



# World Champions

## William E. Bivin Forensic Society

BY DEBORAH T. GIVENS

**"DON'T ARGUE WITH WESTERN," IS THE MOTTO OF THE WILLIAM E. BIVIN FORENSIC SOCIETY. WITH 13 CONSECUTIVE STATE TITLES, NUMEROUS TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS AND THREE CONSECUTIVE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS, THERE IS NO DEBATING THE ACCURACY OF THE SOCIETY'S MOTTO.**

Forensics is the practice or study of formal debate. It promotes the disciplines of speech, interpretation and debate, according to the team's website.

Judy Woodring, a Western graduate and director of Forensics, has coached the Western Forensic team for 13 years. The Forensics Society had just been reestablished and named after former University attorney William E. Bivin, who left a bequest to the team in his will. The Society lacked sufficient funding for coaching staff, research materials and travel expenses. "It was a bad situation," according to Woodring. The first time students competed in a national tournament, their expenses were paid by Kassie DePaiva, an actress on the day-time drama, "One Life to Live," and a member of Woodring's former high school team. The Forensics Society had to share a small office and practiced in the hallways.

Woodring credits Provost Barbara Burch for finding the funds to save the program and keep her at Western. At the first department meeting Dr. Burch told Woodring, "You just hang in there."

This year's Fo-

rensis Society boasts 32 members — a large number — since Western's director wants to give interested students the opportunity to participate. "I usually let the uncommitted students eliminate themselves," Woodring said.

Since most practice is one-on-one between team member and coach, Woodring now has a staff of five assistant coaches including Greg Robertson, Matt Gerbig, Scott Gordon, Chris Grove and Jace Luz.

While the Forensics team welcomes "walk-ons," the staff also recruits talented high school students with financial incentives such as housing waivers, tuition scholarships and other scholarships, including the \$350 William E. Bivin Scholarship.

The 2001 competition schedule began with a tournament at Purdue University where Western placed first in the individual sweepstakes. With events almost every weekend, the team then won the team sweepstakes overall, as well as for each portion of the swing.

During the spring semester, Western's strategy changes. The team focuses on qualifying as many members as possible for national competition, by a member finishing in the top six in an event during the year. "That is harder than it sounds," Woodring explains, "since there are often more than 100 competitors in an event."

Forensic competition encompasses four genres.



Members of the William E. Bivin Forensic Society take a break. Pictured left to right are Jenny Corum, Judy Woodring, Alisa Ponananta, Eric Rogers, and Joel Smith.

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Debate has the competitive Lincoln Douglas Debate and Parliamentary events. In the Lincoln Douglas Debate, the National Forensic Association selects a topic; this year's topic is, "Resolved: that the United States Federal Government should significantly alter its policy for combating international terrorism." Recent events involving terrorism have led to ongoing preparation for the debate.

The other genres are Limited Preparation with the events Extemporaneous Speaking and Impromptu Speaking; Public Address, which is divided into the events of After Dinner Speaking, Rhetorical Criticism, Persuasive Speaking and Informative Speaking; and Oral Interpretation, which includes the events Dramatic Performance, Duo Interpretation, Prose, Poetry and Programmed Oral Interpretation. Woodring said that work on each speech continues throughout the year to improve the presentation and reflect current events.

To help prepare for competition, team members have a one-hour practicum class each

semester. Class time is just the beginning. Students spend numerous hours researching topics on their computers in Cherry Hall, and with the help of Western's librarians, access the Lexis-Nexis database for news and legal materials. Woodring said, "If it was not for the librarians, we could not compete with the Ivy League schools."

Woodring recalls her first student to win a national championship, Robert Mattingly. While just a freshman, Mattingly defeated a senior from William and Mary in a 5 - 0 decision. Woodring said no one believed that a competitor from a regional university could win the event. Mattingly was also the first person to repeat as a national champion, winning again as a senior in 1996. Woodring credits Mattingly's achievement with setting the pace for everyone else. "You are as good as you think you can be," the coach states.



Judy Woodring (right) coaches Auburn, KY freshman Jenni Corum.

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A recent honor has included the Seth C. Hawkins Founders Cumulative Sweepstakes Award presented in April 2001 to Western as the school to have accumulated the most sweepstakes points throughout the years at the National Forensic Association national tournament.

Woodring continues to set new goals for the forensic society: to win a NFA individual sweepstakes, and to obtain computer-related technology for the team.

Forensic team members develop exceptional prowess in communication and research. They also have to learn good organizational skills so that they can juggle the practices and competitions. "A lot of being successful is knowing how to manage time," Woodring said. "However, success is not about winning trophies. Awards are great, but we do not want to overshadow the academic part and the educational values."

The four years that I spent as a part of the William E. Bivin Forensic Team at Western Kentucky University has had a tremendous influence on my life both in school and out of school. Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of being a part of

the team, though, was the chance to meet people from around the country and the world.

Winning Informative Speaking and After Dinner Speaking on our first trip to the I.F.A. International Tournament in Rome, Italy was truly an unforgettable experience. While it was nice being named champion in those individual events, I was most proud of our team. We set out to accomplish a goal of winning the international title, and we succeeded. We were given the unique opportunity to represent Western Kentucky University and let everyone know of the excellence we strive for on "The Hill," and this time not just on the regional, state, or national level, but to the entire world.

Schools around the nation and the world know that when the William E. Bivin Forensic Team from Western Kentucky University shows up that they can truly "expect the best."