

SCHOOL NEWS

Rosarian students spell it out



Cindy Thuma

Winner of school bee makes top-level finals for third year in row

Rosarian Academy's school-level competition of the 2020

National Spelling Bee was held recently and after 19 rounds of competition, seventh-grader **Emma Chopin** won with the championship word "oniomania," defined as an obsessive or compulsive urge to buy things.

Mark Albury, a sixth-grade student, was the runner-up.

This is the third consecutive year that Emma has been a school-level finalist. Last year, Chopin was one of 21 participants

who made it to the final round of the Regional Bee.

She was then able to participate in the Scripps National Spelling Bee via acceptance into the RSVBee program — a special, invitational program created by Scripps to provide an opportunity for more spellers to participate in the National Finals. Chopin was one of three students in Palm Beach County to compete. She successfully made it through two

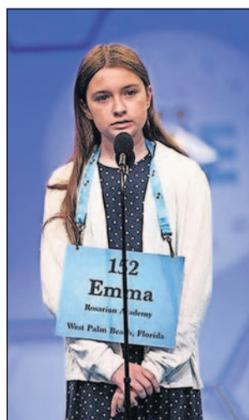
rounds. The first round was a written test. In round two, every participant had the opportunity to spell one word on stage.

Chopin's word was "blunderbuss," which she spelled correctly.

Both Chopin and Albury will represent Rosarian Academy at the Final Regional Southeastern Florida Scripps Spelling Bee on March 10 at Boca Prep International School.

*** Three St. Ann students triumph at fair:** Three students from St. Ann Catholic School in West Palm Beach won awards at the recent Palm Beach County Science and Engineering Fair.

Thresa Jobish won the Compost Methods competition; **Samuel Almazon** finished third in the Engineering and Materials division and **Kate Silvennoinen** took fourth place for an essay.



Emeline "Emma" Chopin spells at the Scripps National Spelling Bee in 2019. She won the Rosarian Academy competition this year. [MARK BOWEN/SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE]

Today

SHINY SHOTS



Lillian and Luis Fernandez attend the Tropical Safari Gala on Jan. 31 at the Palm Beach Zoo, an event that raised \$1.8 million for animal conservation. For more Shiny Shots, see PalmBeachDailyNews.com. [MEGHAN MCCARTHPALMBEACHDAILYNEWS.COM]

THE WEATHER

Today will be windy with a 20 percent chance of showers. The high will be 75 degrees, with a low of 72, according to the National Weather Service in Miami. Southeast winds will be 15 to 21 mph.

The marine forecast: Seas will be 3-5 feet, with occasional seas to 6 feet, with southeast winds of 15 to 20 knots. Intra-coastal waters will be choppy.

Lake Worth Lagoon: High tide will be at 9:28 a.m. and 9:42 p.m., with low tide at 3:38 p.m.

Sunrise: 6:49 a.m. **Sunset:** 6:18 p.m.

TOP PICKS

Campus unrest: The late filmmaker John Singleton's "Higher Learning" (1995) concerns a group of incoming freshmen at a university who struggle, as all freshmen do, to find their independence. But things take a sinister turn when one of them gets recruited by neo-Nazis. Bill Nix hosts a showing of this film (which stars Omar Epps, Laurence Fishburne, Ice Cube, Tyra Banks, Michael Rapaport and Kristy Swanson) as part of the Kravis' African-American Film Festival. Tickets are \$12 for the movie, which will be shown at 7 p.m. in the Rinker Playhouse. Call 832-7469 or visit www.kravis.org.

MEETINGS

Parks: A community meeting to discuss Lake Park Drive improvements will be held this morning in Town Council Chambers, 360 S. County Road. The meeting will last from 10 a.m. to noon. Call 838-5400 or visit townofpalmbeach.com for more information.

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ATTACK

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"It generally means someone within the organization was tricked."

The virus is then launched by either clicking on a link or attachment and "effectively grants the ransomware permission to go in and begin encrypting the files on your system," said Paul Debogorski, owner of Corvitus IT Solutions in Jupiter.

The virus renames typical office files with a ".zepto" extension, rendering them inaccessible without an encryption key.

"Almost always it means the hacker is not in your stuff. They've scrambled your stuff, but they're not actually seeing your data," Crowetz said. "I can't break into your car, but I can put a clamp on your tire and make you pay me."

A ransom is demanded of the victim to get this encryption key needed to regain access to files and data — something the U.S. government does not recommend anyone pay.

"Sometimes (victims will) pay the ransom and get the key to decrypt the files, and other times (bad actors will) just take the money and run," Debogorski said.

Without paying a ransom, the encrypted files that aren't saved on a backup will be lost. The best way to prevent the

spread of such a virus is to turn the computer off or disconnect it from the network and WiFi, Debogorski said.

"If you get to it quickly enough, if you have an effective backup system ... and also if you train your staff as well to spot phishing emails ... you can minimize the impact," he said.

Both former and current election chiefs — Bucher and Link, respectively — have said the office did not pay a ransom after the 2016 ransomware attack.

Link said the incident happened on a computer at the main headquarters on Military Trail, encrypting Microsoft Word documents and Excel spreadsheets. Officials said voter information was not impacted, and that servers were immediately shut down, preventing the attack from spreading.

The email that delivered the virus was opened by an employee. It purported to be from the employee's bank, Bucher told the Post Editorial Board on Feb. 14. Bucher has not accepted multiple interview requests since Link first disclosed the incident on Feb. 12.

Bucher, in speaking the Post's editorial board this month, said that she was reassured that the virus was contained behind a strong firewall.

But a firewall isn't necessarily a "silver bullet that would protect them from everything," said

Richard Forno, assistant director of the University of Maryland-Baltimore County's Center for Cybersecurity.

"If the firewalls are not scanning for email, having a firewall is not protecting you against that type of threat," Forno said.

Gonzalez, founder of ERMProtect, added that "if firewalls were so awesome," she'd be out of a job and her company's services would not be needed.

"A firewall is as useful as a Swiss Army knife in a nuclear war," Gonzalez said.

Bucher also told the editorial board that the virus was "quickly contained" and caused two people to lose their work product.

Bucher added she did not inform anyone outside the elections office because the pertinent state official was a part-time worker who did not provide assistance when issues came up in weeks prior. Besides, Bucher said, they weren't aware of any election hacking threats at the time and did not feel, that as an isolated attack, the issue was grave enough to inform federal agencies.

Current elections chief Link disagrees.

"That isn't the way it happened," said Link, who was not in office at the time of the attack, but relied on corroboration from several current employees. "Numerous people from many different departments have said they lost

files." Cybersecurity officials say these days phishing attempts are not so much targeted as they are spread far and wide.

"It's usually very passive, meaning they're not targeting them specifically," Crowetz said, adding that the phishing attempt that plants the virus sends it to "tons and tons of people and see who nibbles the bait."

It's difficult to figure out who is behind the attacks, why they happen and where they come from, Forno said.

"The question of attribution in cyberspace is one of the perennial questions we have yet to answer," he said.

It's possible for attackers to mask their locations, he added, making it seem as if they're operating from somewhere they're not.

But even though this particular virus that reached the elections office was limited in what it could do — encrypting files and demanding ransom — "it is something that the public should know about," Debogorski said.

A similar misstep with a more dangerous virus could "open the proverbial floodgates," he said.

"This one itself couldn't really do much beyond encrypting the files and asking for the ransom, but there are scores of other viruses that transmit themselves (through phishing or a link)," Debogorski said.

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