



Hour photo/Chris Palermo

Lisette Perez, Himani Narayan, Prachi Narayan, Sushmita Narayan, and Alex Virvo pose at the Kids Draw Free booth at the Oyster Festival Saturday afternoon.

Pen-Stars brings out creativity in children

Upcoming Library workshop open to 25 participants

By **LESLIE LAKE**
 HOUR STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — When sisters 14-year-old Sushmita Narayan and 11-year-old Himanyi, who share a passion for writing and drawing, realized several years ago that some of their fellow elementary school students had writing and art talent, but had no platform to showcase that talent, they created Pen-Stars.

The Pen-Stars series, an interactive children's book series that aims to bring children together from diverse backgrounds under one roof where they can, collectively or independently, read stories, learn new words, write and draw their own stories, and become published authors and artists.

"One day, when Himani was drawing pictures, my mom asked her what she planned to

do with those drawings," Sushmita tells her story on the Pen-Stars website. "Himani pointed to a folder and said she'd save them in a folder. ... She (my mom) asked her if there were any competitions at her school in which she could enter her drawings. My sister shook her head in disapproval and said she wished she could put her drawings to some good use."

It was then that a light bulb went off in the girls' heads.

"We thought about how wonderful it would be if we could tie artwork with stories and publish them in a book," Sushmita writes. "This could be a way to keep children engaged in creative activities, motivate other children to bring out their inner authors and artists, and dissuade them from spending their time on electronic devices. That's when The Pen-Stars se-

ries was born."

In an upcoming interactive bookwriting workshop for children for children, Sushmita and Himanyi will present their first book while facilitating other children's creativity through writing and illustration.

"My kids authored their first book, and have done workshops where each child takes turns and paraphrases a few lines, and using key words explains what the words mean," said the girls' mother Prachi Narayan. "It's very interactive and done in a playful way. The children help come up with ideas and then they play with those ideas."

The first book, "Happy Celebrations!," which was co-authored by Sushmita and Himani, was launched in De-

ember 2014. It consists of three stories which are written and hand-illustrated by them. Each story includes keywords at the bottom of each page to help enhance children's vocabulary.

The book has a section called My Creative Corner, where children can create their own stories and send them either by mail or by uploading them on the Pen-Stars website. Each story is reviewed by a panel of judges. Children are rewarded for their creativity in different ways. Some are to be featured on the website as the Artist of the Month, the Author of the Month, or be published in the future editions of the series. All the participants receive a Certificate of Participation.

"Our vision is to provide a unified platform to all children from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds where they can showcase their talent and creativity and achieve their true potential," according to the Pen-Stars website.

"Vicki Oatis, head of the Children's Department at the Library, has been very supportive of our efforts to promote the book and the workshops in our Norwalk community," said the girls' mother Prachi Narayan. "We believe this could be a fun, inspiring, and rewarding experience for all children who participate in this event."

The upcoming Pen-Stars creative workshop will be held from 4 to 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 16, at Norwalk Public Library. There are slots available for up to 25 children.

"The library buys the books from us and hands them out for free," Prachi said. "While we were originally looking to target children from ages 7 to 11 in the workshops, we found that children as young as five years old enjoyed doing this."

For information: <http://thepenstars.com>.

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