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Gateway speech coach is honored

Deeley-Wilhite best in state

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EDGEWOOD - Three years after starting the speech team at Gateway Community and Technical College, Michelle Deeley-Wilhite has been awarded the David Carter Coach of the Year Award. The award is presented annually to the most outstanding speech team coach in Kentucky.

"I was surprised to be recognized since we have only been competing for three years at Gateway," said Deeley-Wilhite. "I know the quality of the other coaches. Many of the coaches today were coaching when I was competing."

Deeley-Wilhite competed in speech tournaments in high school and college and helped Northern Kentucky University's speech team before coming to Gateway.

"Coaching a team with nontraditional students is different from teaching at a traditional institution," she said. "Most of the students on our team work full-time and many have children. Some of our best speakers may not be able to attend a practice session or a tournament if they cannot get permission to take a vacation day from work or if they cannot find a baby sitter."

Deeley-Wilhite said even with those obstacles, the Gateway team has had some great successes.

"We have placed in the top three schools in our division at 90 percent of tournaments we have attended," she said. "More importantly, several students on the team have sent me notes or cards telling me how much the speech team has been a positive impact on their lives."

Deeley-Wilhite said her best time coaching was when a student earned a position at a national tournament. Student Gina Wolfe qualified for the Interstate Oratorical Contest in New Mexico. Each state may send no more than two students to the event, usually selected at their state championship tournament. There were 49 competitors from 28 states who participated.

"The fact that a Gateway student was participating made me extremely proud," Deeley-Wilhite said.

Wolfe, who works full-time and has a 5-year-old daughter, credited her coach with her success.

"Competing against the best speakers in the country was really intimidating," said Wolfe. "Luckily I had the world's best coach to encourage me. Michelle was great. She was able to calm me down and help me focus on why I was there - to learn."

Deeley-Wilhite said this experience fits with her position as an educator. "One of my purposes in life is to help students grow individually as well as prepare for their future careers," said Deeley-Wilhite. "Communication skills are needed for both. There is no greater satisfaction than to see students become self-confident and grow into successful, productive speakers and citizens."

Deeley-Wilhite got the award at a speech tournament. Her team won second place in the small schools division at the BBQ Capital of the World Speech and Debate Tournament held Nov. 7-8 in Owensboro.

