

For Immediate Release: **Weihenmayer Inspires at Mary Helen Straker Award in Writing**

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(ZANESVILLE)



Susan Holdren, Straker Foundation Executive Director; Erik Weihenmayer, Author, *No Barriers*;
Zena, Erik's guide dog

“What’s within you is stronger than what’s in your way,” adventurer, author, speaker, and philanthropist Erik Weihenmayer told a packed house at Secrest Auditorium on Thursday, December 14. High school sophomores, freshmen, faculty and staff, and community members heard Weihenmayer during the third Mary Helen Straker Award in Writing. The J.W. & M.H. Straker Charitable Foundation sponsored the event; its President and Executive Director Susan Straker Holdren and Weihenmayer presented 21 students from throughout Muskingum County with awards recognizing the excellence of their essays.

Sophomores in participating county high schools read the young adult version of Weihenmayer’s book, *No Barriers*, in response to a prompt asking them to write about a challenge described in the book. Then the students considered their own challenges and responses.

“A lot of planning, resources, and creativity go into making this event a reality,” said Mrs. Holdren. “Mary Helen Straker, my mother, was a writer, and this event’s goal is to awaken students to the joys and rewards of good writing. While we wish every school system in the county had participated, we are excited at the quality of the essays received and the courage and transparency with which students addressed the prompt.”

School winners received \$500.00, and include sophomores from the following schools:

Jaclyn Connell, Malorie Crooks, and Isayah Sealy, Bishop Rosecrans;

Cale Achauer, Preston Barr, and Sharoll Bonner, East Muskingum;

Chloe Hadley and Mireya Scott, Foxfire;

Maddie Kirkbride, Angelina Myers, and Natalie Ondo, Franklin Local;

Colton Devoll, Sarah Jacoby, Kenison Kennedy, Alaina Roberts, and Sam Wegner, TriValley;

Maddy McConnell, West Muskingum;

Kailyn Chandler, Kailynn Hunter, Autumn Starkey, and Legend Wicker, Zanesville City.

Grand prize winners were selected from the school winners. Two students from the same school tied for the highest score, Angelina Myers and Natalie Ondo, both from Franklin Local; each received a \$2,000.00 grand prize award in addition to their school prizes.

Zanesville City’s Kailynn Hunter received an additional \$1,000 grand prize award for her visual interpretation of the theme.

This year, the J.W. & M.H. Straker Foundation recognized the teachers of the three grand prize winners with \$1,000.00 awards to be used in their classrooms. The honored teachers include Nancy Salisbury and Sarah Sycks from Franklin Local Schools and Wendy Curtis from Zanesville City Schools.

Susan Holdren thanked participating schools; Muskingum County Community Foundation CEO Brian Wagner, who acted as master of ceremonies; Beth Fox, the event’s coordinator; MCCF staff; the Muskingum County Library System; Secrest auditorium personnel; Barnes

Advertising Corporation; Zane State College; Maysville High School Maker Space students and their teacher, Jared Cox; the event's judges; and all of the volunteers who helped the third Mary Helen Straker Award in Writing run smoothly.

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About the J.W. and M.H. Straker Charitable Foundation

William and Mary Helen Straker launched the J.W. and M.H. Straker Charitable Foundation in 1994. Ten descendants of J. William and Mary Helen Straker serve as its board of trustees. The trustees are committed to using J.W. and M.H. Straker Charitable Foundation funds to support the kinds of projects the Strakers cared about: programs that foster community growth, enable young people to grow in character and integrity, enhance education, or increase community exposure to the arts and sciences.

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