Toastmasters kicks off world's largest speech contest

Global competition draws more than 30,000 participants to the stage

RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, Calif., Feb. 4, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- The Toastmasters International Speech Contest season has begun. With more than 30,000 contestants in 116 countries, it is the world's largest speech competition. Participants practice and give their presentations in local clubs, and they polish their skills as they advance to area, division and district levels. The competition culminates with the World Championship of Public Speaking, to be held August 24 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

"Speech contests are an exciting part of the Toastmasters communication and leadership program," says John Lau, President of Toastmasters International. "They challenge members to fine-tune their skills in front of a larger audience. In a club, members are evaluated; in a contest, they are judged against their peers."

For the past 75 years, the International Speech Contest has been a dramatic part of the Toastmasters experience, capped off annually by the championship round held at the organization's International Convention. For insight into last year's competition, view this video about the 2012 contest finalists or check out highlights of the 2012 winning speeches.

To be eligible for the competition, participants must be age 18 or older, and present a five-to seven-minute speech in English on any topic. Judging criteria include speech content, originality, organization, gestures, style and timing.

Former World Champions of Public Speaking, such as Lance Miller (2005) and Jim Key (2003), have used their success as a springboard to professional speaking careers. Those who leave the contest without a trophy also benefit from the experience. "I felt I had been successful just by entering the contest and facing my fear," says Paula Howley of British Columbia, Canada. Liz Shaw, of Arizona, says, "I view speech contests as the perfect personal growth experience." Colin William, of Indiana, says, "Preparing for speech contests helped me become a more effective speech writer."

To locate a club, observe a local contest, or learn more about Toastmasters membership, visit www.toastmasters.org.

About Toastmasters International
Toastmasters International is a nonprofit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. Founded in October 1924, the organization currently has more than 280,000 members in 13,500-plus clubs in 116 countries. Each week, Toastmasters helps more than a quarter million people of every ethnicity, education level and profession build their competence in communication so they can gain the confidence to lead others. For information about local Toastmasters clubs, please visit www.toastmasters.org. Follow @Toastmasters International on Twitter.

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For further information: Angela Burrell, +1-949-858-8255, aburrell@toastmasters.org

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