

## Deaf 'Survivor' visits NTID, offers tips Woman had role of reality TV pioneer

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(March 19, 2004) — Living in the Amazon for more than a month, Christy Smith probably wasn't thinking about the skills necessary to land a job.

For Smith, 25, of Basalt, Colo., her job at the time was to outlast other competitors in the CBS reality show *Survivor*, which aired last year. She was voted out on the 11th show of the 13-week saga.

The only deaf member in *Survivor* history, she initially declined the offer to be on the show, despite beating out 60,000 other hopefuls.

"I was scared to be on the show," Smith told about 75 students Thursday at Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf. "How can I represent all deaf people?"

After contemplation, she agreed to do the show, despite the fact that there would be no interpreters or other concessions. "I have to be who I am," she said.

Smith's appearance was sponsored by NTID's Center on Employment, and she discussed how deaf students could survive in a hearing world; she gave them tips for interviewing, such as maintaining eye contact and being on time.

"If you're late, you are unreliable," she said.

One way to do well at work is to enjoy what you do.

"You must do what you love," she said, using sign language. "You're not born with skills and experience. It's up to you to develop your skills and determine what you want."

And, she said, it is up to the students to educate employers about deafness.

Earlier in the day, Smith told students at Rochester School for the Deaf that they can do whatever they want.

"You have to sell yourself," she said. "You can get a job. Just believe in yourself."

Career options have opened since Smith appeared on *Survivor*. For years a camp counselor for deaf children, Smith now keeps busy being a motivational speaker and hopes to raise \$30,000 for the pilot of a PBS show, *Christy's Kids*. Her plan is to have deaf and hearing children exploring nature together and learning or teaching sign language.

"I see myself as a spokesperson, not only for deaf people but for people with other disabilities," said Smith. "How many deaf people do you see on TV?"

One NTID student asked if she could have a *Survivor*-type show for the kids.

"I can't touch that. That's their thing," she said of the network.

After her hourlong talk at NTID, she signed autographs and posed for pictures. She hugged Anthony Brucato, 26, of Rochester, who worked with her as a counselor at the Colorado camp two years ago.

"She taught me all about survival skills and patience," he said. "She inspired me."

Luke Adams, 18, of Monument, Colo., met Smith last spring when she visited his high school. He liked what she had to say about being successful if you plan, practice, have patience and persevere.

“That’s something I’ll remember all my life,” Adams said.

Melissa Potolsky, 20, of Kingston, Ulster County, agreed. “If we want to do something, we can set our mind and do it without any kind of fear,” she said.

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