



Mentoring Christian students to lead

The Institute for Cultural Communicators



By Franklin Hoecke

Franklin Hoecke, 18, has a passion for changing lives. One of three children, he loves writing stories, songs, and poetry; and playing classical piano.



and Morgan Hamby

Morgan Hamby, 17, has been a part of ICC for four years. He enjoys skateboarding, swimming, writing, and politics. The oldest of five siblings, he lives in Blythewood.

Photos by Clark Gebel, ICC Alumnus, assistant to the Chapter Sponsor, ONE VOICE chapter

For more information, visit ICC's website: www.iccinc.org.

For information on Columbia's chapters, contact Catherine Hoecke, classicalhoeckes@aol.com or Dede Ruff, johndederuff@truvista.net.



On June 6, 1944, in the town of Normandy, American soldiers stormed the beaches of France, joined multi-lateral forces, promoted patriotism, and honored their fellow soldiers to secure the blessings of freedom. Seventy years later, in the town of Ridgeway, ten students joined a multi-generational community, promoted patriotism, and honored World War II veterans through a group presentation called "Freedom." Spearheaded by 13-year-old student Doug Ruff, members of the Institute for Cultural Communicators (ICC) commemorated D-Day and honored veterans as part of a

town-wide event sponsored by the Merchants of Ridgeway.

The performance showcased the Founding Documents and the words to hymns and patriotic songs from America's history and emphasized the importance and cost of America's freedom. After months of preparation and countless articulation and projection exercises, the students of ICC were not just reciting the words of these documents, they were communicating the message behind them.

"Their speeches as well as their interaction with the veterans

brought tears to many eyes," said Charlene Herring, Mayor of Ridgeway. "It was wonderful to see the younger generation interact with the Greatest Generation by sharing the messages of many of our war heroes as well as emulating their leadership skills."

Carol Allen, owner of Laura's Tea Room, hosted the presentation. "My father was a WWII veteran, and I was hoping this would be something Mom would enjoy." She wasn't disappointed. "Mom couldn't quit talking about the 'young people' taking part in this," she said. Allen's mother, Eleanor Kneen, 93, was convinced that only 'old people' still remembered those times. "To watch all these children speak out so well on a subject that so affected her era was something she will never forget," says Allen.

Customers of Laura's Tea Room were equally impressed. "I am still hearing from customers how much they enjoyed the entire evening... This day and time we aren't treated to enough good examples of our youth."

John Ruff, owner of Ruff Furniture and father of Doug, said of the occasion. "We were all proud of our fathers, grandfathers, and our country that night, but we were

continued on page 14

Mentoring Christian students to lead

Continued from page 10



also hopeful for our future because of these students.”

Speaking in the community is one of the core values of ICC. And, while many students might be reluctant to speak in public, especially at a community-wide event, ICC members eagerly anticipated the opportunity.

ICC’s vision is simple. It is the idea that Christian leaders can transform the world through effective communication for God’s glory. In a youth culture often burdened with negative messages, competent students can communicate clear and effective truths to a culture of lies. “The vision of ICC,” according to 14-year-old member Graden Trenary, “is to, ultimately, change the world.”

How does the institute accomplish this vision? It equips students and parent coaches to serve the local community by training and equipping within chapters and at ICC events. With more chapters popping up each year, there are currently over 80 chapters in the institute in the US, Singapore, and Malaysia.

Chapters are usually hosted in local churches. Columbia’s chapters, ONE VOICE and GOFORTH, meet at Wood-

land Hills Community Church and First Baptist Church (Ridgeway), respectively. Members meet bi-weekly in sessions led almost entirely by student leaders. During the two-hour sessions, students participate in games with purpose, practice speeches, and receive feedback (what they call “coaching”), from experienced student communicators and parents.

Students also fill key leadership and service roles. Fourteen-year-old Graden Trenary serves as ONE VOICE chapter’s Media Historian. His responsibilities include taking pictures during chapter meetings and managing the chapter’s online assets such as its many Google Docs and the chapter’s website.

ICC is not a drop-off activity; parents learn alongside their children. Students within chapters range in age from six- to 18-years-old, and the majority have a homeschool background. Public and private school students also attend. The cost is nominal.

In addition to chapter meetings, students work on their Young Speaker’s Guild curriculum, a commitment of 15 minutes a day, and give individual speeches in their community. Columbia-area students (21 in all) presented on 199 community platforms

such as the Richland County Public Library, Denny Terrace Neighborhood Association, and H. B. Rhame Elementary School in 2013-14. This built character and competence in communication skills as they prepared for each presentation and analyzed their audience.

One student learned that communicating with the audience didn’t just involve speaking. “Before I came into ICC, my greatest interest was making sure people heard me,” says 15-year-old Chandler Hamby, Chapter Correspondent of GO FORTH. “I wasn’t interested in hearing what people said. Now I’ve learned that communication is not just about (my) opinion. I need to listen to people, and my opinions are not necessary for every decision.”

ICC chapter members typically attend two events each year: a local Communicators for Christ (CFC) conference and a forensic event. The CFC Tour gives individual chapters an opportunity to come together and further their students’ communication and leadership skills. ICC Forensics Society events provide opportunities for chapter members to compete, thus sharpening their speaking skills in response to community evaluator critiques.

For the past several years, the students of ONE VOICE have given group presentations to audiences within the Columbia community. They have promoted the importance of voting, celebrated the life and work of Charles Dickens, and brought a message of “Hope for America.”

Some parents are reluctant to add another activity to their student’s schedule. Maryann Sarazen, mother of 14-year-old ONE VOICE member Jonathan, was one of them. After joining the ONE VOICE chapter, however, Sarazen found that ICC was co-curricular. “Recently, my son had to write a paper on Evolution vs. Creation. [We were] able to take that paper and turn it into a speech for ICC.” Instead of adding to her workload,

continued on page 18



she is "enhancing her son's education and focusing on skills that will last a lifetime."

If ICC has a reputation for one thing, it's changing perspectives, like that of Noelle

Gebel, mother of ICC Young Speaker's Guild Inductee and alumnus Clark, 19. Gebel, mother of four adult children, was a leader in competitive speech and debate for five years. While she trained her children in speech and debate, she realized they were developing skills, but not necessarily the desire to communicate with and serve their community.

"Competition can be helpful in developing the skill," she says, "but should not be an end in itself," she says. "Taking one's polished speech into the community causes so much more growth. ICC provides the environment I need to see my children, and others like them, develop the character they need to lead local chapter meetings, train others at conferences, and, especially, serve out in the community." *REC*

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