

At Amazon.com

Hills girl is among finalists in national toy invention contest

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An 11-year-old sixth-grader from Farmington Hills who invented a toy monkey with a comedic bent was honored recently in New York City.

Warner Middle School sixth-grader Natalie Perash, creator of The Joke-Telling Monkey, was one of 40 national finalists from among thousands of entrants from across the United States and Canada in the Amazon.com Toy Quest Contest.

As such, Natalie, accompanied by her mother Anita and fraternal twin-sister Nicole, enjoyed an all-expenses paid trip to The Big Apple which included limousine transport from the airport to their suite at the Sheraton New York Hotel, a banquet, a \$500 Amazon.com gift certificate and a parade through downtown Manhattan.

She and the other 39 finalists will be featured on the Amazon.com Web site and also on electronic greeting cards at the company's e-cards site.

The Auburn-haired, freckled young miss was thrilled to see her own handmade clay model of The Joke-Telling Monkey displayed for news media along with those of the 39 other inventors, all of whom were age 12 or under.

And she got a kick out of meeting the unique judges' panel: Jeff Bezos, founder and chief executive officer of Amazon.com; Katarina Witt, world champion figure-skater and two-time Olympic gold medalist; Furby inventor Richard Levy; Lonnie Johnson, inventor of the Super Soaker, the hottest-selling toy in America in 1991 and '92; and Thomas Edison Sloane Jr., an expert in developing talking toys who's also the great-grandson of Thomas Edison.

The celebration organizers even fooled Natalie and her mother. While riding toward the toy district for the awards presentation, a parade crossed the path of their special bus.

"Oh, no, now we're going to be late," Anita Perash exclaimed. But a few minutes later, the marchers stopped, the bus swung into the procession and the Perashes realized they were part of the parade.

The route took them directly to the ceremonies, where they found a red-carpet welcome, complete with live band.

Natalie said her toy monkey tells jokes and has a built-in sensor that "can hear if you laugh at a joke or not."

Stuffs banana

"If you laugh, then he will keep on telling jokes, but if you don't laugh, he will stuff" the banana he's holding into his mouth to be quiet, "because he wasn't funny."

The Joke-Telling Monkey's inventor apparently isn't pretty good at getting laughs: "My friends think I'm really funny and they think I should be a comedian," Natalie said.

She heard about the toy contest at school. When she told Diane Sanders, one of her teachers, her idea, Sanders "thought it was a good idea, just thought it was a cool idea, and so I decided to enter," said Natalie.

The Hills youngster, who earns As and Bs on her report card, plays basketball and baseball, water-ski, swims, dances and snow-sleds. She also attends Adat Shalom Synagogue Religious School.

She has two older brothers: Dean, 14, a Warner eighth-grader, and Daniel, 16, a North Farmington High School sophomore. Her mother Anita does substitute teaching in Novi schools while her father Asi is a top engineer in the new electric cars division of Ford Motor Co.

'Overwhelmed'

The toy contest "celebrates kids, toys and innovation," Amazon's Bezos said. "We were overwhelmed with the creativity and invention we saw... These kids are innovators for the 21st century."

The contest's grand-prize-winning toys - both from New Jersey - will be manufactured and sold at Amazon.com Toys in 2000. Their inventors each will get \$10,000 college savings bonds from Amazon.com and also will earn royalties from their toys' sales.

They are Mr. Itchy Pants from Natalie's 9-to-12-year age group and the My Favorite Friend Doll in the 8 and under category.

At the press of a button, Mr. Itchy Pants, created by Nadia Smith, 11, of Voorhees, N.J., dances and sings about ants in his pants which make him dance.

The My Favorite Friend Doll, invented by Nicky English, 7, of Morganville, N.J., is a doll with a picture frame face for photos of kids' friends. Accessories include a disposable camera.

Runners-up were Daniel Fremont, 8, of Palo Alto, Calif., with Robot and Megan Griffin, 11, of Englewood, Colo., with Karaoke Hair Care.



STAFF PHOTO BY DEL BRADLEY

And the winner is... Natalie Perash created the Joke-Telling Monkey and won a contest held by Amazon.com.

Parkinson Foundation raises almost \$100,000 at benefit auction

Last month the Michigan Parkinson Foundation's 11th annual benefit dinner and auction was held at the home of

board members Albert and Mitie Seaglione of Farmington Hills. The event gave special recognition to family members

and caregivers of those faced with the challenges of Parkinson's Disease. Approximately 150 supporters

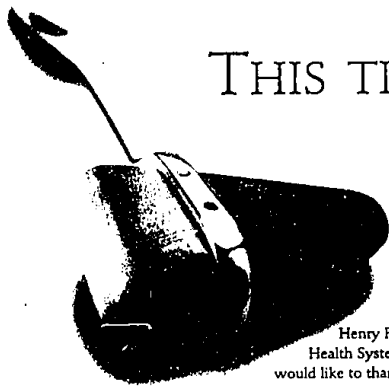
attended the event. Proceeds totaled nearly \$100,000 and will go toward promoting, maintaining and expanding the programs

offered by the MPF to help people who provide care or those with Parkinson's disease. Such programs include medication

assistance, adult day care, and support groups. For more information, please contact the MPF at (1-800) 652-9781.

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