

August 1-5, 2005

Eta Sigma Alpha Home School Honor Society

"When she discovered that homeschoolers could not be admitted to the National Honor Society, Joanne Juren founded an honor society just for them. This week, Mike Smith talks with Juren and two Eta Sigma Alpha members about how participation can enhance your child's high school experience"

Mike Smith: Well, we'd like to know what Eta Sigma Alpha stands for.

Joanne:

Eta Sigma Alpha is actually the first honor society founded exclusively *for* homeschoolers *by* homeschoolers. We founded the organization in 1999. The organization's major purpose, of course, is to recognize the outstanding academic achievements of homeschool students. It also provides wonderful opportunities for the students to serve in leadership positions and to provide community service. We also find that it opens the door when the student applies for college admission. It may open the door for honors programs and scholarships. It also gives homeschool students a wonderful network opportunity

Mike Smith:

Joanne, why did you decide to start a national homeschool honor society?

Joanne Juren:

Well, Mike, after contacting the National Honor Society, we discussed whether homeschoolers could actually have individual chapters. The answer given to me was *no*, because they said that we had a lack of uniform standards between one homeschool family and another. So we set out to start our honor society back in 1999. We, of course, wanted to recognize the homeschool academic achievements, but we also wanted to provide a wonderful opportunity for students to have service opportunities, leadership opportunities, to network with other homeschool students. And one of the most important things that we have found since we started the honor society is that it gives our homeschool students equal footing to national honor society students when they are in competition for scholarships and college admissions. So we have found that it has been a wonderful addition to our homeschool résumés and transcripts to have the national honor society for homeschoolers.

Mike Smith:

Joanne, how do homeschool students benefit from membership in Eta Sigma Alpha?

Joanne Juren:

Well, one of the ways, Mike, that they benefit is obviously that they are recognized for their outstanding academic achievements. They actually can hold offices when they are members of the various honor society chapters. This gives them those wonderful leadership opportunities that they can put onto an actual high school and college résumé.

We also find that when they actually are members of ESA, many of them develop wonderful friendships and they get to have some great socialization.

Mike Smith: Nicole, what does it take to run a chapter of ESA?

Nicole Hanson:

Well, it takes a lot of teamwork. Even though I hold the title of president, we all run the meetings. We have a vice president, a secretary, and a treasurer, and several adult sponsors that all keep us on track. So, it takes all of us working together. Everyone in this honor society is very smart, and when you put all that brainpower together, a lot can be accomplished. It also takes a lot of patience, because the alpha chapter that I'm in is pretty big, and when everyone does get together, there's bound to be conflicting opinions. I've always heard in the past that I cannot please everyone. I've really learned this this past year being the president.

Mike Smith: Jocelyn, could you tell us what kinds of activities your chapter participates in?

Jocelyn Galvan:

Sure. Like other honor societies, ESA does value community service as a high priority. Currently, we have at least one service project every school semester. Members propose ideas, and then a vote is taken on those which seem to be the most likely for the group to accomplish as a whole. For instance, the Laura Kate Smither Memorial Scholarship, which is given to a homeschooler each year through our local community college, has been our spring focus for the past two years. Last year, we did a car wash and held an auction to help us raise over two thousand dollars to benefit the scholarship. Not everything we do is on such a large scale though. We also did some smaller things. At a grocery store, we passed out flyers with a list of needed groceries for our boys' and girls' shelter, and then we delivered those items. And on another occasion, we sorted and wrapped Christmas presents for needy children at a neighborhood center. So, it's truly been a great learning experience for me as a homeschooler to be involved with this. "