

Peppered to succeed CAPPAs head places third in contest

By STEPHANIE FARR
sfarr@sungazette.com

Loni Gamble appears to have narrowly missed winning \$23,000 in the Dr. Pepper "Pepper your community contest," but that hasn't dampened the positive spirits of a man who said the contest was instrumental in raising community — and national — awareness of his organization.

Results were released Online Friday and Gamble appears to have placed third in a contest where the first and second place winners each received \$23,000. His organization, the Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action, more commonly known as CAPPAs, will still receive \$2,300, an amount which Gamble said will help "keep the bills paid."

"We were still one of five finalists in the nation, that was a good feeling," Gamble said. "What we've got in the end is a good thing."

Gamble said what he got was the opportunity to let people all across the country know what his organization is about — fostering area children's creativity, confidence and motivation and helping them to strive for educational excellence.

People who previously were unaware of CAPPAs's mission started coming "out of the woodwork" once the contest was announced, Gamble said.

"Through this situation, people started paying more attention to who we are and what we do," he said. "Dr. Pepper was instrumental in getting out that awareness and bringing people together for one cause. It put me in a position to explain what we do."

From just 60 participants in a basketball league five years ago to more than 400 students participating in activities ranging from entertainment showcases to employment initiatives, Gamble said his organization couldn't have grown as it has without community support.

"When people would stop me on the streets they would say 'How did we do?,' not 'How did you do?'" Gamble said. "People are feeling a part of CAPPAs and that's what it's all about."

A fringe benefit of being one of five national finalists in the contest was that a camera crew from the Internet portal Yahoo! came to make a professional promotional video of CAPPAs which now appears Online at <http://ad- vision.webevents.yahoo.com/drpepper/getpeppered/winners/winners.php>.

"Now we have a promotional video that would have cost up to thousands of dollars to make on our own," he said. "They showed our diversity in the video and I think that's important as we move forward with our mission."

Operating expenses are one of the challenges of running a non-profit organization such as CAPPAs, Gamble, CAPPAs's only full-time employee, said. But, he hopes the local and national exposure will help to raise awareness of the organization and its needs.

"The money would have been nice, it would have been something we desperately needed, but at the same time we got so much more out of it," he said. "I would have never imagined something like this would have happened to us."

Gamble said he is grateful to many entities, including Dr. Pepper, which reached into the community and "gave us all a hand up."

"Thank you to everyone in this entire community that got behind this," he said. "We have won, there are no losers here. We didn't lose anything and we are in a better position now than we ever were before this competition."