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That's well said - Somerville resident takes second place at Toastmasters International

By Aaron Crear

A Somerville resident took second place in the Toastmasters International World Championship of Public Speaking. Mary Cheyne out spoke nearly 25,000 candidates from around the world on her way to a second place overall finish during the finals held at Foxwoods in Mashantucket, CT. The final round was the culmination of nearly a year of competition. Her speech, entitled Nelly, told a story about striving to achieve your dreams and ignoring the internal voice that says it cannot be done. In total Cheyne revised her speech over 40 times before presenting the final version in August.

Toastmasters International is a non-profit educational organization that focuses on improving the public speaking abilities of its participants. Through repetition and constructive criticism members increase their confidence level and help eliminate nerves and anxiety when speaking in front of an audience. Cheyne represented District 31 in the event, which comprises nearly 160 individual clubs throughout Eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. District 31 has had much success in recent years. The district produced World Champions Darren LaCroix and Vikas Jhingran in 2001 and 2007 respectively.

Cheyne became involved in Toastmasters to overcome anxiety that hindered her when she spoke in public. "After college I worked as a computer programmer. Sitting behind a desk all day was not conducive to growing my confidence in public speaking. Instead, my personality retracted. Whenever I had to speak in front of a group, such as a work team meeting, I would sweat bullets. That's when I knew I had to do something about it."

Cheyne, who is now a corporate trainer for software company Bullhorn, has always taken a proactive approach to improving her performance and working on her weaknesses. "When I wanted to work on my humor, I took stand-up comedy classes. When I wanted to write better speeches, I took creative writing classes", said Cheyne. "I also actively seek to learn from people who are at higher levels of the field than I am, such as the past World Champions of Public Speaking like Darren LaCroix, the 2001 World Champion of Public Speaking who was also from Massachusetts." Frequently training large classes of people at work also allows her to hone her speaking even more.

Cheyne feels that people from all walks of life can benefit from becoming a better public speaker. "How you speak is a part of you, and how well you speak plays a significant role in your ability to influence others." Toastmaster has also helped demonstrate that the way you convey your message is as important as the message itself.

A Toastmaster Since 2005, Mary belongs to the Last Word Toastmasters Club in Burlington as well as the Renaissance Club in Boston.

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Somerville resident Mary Cheyne took second place in the Toastmasters International World Championship of Public Speaking. --Photo courtesy of District 31 by Don Saracen

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