Longmont. This year will mark his daughter's second trip, as well.

Competitors in program oral interpretation get a lot of leeway. They can mix and match pieces of poetry or plays or TV shows, just so long as it's a published work.

The theme of Pumphrey's winning piece is being an outsider, and she achieves that by taking on the role of Frankenstein's monster.

Her goal is to "become the character." And how, exactly, do you do that?

"Show him the pose! Show him the pose," Seematter said from the other side of the classroom.

Pumphrey obliged, contorting her body and staring intently forward.

"I was terrible at the beginning," Pumphrey said. "I was awful. Improvement is my favorite part because I thought I was never going to be successful."

The three Northridge students aren't sure how they'll fare at the national tournament this summer, but they know they'll enjoy the journey.

"I just love performing," she said. "I notice that I have the most success when I stop caring if I have success — just perform the piece to honor the characters."

— Tyler Silvy covers city and county government for *The Greeley Tribune*.

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