

CDS student talks her way to the podium



While public speaking may be the number one fear for most people, a talented group of students will be flocking to South Africa to quite literally talk their way to the podium.

And a young student at Country Day School hopes to break some records along the way.

Newmarket debater and provincial champion, Grade 9 student Natalie Ganzhorn, is fast on her feet. And, the 14-year-old can present a persuasive argument better than most adults.

She has been a member of the CDS Debating team for the past three years and was recently named provincial champion at the Kaufman Cup Junior High Public Speaking Championships held in Toronto.

At the provincials, Natalie finished first in Persuasive Speaking, second in Impromptu Speaking, and first place overall. More than 75 Grade 6-9 students from across Ontario competed in three different events. As provincial champion, Natalie will represent CDS and Ontario at the national championships in Calgary in May.

But the world awaits.

Before she heads off to Calgary, Natalie will be travelling to Durban, South Africa at the end of this month to participate in the World Championships. She will present her provincial-winning seven and a half minute persuasive speech on the alarming level of germs in hotel rooms. Natalie qualified for the Worlds at the International Independent Schools' Public Speaking Competition (IISPSC) last October in Calgary. There she competed in Dramatic Interpretation, Persuasive Speaking and Radio Newscast. She sees her topic as being a bit "disgusting" but she'll engage the audience and take a light-hearted approach to her topic.

Natalie simply loves performing and competing and public speaking offers both, in spades. Unlike the old days of boring, prepared topics, competitors today bring stories to life in different categories to show off individual talents. That makes it very entertaining and enjoyable for the audiences and judges.

For her dramatic reading, Natalie has chosen a passage from *The Lovely Bones* (a 2002 novel and 2009 movie), where she will narrate the story and "act" in several of the characters' voices.

To prepare, Natalie has found a "lucky room" at CDS and a "magic carpet." Unfortunately, these will be left behind during this trip half-way around the world.

"Natalie is incredibly dynamic, she's a great actress, she has incredible vocal range, great use of gesture and eye contact" she also has a very smart head on those shoulders," says her debating coach, Kerstin Wyndham-West. "At 14, she will be by far the youngest competitor (on the Canadian team) because the majority of them will be 17 or 18 years old."

Wyndham-West has been at CDS for the past 18 years and has grown the program to 40 students, who compete regularly. In fact, CDS has had competitors at the world events for the past six years.

For competitors, they have to have a natural love of performing and a comfort level being in front of crowds. They have to think on their feet, particularly in the impromptu category, where they're given a subject, or even just a single word, and only two minutes to prepare a 3-5-minute speech.

Her students tend to be involved in drama and most are very comfortable on stage. Natalie wants to pursue drama and already has some TV appearances to her credit.

Where Wyndham-West's experience comes into play is helping students select appropriate pieces and helping them project the proper emotion and connect with the audience. Body language, and vocal tones are all part of the delivery. And it all comes down to practice and preparation.

She has gotten to know what works, and she's been pleased to see her public speaking students go on to careers in law, government and advocacy.

Canada traditionally performs well at the world competitions and this year will be no exception.

At the 2012 IISPC Natalie made it to the finals in all three of her categories placing second in Dramatic Interpretation, fourth in Persuasive Speaking and sixth in Radio Newscast. This placed her as the 4th Canadian speaker, which qualified her to compete in the World Championships this April; an extraordinary accomplishment for a Grade 9 student. This is the sixth year in a row that a CDS student has qualified for the Worlds.

The Country Day School will host the world at the International Independent Schools' Public Speaking Competition in King, this Oct. 17-20.