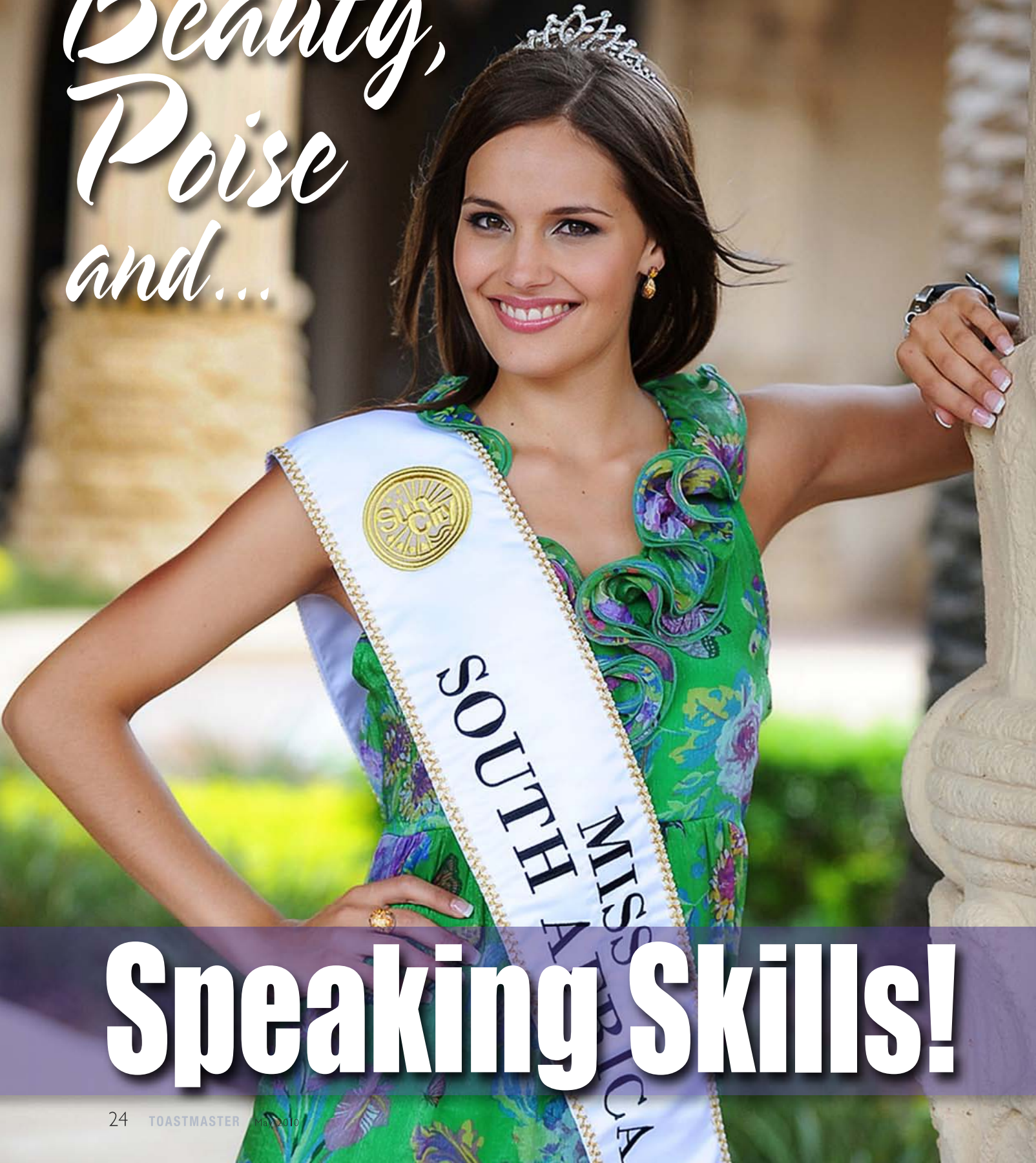


*Beauty,  
Poise  
and...*



**Speaking Skills!**

## Beauty pageant winners from around the world credit Toastmasters with helping them win their titles.

By Katie De Boer

*What does it take to win a beauty pageant today? You might be surprised.*

**A** contestant's communication and leadership skills are as important as her poise and appearance, which is why a number of pageant contestants – and winners – from around the

world are members of Toastmasters. They credit the program for helping them become confident speakers and leaders, enabling them to impress judges and serve gracefully during their terms as reigning beauty queens.

Ceylone Boothe-Grooms, a Toastmaster from Middletown, New Jersey, won the title of Mrs. New Jersey in 2009. "It is true – winning the contest is dependent on how well you can answer your interview questions," says Boothe-Grooms. "Just like in Table Topics, the questions are simple and off the cuff, which you are required to answer quickly and clearly."

A contender needs to intelligently voice opinions on current events and controversial topics – if she wants to win. "Be educated," says Kristen Dalton, Miss USA 2009. "You need to know what is going on in the world." As it turns out, opinions are easy to come by, because these women have plenty to say.

Ultimately, for a true beauty queen it's not about the title, the crown or the attention; it's about the experience and the passion "to promote and speak about a platform – a cause that is important to you," says Boothe-Grooms.

Here's what a few beauty-contest winners from around the world say about their Toastmasters training:

### **Ceylone Boothe-Grooms, Mrs. New Jersey United States, 2009**

Boothe-Grooms won the Mrs. New Jersey crown – all contestants are married – at the age of 38. She entered the competition, in part, because of her interest in raising awareness for the early detection of cervical cancer. Ever



since her sister died from the disease, she's been a passionate advocate for early detection.

Boothe-Grooms competed in her first pageant at age 19 and won several titles. She took a break to focus on family, becoming a mother of four, but returned to the pageant scene in search of opportunity and challenge.

During the interviewing process she discovered that much had changed since she last competed, and she found it difficult to communicate her answers clearly. Fellow contestants told her about Toastmasters and she soon joined the AT&T Middletown club in Middletown, New Jersey.

She credits Table Topics with building her skills and confidence. "It felt like someone had spoon-fed me my answers and I was able to grab my audience's attention," says Boothe-Grooms about her winning responses.

Boothe-Grooms now uses her pageant-title platform to promote the importance of regular health checkups. She is also starting her own foundation to help friends and family members of cancer patients find resources related to medical care and support.

"My experience in Toastmasters has been incredible," says Mrs. New Jersey. "My club is extremely supportive. I am so thankful to have met such wonderful people."

### **Rachael Rees, 2009 Miss World, New South Wales, Australia**

Rachael Rees, 21, always dreamed of competing in a beauty pageant and knew public speaking skills were critical in carrying out the duties of being Miss World.

"When I first entered the Miss World competition, I had a fear of public speaking," says Rees, who discovered the importance of communication skills – particularly tone of voice – in such competitions. She turned to the Wagga Wagga Toastmasters for help.

The club in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, Australia, quickly became one of her strongest networks of support. From providing help on her Ice Breaker speech to lending support when she took on leadership roles, members



were always available to offer guidance, advice and reassurance.

She noticed a dramatic improvement in her poise under pressure. "I have become such a strong and confident public speaker that I now have the ability to give a 20-minute presentation without any written [notes]," says Rees. "It is a great feeling when you can get a laugh from your audience; you know they are enjoying the experience as much as you are."

Like other pageant winners, Rees has used her Miss World platform to be a health advocate, serving as an ambassador and community representative for Multiple Sclerosis Australia.

This once-shy girl has chosen a career in the media industry. She is a graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), a highly competitive training institute in Kingston, New South Wales, for students of theater, film and television. Rees now says speaking off the cuff – connecting and laughing with her audience – is her favorite part of giving a speech.

### **Nicole Flint, 2009 Miss South Africa**

Nicole Flint, 21, is no stranger to Toastmasters. Her father, Ian Flint, DTM, has been a member for 26 years and served as District 74 Governor in 1991. Ian impressed his daughter with the value of Toastmasters by conducting Youth Leadership programs (YLP) at her primary school. Nicole started modeling in high school but realized the value of vocal projection and joined her school's public speaking team. She also participated in two additional YLP courses. "This exposure to Toastmasters improved her self-confidence, and this, I firmly believe, made the difference in her pageant successes," says her father, a member of the Forum Club in Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa.

Nicole agrees heartily, saying Toastmasters helped her add the finishing touches to her professional performances. "It's being able to understand how important manners are in the presenting of a speech," she says. "I have learned that it's the little things that make the difference between good and bad delivery."

Nicole learned not only how to speak confidently and effectively but discovered other valuable Toastmasters skills. "It is important to arrive on time and ensure proper preparation for all engagements," she says.

On the heels of her Miss South Africa success last December, Nicole is giving back to her community as a guest speaker at various Toastmasters events. Once



her busy schedule slows down, she plans to join a club in the Pretoria area.

### **Nadia Moffett, 2010 Miss North Carolina USA**

After being crowned Miss North Carolina in November 2009, Nadia Moffett expressed gratitude to Express Yourself Toastmasters in Tobaccoville, North Carolina, where as a member she developed grace, eloquence, confidence and the ability to articulate – all skills necessary to ace her personal interviews with the judges.

When she started participating in beauty pageants, Moffett realized she needed help with her speaking skills. "Rambling was my biggest downfall," she says. "I would make a point and wouldn't stop." In Toastmasters, she learned to control the content of her answers. She didn't want to ramble, but she still wanted to say enough to connect with the judges and audience. "Something else that is really important to grasp is to know how to let your words flow," says Moffett. "Be connected in your heart and how you are feeling. It is important to trust your instincts."

Toastmasters training allowed her to develop the skills she needed to follow those instincts. "I was able to confidently speak my views, thoughts and opinions on various topics with no hesitation," she says.

As Miss North Carolina, Moffett, 25 this month, is constantly meeting, speaking and interviewing people. "Every time I put my sash on, I get to meet a whole slew of new people... I've always been a social butterfly, but this takes it to another level."

After graduating from college, Moffett went to work at American Express in Greensboro, North Carolina, and two years ago joined its corporate club, Express Yourself Toastmasters. She had no idea how big of an impact Toastmasters would make on her career and personal aspirations.

Susan Mitchell, Express Yourself club president, says Moffett "is an asset to American Express and our Express Yourself club. Her positive attitude and willingness to help make her unique."

Moffett is also co-founder of the "Make Me a Queen" foundation, dedicated to helping young women build self-esteem. Toastmasters helped build hers. "I have gained the level of confidence needed to perform my best as I prepared for my title, and now prepare for the Miss USA contest [in May], and as I work to be my best in my career in corporate America," she says.



**Brittany Hoff, 2004 Miss Lewis County, Washington, and 2006 Miss Nampa, Idaho**

Brittany Ann Hoff, ACB, CL, discovered Toastmasters from her parents as a senior in high school. But she wasn't convinced to join until 2004, after her first pageant interview in Lewis County, Washington.



The interviews at the county level lasted 30 minutes, with an additional 10 to 12 minutes for questions. "It's more like Table Topics on fire," says Hoff. The board had brought in Toastmasters from the community to "practice judge" the interviews, Hoff says, and after the evaluations it was apparent she needed help with her excessive rambling. "There are a lot of things I love to talk about, so I needed to learn how to keep focused."


Like the other winning contestants, Hoff credits her Toastmasters training with helping her organize her thoughts. "The most important thing is to state all the points you will cover in your speech and then explain each one separately," says Hoff. This helped her keep her answers succinct. "Typically when you see a young contestant who stumbles or rambles in her interview, it

is most likely because she is over-thinking her answers. I know, because I used to do the same thing."

As Miss Lewis County, she made more than 80 appearances in one year, promoting her platform of a healthy lifestyle and the dangers of diabetes. To connect with her audiences, she started using props and learned to involve audience members in her presentations.

Two years later, in 2006, Hoff moved to Idaho. She soon joined another club, entered the Miss Nampa, Idaho, competition – and won. She continued to spread her message and made more than 60 appearances in six months.

Hoff, 23, will soon graduate from Boise State University and looks forward to traveling the world.

Hoff credits her Toastmasters mentors with her successes so far. "It is extremely important to have a mentor and learn how to become a mentor," says Hoff, whose own mentor is current District 15 Governor Dave Manning. Because of his advice, she is now serving as an area governor. Hoff did not expect to come this far in Toastmasters. She says, "It has been an incredible journey and experience." 

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