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Union County student wins PNC, Balloon Festival writing contest

[Nick Muscavage](#)



Guy Francis, a seventh-grade student at Kawameeh Middle School in Union, is the grand-prize winner of the 14th annual PNC Bank American Patriot Essay Contest, in association with QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Russ Mensch/Mensch & Company, Inc.)

A 13-year-old from Union County has won first place in the 14th annual PNC Bank American Patriot Essay Contest.

Guy Francis, a seventh-grader at Kawameeh Middle School in Union, took home the grand prize for his essay about his ancestors escaping Nazi Europe and slavery.

The essay writing contest is sponsored by the QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning in Association with PNC Bank in which schoolchildren through grades 2 through 12 write about what the American flag means to them.

As part of his grand prize, the Festival of Ballooning and PNC Bank brought a 75-foot-tall hot air balloon to his school Tuesday, when he took a tethered ride in front of his family, hundreds of classmates, and township and county officials.

Guy's essay focused on how his maternal great grandfather traveled 4,000 miles to flee the Nazis during World War II and his paternal great-great-great-grandfather escaped from slavery in North Carolina.

His essay was selected the best among the thousands of essays received by a panel of judges comprised of PNC Bank and Balloon Festival staff and educators. The contest was held as part of PNC's community outreach efforts through its association with the QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning.

"It was extremely heartfelt to see the very personal meaning the flag and his family have to him," said Howard Freeman, the festival's executive producer. "To understand what his ancestors went through to achieve their freedom, going back several generations, is very impressive. His essay best captured the spirit of both the contest and American flag. QuickChek, PNC and the festival are proud to present him with this award."

Runner-ups in the contest were Judd Espejo and Samantha Lagrosa.

For additional information on the contest and the QuickChek New Jersey Festival of Ballooning in Association with PNC Bank, visit www.balloonfestival.com.

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