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## PNW Japan Bowl Experience

My experience at the Japan Bowl this year was something I'll cherish. It felt like a true celebration of all the hard work that I and my team have put into learning about Japanese culture and language. What I really found amazing was how far we seemed to have come. I remember last year, for level two, opening the study guide and being absolutely taken aback. The process of memorizing and learning to write just a hundred kanji seemed impossible. Now, I know and understand more Japanese than I ever thought I would, because I found so much joy in practicing the language on my own. The Japan Bowl was my ticket to realizing it wasn't just a dream; I could really learn Japanese. For that, I will always appreciate this opportunity.

Of course, this year as well I found new interests while practicing. I thought the subject of trains would be boring, but I found that I really enjoyed some of the information out there. And of course, it was fun to go to the Japan Bowl and then prove that we could apply that knowledge. I really enjoy all the rounds of testing because it's not only fun to show what you know and use all your hard work, but it's fun working with your team and getting all the answers at the end and listening to everyone's reactions. I think our group of Level Three Competitors was pretty rowdy in the first rounds this year (my apologies to the people reading the questions), but I enjoyed having that stressful but fun experience in common with a group of people.

At the event itself, we were all met with such passion and friendliness. As with last year, I was able to talk to people with similar interests to myself (in this case, Japan and Japanese culture). I met some great people there, and my team made quick friends with a team from Westview. They were so sweet and funny, and the community in general at the event was so kind. I enjoyed the sessions where we got to talk with members of other groups as well as people from Japan. I think it was a good opportunity to branch out socially. I also appreciated how everyone was cheering each other on, even when we were technically competing. I think the Japan Bowl has a really good culture around it that makes people want to return.

Of course, I can't leave out the food. I was talking with one of my teammates the day before the Japan Bowl (for a last minute study session, of course), and we both remarked at how

excited we were for the next day's food. I thoroughly enjoyed my bentō, and as a vegan I really appreciated how accommodating the Japan Bowl is to food restrictions.

Thank you all so much for helping to put on this event! I'm not exaggerating when I say I wouldn't be where I am now without it. It was a great opportunity and experience, and though I'm surprised we won, my team and I are very excited to face the National Japan Bowl with all we've got.