

Feature Writing

State Meet • 2021



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School has 900 students in grades 9-12. From the start of the pandemic, junior Colt Real has been tracking the development and progress of the COVID-19 vaccine. Colt lives with his two elderly grandparents, who both have heart disease and diabetes, so he wanted to be ready to help his grandparents get vaccines as soon as they were approved for use. In late December after two of the vaccines were approved for use in the U.S., Colt began searching the internet for vaccine appointments. On New Year's Eve, Colt found vaccine appointments for his grandparents, just two days after they were eligible for the shots. Word quickly spread among his grandparents' friends that Colt knew how to get vaccine appointments. Soon, Colt was searching for appointments for other elderly citizens. Within a week, he had them scheduled.

By the beginning of February, people from all over the city were asking Colt for assistance to make vaccine appointments. That's when Colt realized he needed some help. Colt and his best friend, Jay Guthrie, started recruiting friends to help find and schedule vaccines for eligible people in the community. The group, which calls themselves the Shot Spotters, created a website where people could input their information and ask for help.

By the end of February, Colt and his group had found vaccine appointments for more than 150 eligible local residents. As the eligibility for vaccines expanded, so did the demand for their help. When teachers were approved for the vaccine, more than 50% of the faculty asked Colt for help. To date, Colt and his friends have helped more than 750 local residents schedule their vaccine appointments.

This Friday, May 7, the city of Leaguetown will honor Colt and the Shot Spotters with the Citizens of the Year award. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed this Wednesday, May 5.

■ COLT REAL, junior

"When the pandemic hit, I freaked out. I live with my grandparents, both of whom are in their 70s and have health issues. I was so scared that they might get the virus and die. For the first few months, we barely left the house because we didn't want to risk any exposure. To say that I was obsessed about the vaccines is an understatement. I read everything I could about the vaccine development and progress. It was the first thing I did every morning and the last thing I did every night. I knew that the vaccine would be our way back to normalcy for my grandparents.

"In early December, we learned that my grandfather's brother got the virus. Unfortunately, Uncle Bob died three days later. We couldn't go the hospital to see him nor could we go to the funeral. It was heartbreaking to watch

■ COLT REAL (cont.)

my grandfather say goodbye to his younger brother on a Zoom call. My great uncle's death only motivated me more to follow the vaccine development.

"I got lucky scheduling my grandparents' vaccines. I was combing through neighborhood websites in nearby towns and someone posted a link to a vaccine sign-up. The link was disabled about two hours after I scheduled my grandparents' appointments. We drove over an hour to get the vaccines, but it was worth it. When my grandparents got their first shots, I am not embarrassed to say that we all teared up. It was definitely an emotional moment. It felt like we could finally breathe for the first time in months.

"Once my grandparents mentioned to their friends about getting the vaccine, my phone blew up. Everyone wanted help. Older people are not used to using the internet. Many of them had never used it, so that's where we could help. My friends and I figured out quickly how to navigate different websites and when new appointments were typically posted. We learned to get up very early in the morning and be very fast with the keyboard to snag appointments. Even though we are all teenagers and love to sleep late, no one ever complained about the 4 a.m. alarms. We took turns waking up early. The first thing we do is check local pharmacy websites for appointments — CVS, Walmart, HEB. Most add appointments in the early morning and, if you are fast, you can usually grab a few. The adrenaline rush I get from scoring an appointment for someone is way better than sleeping in. Honestly, it's a little bit addicting, but I guess a helping-people addiction is not a bad one to have.

"Before we created the website, I had paper all over my house with people's information on it. It was crazy and unorganized. I knew if we were going to help people, we needed a better system. So Dave [Rotan] created the website, and I recruited friends. In total, there are 10 Shot Spotters, and we all will be at the City Council meeting on Friday."

■ JAY GUTHRIE, junior

"The website is nothing fancy, but it serves its purpose. It stores the information we need in one place. Before the website, Colt was texting us information in pieces. When Colt first asked if I would help, I didn't realize I would have to wake up at 4 a.m., but I also didn't know about the excitement I would get scheduling an appointment for someone. Vaccine appointments are neither easy to find nor easy to secure. If you don't understand the different sites, it's near impossible, and it's really hard to get appointments near us. But with a little knowledge, a little luck and an early alarm, it is much easier."

■ GERTIE SMITH, community member who is 77 years old

"Colt and his friends got me an appointment in late January. My son and I tried to get me an appointment for weeks, but we could never find anything. Colt's grandma told me about her grandson's website, and the next week, I had an appointment. I had to drive 45 minutes, but that was no trouble at all. Colt and his group are my heroes. They are saving lives by helping people like me."

■ MARGARET REAL, Colt's grandmother

"You can bet we will be at the city council meeting. Colt and his friends have done a remarkable service for our community. We are so incredibly proud."

■ TINA AMAYA, mayor

"The vaccination rate for our city is 20% higher than any surrounding city. A lot of that credit goes to Colt and his friends. They even got my mother a vaccine appointment. Those teens have worked tirelessly for our community, and they needed to be commended. Other cities have people who are charging money to find appointments for people. Colt and his group haven't charge one cent for their services."

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

STATE • 2021 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a student and his friends who started scheduling vaccine appointments for local residents.

2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay as close to the prompt as you can. Some judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

It's 4 a.m., and the alarm is blaring.

Junior Colt Real pulls himself out of bed and flips on his computer.

The search begins. CVS. HEB. Walmart. Through blood-shot eyes, Colt scans all of the websites.

Within minutes, he finds what he's looking for — a COVID-19 vaccine appointment for an elderly woman. Success.

“The adrenaline rush I get from scoring an appointment for someone is way better than sleeping in,” Colt said. “Honestly, it's a little bit addicting, but I guess a helping-people addiction is not a bad one to have.”

3. Once you get past the lead, make sure you include a nut graph. It tells the reader what the story is going to be about. Follow the nut graph with a direct quote and then go into the transition/quote formula.

nut graph

For the past few months, Colt and his friends, the Shot Spotters, have set their alarms for the crack of dawn to help local residents schedule vaccines. The group has scheduled more than 750 appointments, and this Friday, the city of Leaguetown will honor Colt and Shot Spotters with the Citizens of the Year award.

direct quote

“Colt and his friends have done a remarkable service for our community,” Colt's grandmother Margaret Real said. “We are so incredibly proud.”

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of the transition/quote formula.

Be sure you attribute after the quote or at least after the first sentence. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution (“Colt said,” not “said Colt”). Avoid stacking quotes. Try to avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing some kind of transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and that the quote does not repeat information in the transition.

transition/story-telling

In fact, Mayor Tina Amaya said the vaccination rate for the city is 20% higher than surrounding cities.

direct quote

“A lot of that credit goes to Colt and his friends,” she said. “They even got my mother a vaccine appointment. Those teens have worked tirelessly for our community, and they needed to be commended.”

transition/story-telling

Colt’s venture into the appointment-making world grew out of necessity, he said. He wanted to keep his grandparents protected.

direct quote

“When the pandemic hit, I freaked out,” he said. “I live with my grandparents, both of whom are in their 70s and have health issues. I was so scared that they might get the virus and die. I knew that the vaccine would be our way back to normalcy for my grandparents.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own Colt.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Colt is so awesome.” These statements are personal opinions and should not be made in a feature story.

6. Always use the verb “said” as the verb of attribution. Don’t say “says,” “stated,” “feels” or any other synonym for “said.”

7. Finally, look for a strong quote to use as a closing statement or a statement that will bring the reader back to the beginning of the story. It should give the reader a sense of satisfaction or resolution.

Local resident Gertie Smith, who is 77, said she and her son had looked for weeks for a vaccine appointment for her but could never find anything.

“Colt’s grandma told me about her grandson’s website, and the next week, I had an appointment,” she said. “I had to drive 45 minutes, but that was no trouble at all.

“Colt and his group are my heroes. They are saving lives by helping people like me.”

SAMPLE STORY

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"A lot of that credit goes to Colt and his friends," she said. "They even got my mother a vaccine appointment. Those teens have worked tirelessly for our community, and they needed to be commended."

Colt's venture into the appointment-making world grew out of necessity, he said. He wanted to keep his grandparents protected.

"When the pandemic hit, I freaked out," he said. "I live with my grandparents, both of whom are in their 70s and have health issues. I was so scared that they might get the virus and die. I knew that the vaccine would be our way back to normalcy for my grandparents."

Colt said luck was on his side when he found vaccine appointments for his grandparents on New Year's Eve, just two days after they were eligible for the shots.

"I was combing through neighborhood websites in nearby towns and someone posted a link to a vaccine sign-up," he said. "The link was disabled about two hours after I scheduled my grandparents' appointments."

The family drove over an hour to get the vaccines, but Colt said it was worth the drive.

"When my grandparents got their first shots, I am not embarrassed to say that we all teared up," he said. "It was definitely an emotional moment. It felt like we could finally breathe for the first time in months."

After word got out that he found his grandparents vaccine appointments, Colt said his phone blew up. Colt recruited a few friends, and the Shot Spotters were born.

"Everyone wanted help," he said. "Older people are not used to using the internet. Many of them had never used it, so that's where we could help. My friends and I figured out quickly how to navigate different websites and when new appointments were typically posted."

Eventually, Colt and his friends created a website where residents could input their data.

"Before the website, Colt was texting us information in pieces," junior and fellow Shot Spotter Jay Guthrie said. "Vaccine appointments are neither easy to find nor easy to secure. If you don't understand the different sites, it's near impossible, and it's really hard to get appointments near us. But with a little knowledge, a little luck and an early alarm, it is much easier."

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