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| THE ENQUIRER

Last Updated: 7:47 am | Monday, February 19, 2007

Gateway speech students winners

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The new Gateway Community and Technical College Speech Team brought home three individual honors and an overall second place among community colleges in their inaugural competition Jan. 27 at Transylvania University in Lexington.

Melisa Bissonnette won in after-dinner speaking, Jonathan Slone won in informative speaking, and Gina Wolfe won in persuasive speaking.

The team is led by coach Michelle Deeley Wilhite and assistant coach Melissa Fry, an English professor.

"While Gateway just formed a team in January, other schools have been competing in tournaments during the fall of 2006," White said. "I was excited we had four students prepared to attend the tournament. This was an accomplishment. Having three of the four students break into finals was icing on the cake for both Melissa and myself."

While the Gateway team does compete against four-year colleges, it is different in many ways, including more limited budgets and not awarding scholarships.

"Our focus is to provide a forum for students to challenge themselves and improve their speaking skills instead of winning trophies," said Deeley Wilhite.

Bissonnette was still impressed with how she did in her first competition. The 37-year-old married mother of a 14-year-old from Independence cleans homes for a living. She is earning her associate degree in applied science in general occupational technical studies.

"We went up against students from four-year colleges that are majoring in communication and we beat some of them out," Bissonnette said. "I wasn't nervous the first two times I gave my speech, but when I went to finals, I was horrified. I felt really good about my performance and was secretly hoping to place."

For Wolfe, 29, a married mother of a 3-year-old from Bellevue, this was her first team experience. She works full time for the Federal Home Loan Bank in Cincinnati.

"I've never really been part of a team before, not even in high school," she said. "Working in a group and meeting new people has been very good for me."

Slone, 17, is a science major from Dry Ridge.

"Many people have fears of speaking in public - including me," Slone said. "Six months ago, I wouldn't have even considered being on a speech team because of the fear of speaking in public but I was convinced into joining the team. I am glad I did because I learned that public speaking is not that bad, it can actually be fun."

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