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Erica Walch

Age 37. Owner, Speak Easy Accent Modification

Interviewed by: *Joseph Bednar*

In business, perception is often reality. So Erica Walch decided to change reality for people for whom speaking English is not first nature.

“When I was teaching English as a second language, many of my students said, ‘I wish I could change my accent,’” she said, citing many accounts of people with non-intrusive accents being perceived as more fluent than they are, while skilled English speakers with difficult accents are often thought to be non-fluent.

“I found out there are programs that teach accent modification,” she said, “so I brought my own English-as-a-second-language expertise to it and put together a company.” That venture, Speak Easy Accent Modification, launched in December, has seen Walch meet her early client goals, and she is in discussions with an international consulting firm to provide training for 150 non-native English-speaking employees.

Walch’s passion for language also led her to institute the first Italian-language courses at Springfield Technical Community College. Second-semester students of the course communicate electronically with Italian pen pals, and Walch is trying to implement a virtual student exchange with a sister school in Italy.

As for Speak Easy, with immigrants arriving in Western Mass. all the time, there should be no shortage of future opportunities as word spreads.



“The population growth in Western Mass. the past three years has been due to immigration,” she explained. “If not for that, the population would have decreased. So I think that’s an optimistic sign for my business.”

Speaking of folks on the move, Walch’s other passion is Springfield itself – specifically, convincing young, successful business people to make the City of Homes their home. To that end, she has promoted various aspects of Springfield as past president of both the Mattoon Street Historic Preservation Association and the Armory Quadrangle Civic Association, and helped implement the Second Saturday Walking Tours with the Springfield Museum Association.

“I want professional, middle-class people to relocate and choose Springfield to buy a home, rather than, say, Wilbraham or Hampden,” she said. “This is where I live, and I’ve always felt it’s important to be involved in civic life. This city has so much to offer. It’s a great place to live, but it gets a bad rap.”

Kind of like a bad accent obscuring eloquent words. It turns out Walch is working to change perceptions in more ways than one.