Teens Take Writing Classes As Part of Summer Vacation
by Vince Rembulat, Bulletin Reporter

LATHROP – Stephanie McDougald enjoys writing. In fact, her love to express herself creatively received notice from a Ripon High teacher, who encouraged the junior to enroll in the Great Valley Writing Project of the California State University, Stanislaus and the San Joaquin Office of Education.

In the two weeks in the writing and technology workshop for seventh-through-12th-grade students at Lathrop High, McDougald has become a more polished writer during that span.

She credits the daily feedback received from her peers and teacher leader.

For some, according to program leader Elyce Silva, this 30-minute session consisting of students reading their work out aloud followed by the critiquing process can be tough to take at first.

“Students are quiet during those first few days,” she said on Thursday.

For Claudia Hunter, an eighth-grade student at Stella Brockman School, and Sierra High freshman Vannida Nguyen, they found that much of the feedback helped in making them better writers.

“We know it’s in our best interest,” Nguyen said.

In the past few years, the non-profit educational program had been held at the SJCOE facility on North Main Street in Manteca. This site was closer to home for Manteca High sophomore Matthew McColm and his brother, Branden, an MHS freshman.

“This year, we had to wake up earlier in order to get (to Lathrop High) on time,” said McColm, who was using the computer lab to work on his writing project, Our Dog Lucy.

The three-hour workshop kicked off at 8:30 a.m. – students arrived about half hour earlier – with Silva, who teaches English at MHS, noting that the first hour was spent in the classroom followed by the computer lab during the second hour.

“What makes this enjoyable for students is that they can write about any subject of their choice,” said Silva, who was one of four program leaders.

As for the students, many came from Manteca, Tracy, Ripon and Escalon school districts.

Maddie Banks, who will be a freshman at Sierra High in the fall, had been with the program for the past three years.

She enjoyed the challenge of the word-of-the-day, a five-minute writing exercise.

On the previous day, for example, Banks and the other young writers had to incorporate the word “injury” into their work.

“We also put together a college-entrance essay,” she added.

From here, Silva said, those in the program will have a collection of their work, or anthology, posted on the internet for public viewing.

Another writing and technology workshop is planned for next month, catering this time to third-through-sixth-grade students and teachers.