

RIT Makes History

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(Joylynn Whitfield)

A deaf student in a predominately hearing school is the first ever to be named student body president in the country, and it happened at RIT.

24-year-old Elizabeth "Lizze" Sorkin is a senior studying film and video animation at RIT.

"I'm just a regular student; I'm the same as everyone else. I'm here to study, I have final exams, I experience stress," Sorkin said.

But the newly elected student body president is set apart from her peers in more ways than one.

"I voted for her of course. I was going to vote for her anyway. I knew she was going to win regardless," said Armondo Bilancione of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf.

But the way Lizzie communicates is different from 92 percent of the student body at RIT.

"My inner struggle will be I am deaf," said Sorkin.

But it didn't stop her and her running mate from taking home 80 percent of the vote to win the election.

"This is a diverse campus. Here we have a hearing person who is also a Greek brother and a deaf student running on the same ticket," Sorkin said.

"It's not that she's deaf. It's that she's Lizzie and she just happens to be deaf," said Ellie Rosenfield, Associate Dean of Student and Academic Services.

"This is a historic moment for RIT. She is the first deaf person to become president of the student government for the school and also for the country," said Rosenfield.

But for Lizzie, the honor to serve and encourage her fellow students is still somewhat surreal.

"Ha...haa...haa," laughed Sorkin, searching for words to describe the feeling of being the first deaf student elected president. "Maybe it hasn't really hit me yet. I think when a lot of people ask me 'how do you feel' and 'what are you thinking' all I can say is I'm really excited," Sorkin said.

Her supporters are excited too and hope her leadership will draw all students closer.

"The glue that binds together the hearing and the deaf here at RIT . . . sure you could say that," Bilancione said.

"I'm going to work so hard to prove to them that I'm capable, that I am absolutely one hundred percent capable."

There are 1,100 students at RIT who are deaf. They're part of NTID and make up 8 percent of the overall student body. Lizzie can read lips, so she's very good at communicating with someone one-on-one. But the school is also looking at getting her an interpreter.