

Gamble bets on the community

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The ingredients in a can of Dr. Pepper number 23, but representatives of the Dr. Pepper company realize that it takes many more ingredients to make a productive community.

In an attempt to recognize people who

Several individuals wrote in to nominate Gamble, but it was an essay by Curtin Middle School assistant principal Randy Zangara that caught the attention of the contest judges.

Zangara said he was moved to write the essay because of how well Gamble works with area children, many of whom attend Curtin Middle School.

"He helps keep them off the streets and helps them strive for something greater ... to make something of themselves from the talents they have," Zangara said.

Not only does CAPPa foster kids' creative sides, but the organization also pushes students to strive for educational excellence, Zangara said.

"He (Gamble) is a proactive member of the community that is trying to positively affect the way our society is," Zangara said. "He's trying to shape and mold the youth of this town, which are basically our future. This helps assist the school districts and the society as a whole."

Zangara said he was "shocked" when he learned that his nomination had garnered Gamble a spot in the top 23 finalists out of what the Dr. Pepper Web site said were "an overwhelming number of entries."

"I have never won anything in my life and for me to be a part of something to help somebody to benefit the community, it was a pretty nice part of my day," he said.

Gamble, who had forgotten about the contest after the initial e-mail, said he too was

put their hearts, souls and other essential ingredients into society, the company is holding a "Pepper Your Community" contest — and a local man has been chosen as one of 23 finalists nationwide.

Loni Gamble, executive director of the Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action, has been guaranteed to receive \$2,300 for his organization, but it

shocked by the news.

"You know how you just say 'What are the odds of something like that?' " Gamble said. "How amazing is that? I mean God is shining his light on us because he knows we need His help."

Despite several awards CAPPa and Gamble have received from state and national organizations, he said this award is different because the prize money would make an "instant impact."

"This is a monetary situation where the other ones were awards," he said. "You hope those awards put you in a position to generate funding, but these Dr. Pepper awards are actual, monetary awards."

As a finalist, Gamble is guaranteed to receive \$2,300 for CAPPa. That money, he said, will be used to fund operational costs, a factor in running a nonprofit agency that usually can not be covered through grants.

If Gamble is one of two grand prize winners, he said the money will be used to update CAPPa's technology centers and software.

"We serve a lot of kids here, and we need the resources to truly make this thing work," he said.

The money also may be used to fund a monthly television show that CAPPa hopes to produce, Gamble said. The show would be modeled after classics like American Bandstand and Soul Train, but feature youths talking about issues facing teenagers today such as peer pressure, teen pregnancy and dropping out of high school.

will be up to members of the community to help Gamble — and CAPPa — win the \$23,000 grand prize.

Gamble's entry in the contest began with a simple e-mail sent around the community asking those who felt so moved to submit brief essays of nomination to the Dr. Pepper Web site.

But none of that can happen unless people go to the Dr. Pepper Web site and vote for Gamble.

Although the 23 finalists were chosen by a panel of judges, the two winners will be chosen based on the amount of votes each finalist receives on the Web site. Voting begins Thursday and runs through Aug. 11.

"This is one time when we really need the community to come out and get behind us," he said. "This is not going to happen unless every person in the community and every person with e-mail decides to be a part of this. This is our shot, now, together as a community, and all people have to do is vote."

Along with the \$23,000, the two grand prize winners also get visits to their communities by Earvin "Magic" Johnson, according to Gamble and the Dr. Pepper Web site.

"What an opportunity that would be in terms of doing workshops with our kids," Gamble said, of the possibility of Johnson coming to the city. "To bring a national celebrity to our community and have that kind of attention here would be amazing."

Eileen Harley, CAPPa's vice president and academic support coordinator, agreed.

"CAPPa's all about motivating youth and anything we can bring to the kids to motivate them, we do it," she said. "So this is a really, really special chance for the community."

Gamble said he is grateful for the support of the community thus far and hopes that support will help him win this

competition.

"That we've come this far, it shows people how strong, how powerful we are in this little community," he said. "I definitely want to say thank you for bringing us this far and now, as a community, let's take it the rest of the way."

Vote for Loni

Loni Gamble is seeking votes from area residents to help win \$23,000 for his organization, the Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action, in a contest sponsored by Dr. Pepper.

Web site voting address: <http://advison.webevents.yahoo.com/drpepper/getpeppered>

Voting dates: Thursday to Aug. 11

