

Collin College Graduate Represents U.S. in International Competition



by Heather DARROW

Maite Palma is on a quest for happiness—not just for herself, but for students, colleagues and a group of fictitious neurosurgeons.

This driven woman is competing against meeting planning students from around the world, and her journey to date includes a new career, an award and an all-expense-paid trip to Frankfurt, Germany.

“Of course my husband is going to go with me. He was packed the minute I won,” said Palma, grinning from ear to ear.

When she traveled with her Collin College classmates to Atlantic City for the IMEX-Meeting Professionals International (MPI)-MCI Future Leaders Forum’s International

University Challenge, Palma was determined to show meeting planning professionals that the contest’s theme “Connecting the Dots to Happiness” was a foregone conclusion if you travel to Iceland.

Competitors were given a fictitious brief, which included creating a green conference to offer young neurosurgeons opportunities to hear the latest research and connect with colleagues from different countries.

Palma’s proposal includes a healthy menu based on native



Icelandic food, a visit to the Blue Lagoon's volcanic water and the use of electroencephalography (EEG) machines to record electrical activity of the brain. She even suggested using EEG devices during a performance of a deaf, female percussionist.

"Evelyn Glennie plays with bare feet on the floor because that is how she feels the vibration. She wrote *Good Vibrations: My Autobiography* about her experiences. Showing how you can hear things, even if it is not traditional listening, and providing certain brain-healthy foods and measuring brain activity will show conference participants how little changes can make a big difference," Palma said.

The sole winner representing the United States, and the only community college representative, Palma will compete against five students from universities in other countries including Chiang Mai University, North West University, Skema Business School, Shanghai School of Business and Economics and Vistula University in a final competition in Germany this summer.

Palma holds bachelor's and master's degrees in mass communication from Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Venezuela, but when she moved to the U.S. she could not find a job, so she decided to go back to school. Palma earned an associate degree in Hospitality and Foodservice Management in May 2016 from Collin College.

"I came to this country 16 years ago and became an American citizen. If someone would have told me that I would have the honor of representing the United States in another country I wouldn't have believed it," said Palma, who is an adjunct professor at the college and a guest services agent at the Westin Stonebriar Hotel & Golf Club.

Palma says the college was invaluable in her career and contest success. After taking several classes from Karen Musa, Collin College

associate dean of Academic Affairs and Workforce programs, she learned that her professor was looking for deep, critical thinking rather than book answers. Innovative ideas became Palma's norm which served her well in the recent competition.

"Instead of creating a beautiful logo or set up I was trying to think outside the box. I chose Iceland because I read an article stating that Iceland was the third country on a ranking for most happy countries in the world. Iceland is known for sustainability in terms of geothermal energy and growing vegetables indoors. Diet, culture and sustainability make Iceland a different kind of society."

In addition to taking hotel and hospitality classes at the college, Palma participated in the Leadership Academy and became a student member of the college's MPI chapter, the first MPI student chapter in Texas. These experiences opened doors for Palma.

"If it wasn't for Collin I probably wouldn't have had the Frankfurt opportunity. Being part of Collin showed me there are no limits. It is all about you, and Collin has all the resources. Everything you need to be the next big thing, you can find at Collin College," she said.

For many, the results of an international competition might make or break a quest for happiness, but Palma says that is far from her experience.

"I was lucky to have this opportunity to represent Collin and the U.S. Regardless of whether I win, I think this is more than amazing. In fact, I cannot think of a better accomplishment," she said.

For more information about Collin College, visit www.collin.edu. ♦

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Photo by Nick Young, Collin College photographer.