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Gray Academy student going to 'Olympics of public speaking'

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Western Correspondent

WINNIPEG – Josh Fineblit, an Asper Cup competitor and Grade 12 student at Gray Academy of Jewish Education, will be competing at this year's World Individual Public Speaking and Debate Championship.

The debate, to be held in England from March 26 to April 3, is Fineblit's second try as a competitor (having debated at the championship in Germany in 2007, and placing 13th overall).

This world debate is considered the Olympics of public speaking.

Fineblit, 17, is very excited about going to 'Worlds.' "I know a lot of the people who will be there this year and it

will be nice for all of us to be together again," he said.

"Going to Worlds is what I've been working towards for a long time. This will probably be my last debate, as I'm graduating this year. The last time I went to Worlds I came in 13th – something I'd like to improve on this year."

Fineblit explained that there are two debating tournaments leading up to Worlds that determine which 15 or so students get to go to the world championship.

First is the International Independent School Public Speaking Tournament, with about 120 student participants. From there, about 30 students go on to the National Public Speaking Championships.



At the debating finals at the 2007 Worlds in Germany, Josh Fineblit (left) works with his debating partner, Adam Duxbury, from South Africa.

Worlds is attended by about 15 students from around the world. The championship has four segments – either persuasive or

after-dinner (comedic) speaking, impromptu speaking, debating and dramatic reading. Fineblit has opted to do persuas-

sive speaking for the first segment, on how new recycling technologies can help alleviate the problem of plastics in the ocean.

Within the last four years, Gray Academy students have been earning the reputation of being world debating leaders, regularly participating on the Canadian Team for this worldwide championship.

In 2005, senior student Susan Schipper competed at the Worlds in Cypress, where she placed 7th overall, and 2nd place overall in Debate at the Worlds in Connecticut.

In April 2007, Shira Lerner, a Grade 12 student, qualified for the Worlds held in South Africa, where she placed 15th overall in the combined categories of Debate, Persuasive Speaking, Impromptu Speaking, and Interpretive Reading.

Linda Martin, debating teacher and coach, said, "The Worlds is a unique and exciting tourna-

ment where students compete against the very best while making friends with competitors from so many different cultures. It is wonderful to watch the mix and verbal exchanges amongst so many clever and knowledgeable young adults."

Gray Academy has a public speaking and debating course that focuses on skills that allow students to learn how to communicate effectively through oral presentation – analyzing topics, listening to others and learning to refute arguments. Students have the opportunity to present prepared impromptu speeches and participate in parliamentary debates.

Since 2004, Gray Academy has hosted the Asper Cup International High School Debate, a prestigious tournament that in December 2008 had top debaters from every competing province across the country, from Newfoundland to British Columbia.

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PHOTO: SKYVIEW LTD./COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

Aerial photograph of the site

Israeli archeologists uncover Byzantine-era church

JERUSALEM (JTA) – A Byzantine-era church was uncovered during an archeological excavation near Beit Shemesh.

The excavation by the Israel Antiquities Authority was conducted in the wake of plans to enlarge Moshav Nes-Harim.

The church, whose discovery was announced last Tuesday by the authority, is paved with mosaics and a dedicatory inscription in Greek.

"The site was surrounded by a small forest of oak trees and is covered with farming terraces that were cultivated by the residents of Nes-Harim," said archeologist Daniel Ein Mor, the excavation director. "Prior to the excavation we discerned unusually large quantities of pottery shards from the Byzantine period and thousands of mosaic tesserae that were scattered across the surface level.

"We know of other Byzantine churches and sites that are believed to be Byzantine monasteries, which are located in the surrounding region. The excavation at Nes-Harim supplements our knowledge about the nature of the Christian-Byzantine settlement in the rural areas between the main cities in this part of the country during the Byzantine period, among them Bet Guvrin, Emmaus and Jerusalem."



PHOTO: DANIEL EIN MOR/COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

The mosaic also includes a dedicatory inscription written in ancient Greek.

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