



Shoutouts and High 5's for People In and Around QCS

# American History

## Our Hope for the Future

By Leo Bernabei

**T**oday in the United States we live in a turbulent time: an ever-changing, interconnected world, filled with complicated politics and an economy which seems to benefit too few at the cost of the masses. Despite this, I offer you my basis on why I have never been more hopeful about the future of our great country.

The American people have always been a forward-looking, problem-solving, optimistic, and above all, patriotic people. No matter our social class, economic elevation, race, or gender, we are all united by the common bond of our love of country. We are willing to give up time, energy, and even our lives to make this Union more perfect. Every time that we recite our Pledge of

*In tumultuous times like this, it is necessary to look back on our history and listen to the voices of average Americans. They are the ones who save us in times of trouble.*

Allegiance and National Anthem, we are standing up for the core values of our republic: a just legal system, equal protection for *all under the law, freedom of speech, and the pursuit of happiness.*

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The year is 1861 and the Civil War has just begun. Union Major Sullivan Ballou is in Washington, D.C. preparing for battle with his comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rhode Island Infantry. It is a mucky June day in the nation's capital, exacerbated by the warring fears of soldiers. The nadir of our country, faith in government is at an all-time low, and hostilities between fellow Americans have never reached this high. Sensing the end is near, Sullivan pens a letter to his wife, Sarah. Let us listen to an excerpt from this letter.

*My very dear Sarah:*

*The indications are very strong that we shall move in a*

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# QCHS senior 4th in state VFW essay competition

*Leo Bernabei's outstanding effort earned him a \$2,500 college scholarship.*

By Gary Weckselblatt

Leo Bernabei, a senior at Quakertown Community High School, finished fourth out of 3,700 entries in the Pennsylvania Veterans of Foreign Wars Voice of Democracy Patriotic Audio Essay competition.

The award is worth \$2,500 for Leo, one of 24 VFW District winners at the Wyndham Gettysburg Hotel, where the top five finishers were announced Saturday night. He represented District 8, which includes all of Bucks County and parts of Lehigh.

"To get this far is really cool," Leo said during a Monday morning interview at the high school. "Obviously, you'd love to win it all, but the 24 students I was sitting with were the best from each district, and to have your name called as the fourth best of really 3,700, that's pretty special."

Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner was effusive in his praise for Leo.

"His character, commitment to excellence, and ability to be both a gifted writer and orator marks him as a very special person," Harner said. "Leo has a keen intellect, and I would not be surprised to see him in an important leadership role at the community, state or national level in the not too distant future."

Leo, who has been offered a full scholarship to the Temple University Fox School of Business and Management, is waiting to see if he'll be accepted to Cornell, Fordham, Georgetown, New York University and Princeton before making a decision. He plans to major in political science or economics.

Leo and Samantha Norton, also a QCHS senior, tied with the top essay at the post level. Leo then advanced to the district and state competition.

"We're very proud of this young man," said Paul Gerhart Jr., commander of John Rivers Memorial VFW Post

11322 in Quakertown. "What an amazing young student."

The theme for the 2017-18 essay is "American History: Our Hope for the Future." Here's a portion of his essay:

"The American people have always been a forward-looking, problem-solving, optimistic, and above all, patriotic people. No matter our social class, economic elevation, race, or gender, we are all united by the common bond of our love of country. We are willing to give up time, energy, and even our lives to make this Union more perfect. Every time that we recite our Pledge of Allegiance and

National Anthem, we are standing up for the core values of our republic: a just legal system, equal protection for *all under the law, freedom of speech, and the pursuit of happiness.*"

Leo is a veteran of these competitions, having been involved with the program since eighth grade when he placed second at the Post level, and second at the District level out

of 800 entries.

"I really like political science and public speaking," he said, "so (the competition) kind of married those ideas. It will help me in future endeavors in those fields."

He already has a taste of college life as part of Moravian College's Dual Enrollment Program. Last semester he took an introduction to sociology course. This semester the topic is Arab-Islamic Civilizations.

He described the VFW topics as "engaging" and said "they spur my research of broad issues such as American values and our national history. But above all, I'm deeply honored to represent those who have sacrificed so much for our great country. The veterans I've met through the VFW are some of the nicest people I know, and I'm proud to call many of them friends."

*Gary Weckselblatt, director of communications, writes about the people and the programs that impact the Quakertown Community School District. He can be reached at 215-529-2028 or gweckselblatt@qcsd.org.*



# American History

*few days—perhaps tomorrow.*

*... If it is necessary that I should fall on the battlefield for my country, I am ready. I have no misgivings about, or lack of confidence in, the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans upon the triumph of the Government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt.*

*Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me to you with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battlefield.*

Sullivan Ballou gave his life 15 days later during the First Battle of Bull Run.

We remember Sullivan as someone whose love of country rose above all else, and he paid the ultimate sacrifice for the welfare of the greatest nation on Earth. Over 150 years later, Ballou's spirit still holds strong in the hearts of all Americans.

One such American, twenty-four year old Welles Crowther, was starting his career as an equities trader in the South Tower on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, although he hoped one day to become a firefighter. Minutes after Flight 175 struck his building, he called his mother, leaving a brief, albeit calm message saying, "Mom, this is Welles. I want you to know that I'm OK." This was the last time the Crowther's heard from their son. He raced up to the 78<sup>th</sup> floor sky lobby where he encountered a group of survivors and carried an injured young woman down seventeen stories to safety. By the time he returned to help others, he was only recognized by the red bandana he wore, which was given to him by his father when he was four and protected him against the toxic smoke and fumes in the World Trade Center. With even firefighters

evacuating, Welles was spotted moving upward shortly before the tower collapsed.

Six months later, while sifting amid the rubble in Lower Manhattan, crews recovered the body of a man in a red bandana. In the ensuing months, Welles's parents received calls from over a dozen survivors, who only could remember that "a man in a red bandana" led them to safety. Welles was never able to entertain his dream of becoming a member of the New York City Fire Department, but what he did on September 11<sup>th</sup> serves as his legacy.

Americans like Major Ballou and Mr. Crowther, who believed in America even at its lowest points, are the reasons we stand here today. Their spirits carry on in all of us – especially you – the veterans, who carried on the mission of defending and protecting the United States at home and abroad, and those like Sullivan and Welles, who never made it back. It is the essence of these Americans that gives me hope for our great country, and leads me never to doubt that our best days are yet to come.