

Australian Wins Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking

Mark Hunter of Brisbane takes title during annual Convention, earning cheers from 1,500-member international audience.

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It was the World Series of public speaking, the Olympics of oratory, the final bout for the heavyweight title at the Toastmasters International Speech Contest. Mark Hunter, a Toastmaster and school principal from Brisbane, Australia, emerged victorious, claiming the title of 2009 World Champion of Public Speaking during the Toastmasters International Convention, held at MGM Grand at Foxwoods in Mashantucket, Conn., Aug. 12 - 15.

Hunter presented his winning speech, "A Sink Full of Green Tomatoes," to a crowd of nearly 1,500 fellow Toastmasters from dozens of countries.

He described his life prior to and following an accident that left him in a wheelchair. While championing the rights of the physically challenged, he faced a problem: Did he want to fit in with the rest of society, or did he want to stand out? The answer came in his grandmother's kitchen. Using the metaphor of green tomatoes, Hunter described the theme of his speech as, "There's a unique way of loving that allows everyone to be themselves."

The speech contest marked the highlight of the four-day Convention. A panel of 20 Toastmasters judges evaluated 10 contestants from different parts of the world, all of whom had advanced to the finals following a year-long process of elimination among 30,000 contestants, using club, area, district and regional speech competitions. Criteria used in judging included speech content, organization, voice quality and gestures.

Second- and third-place winners in the World Championship of Public Speaking were Mary Cheyne of Somerville, Mass., with her speech "Nelly" and Erick Rainey of Portland, Ore., with his speech "Feed the Right Dog."

Toastmasters International is a nonprofit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of clubs. The organization currently has 250,000 members in 12,000 clubs in 106 countries. Since its founding 85 years ago in October 1924, the organization has helped more than four million men and women give presentations with poise and confidence. For information about local Toastmasters clubs, please visit www.toastmasters.org.

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