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Winsted

Students win awards for essays on FOI

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WINSTED — Rose Nader quoted her famous son, consumer advocate Ralph Nader, Wednesday night as she handed out awards to Gilbert School students for their essays on how to use the Freedom of Information Act.

And the organizers of the only celebration of the state's Freedom of Information Act announced plans to expand the annual event and awards ceremony to neighboring towns next year. The hope is that eventually towns throughout the state will find ways to show appreciation for the law that allows citizens access to information.

"Information is the currency of democracy," Nader said, quoting her son. "With information, citizens have the opportunity to be effective advocates. This is something we should all think about."

Nader, a local resident, awarded first place to Jenny Brooke Condon for an essay about the public's right to have more control over television and radio broadcasts.

Christopher Hurley, another Gilbert School student, earned second place for an essay about gaining access to information about the performance of nuclear power plants.

Tom Clapper was awarded third place for a paper explaining how he would gather information about the effects of electromagnetic fields and share that information with officials and townspeople.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal told the group of 40 people gathered at Northwestern Community-Technical College that "freedom of information is absolutely bedrock essential to our self-government."

Blumenthal described a recent investigation he completed into the state's awarding of a $150 million contract for auto emissions testing. The investigation took three months and 39 subpoenas, he said. And his 137-page investigation report contains some lessons on how government should work, he said.

"The larger lessons have more to do with how we ought to regulate procedures for awarding contracts," Blumenthal said. "FOI enables us to make those decisions — who gets the contracts, who we elect."

Nader encouraged the audience to think about ways to include more people in events to celebrate the Freedom of Information law.

"We hope to export it in ever widening circles and around the state," she said.