

Orator's sweet song of success

Del. prize winner
a man of his words

By **ERIC RUTH**
Staff reporter

In the midst of a long-winded political season, some might say the story of Dilip Abayasekara is a refreshing rarity — an orator who believes shorter is better.

While he's no politician, the Newark resident won the votes of judges in the World Championship of Public Speaking in Las Vegas Saturday, taking second place against eight silver-tongued competitors.



ABAYASEKARA

The advice of the world's second-best orator: Make it short, make it sweet, make them laugh and make them cry.

His award-winning speech was titled "Love Makes the Connection," a self-penned examination of human relationships. He competitively performed the piece for the first time Saturday. The first-place winner, Dana Lamon of Lancaster, Calif., told people to "Take a Chance," and the third-place finisher, Canadian Doon Wilkins of Calgary, Alberta, spoke on "The Glory of Love."

Abayasekara, a Sri Lanka native, took less than seven minutes to weave a tale of personal experience in a new land and personal advice from a father he hadn't seen in years.

His father told him that relationships are life's most precious aspect, and during the 20 years he has made his way in the United States, Abayasekara, 40, said those bonds were what transformed a strange land into his homeland.

Long-standing relationships come when love makes the connection, Abayasekara told the audience.

Abayasekara, a research scientist at W.L. Gore & Associates in Elkton, Md., said successful speeches have a touch of humor, a few personal experiences and a degree of pathos — and the message must touch the audience.

"The shorter speeches are harder to give because you have to say something meaningful within seven minutes [the competition's limit]," he said.

The race between Lamon and himself was a close one, Abayasekara said, but nerves weren't a problem.

"I had prepared like crazy. I felt the most prepared than I had been for any speech," said Abayasekara, president of the Greater Newark Area Toastmasters, who aspires to begin a business coaching public speakers and guiding company presentations.

He began the speech in June, but took it through 15 revisions before he was satisfied. Contestants need three speeches to go all the way through the finals. "Anyone can write one very good speech. A few people can write two very good speeches. But very few can come up with three prize-winning speeches."