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## BELLAIRE HIGH SCHOOL

### Debate team a member of event's Elite 8

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The Bellaire High School debate team is one of eight "Elite" teams still in the running to capture the Bickel & Brewer/New York University National Public Forum's trophy and funds for its school.

Its standing could be taken for granted by some, given that the Cardinals are the defending champions and captured second- and third-place finishes in prior years.

"We've been entering this competition for five years," Bellaire debate coach Russell Rach said. "Last year we won. The year before, we made it to the final round for second place, and in the year before that and the previous year, we placed third."

Team members aren't just competing in written and oral debates with seven other high school debate teams in the nation, but the world as the 2008-09 event has gone international.

Since last October, squads from more than 100 schools in 32 states and 14 countries have been answering the 2008-09 question:

Should the United States substantially increase alternative energy incentives?

#### Paper trail

Paired teams have handed papers back and forth that, alternately each round, affirm or rebuke their team's position.

"We started doing papers and sending them back and forth through Feb. 11, when it came down to the Elite 8 teams," Rach said.

For the fifth consecutive year, Bellaire advanced to the Sweet 16 round, which involved eight sets of two teams.

#### Starting out

Bellaire had opened competition with a victory over Trinity (Pa.) High School last November to advance.

The Cardinals then bested Durham (N.C.) Academy in the Sweet 16 round in which teams — including two from Singapore and one from South Korea — paired up in one-on-one individual written debates.

In the Elite 8 quarterfinal round, which has four sets of two teams, the Cardinals are facing the Bronx High School of Science in New York.

The four squads advancing to the semifinals will be known on March 18.

They each will receive an all-expense-paid trip to compete in the final two rounds of written and oral competitions at NYU from April 7-19.

The last team standing will be declared the winner and will collect the \$10,000 prize.

Leading this year's Bellaire team is senior Andrew Garbarino, a veteran of last year's championship squad.

"The first time he participated was last year as a junior, and he quickly became a leader of the event," Rach said. "This year, we probably have six or seven actively working on this project.

"That's a group from our debate squad — upwards of 200 students, the largest debate squad in the nation."

Half of the \$10,000 prize that Bellaire earned last year went to the school's debate scholarship fund. The balance was divided among the seven team members.

Rach said he is not surprised his squad is doing so well.

"These students just don't want to stop," Rach said. "It confirms what I know — that the students of Bellaire High School are amazing kids and it's a privilege to teach at this intellectual gold mine."

### About the tournament

The forensics tournament, administered by the National Public Policy Foundation and NYU, was launched in 2001.

It is endorsed by the National Forensics League, National Association of Urban Debate Leagues and the International Debate Education Association.

The Bickel & Brewer Foundation is a private, nonprofit funded by the national law firm of Bickel & Brewer, which has offices in Dallas and New York.

### Educational programs

The foundation also relies on companies and individual donors to support its educational programs.

"It is exciting to see Bellaire and others establish themselves on a global stage," said William A. Brewer III, the firm's partner, in a Feb. 12 e-mail. "Their results thus far are testament to their research, written scholarship and advocacy skills."

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