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Oshawa couple wins 83 prizes in one month

"Contesting" a growing trend with conventions, contest clubs

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OSHAWA -- Carolyn Wilman is the contest queen.

It's a title the Oshawa resident bestowed on herself, but that doesn't mean it's not well-deserved.

Last month alone, she and her husband Craig Borysowich won 83 prizes worth more than \$2,000.

Free music downloads, theatre tickets, a cellphone, an Xbox 360, baseball caps, tickets to a Toronto FC soccer game -- and that's just a sampling of the loot the couple collected in July.

"We usually win an average of 15 prizes a month, so July was really great," Ms. Wilman says, adding their previous record was 33 wins in one month. "It's a matter of believing you're going to win. I enter a contest thinking I could win and a lot of the time, I do." Ms. Wilman started entering contests as a hobby about six years ago, after reading an article about a woman who was a full-time tester.

By 2006, she was so good that she wrote a book titled *You Can't Win if You Don't Enter*, which teaches people how to mimic her success.

Over the years, Ms. Wilman figures she and her husband have won over \$100,000 worth of prizes, the best of which, she says, are things money can't buy.

"One of my favourites was winning the chance to go on the set of the Harry Potter movies and have a feast in the Great Hall," she says. "That's something you would never get to do in ordinary life, no matter how much money you had."

In order to win so many prizes, Ms. Wilman and her husband submit thousands of ballots a month.

It might sound daunting, but many of those ballots are for the same contests and there is software that makes quick work out of filling out online entry forms.

There are also websites that make it easier for testers to find opportunities to enter. Sites like www.contestcanada.com post links to hundreds of contests, categorized by prize.

Walter Passarella / Metroland

OSHAWA -- Carolyn Wilman enters every contest she can. It's her hobby and she's even written a book on it. She's helping to organize the first and what she hopes will be an annual Testers Convention in Toronto. Aug. 17, 2007

Right now, MuchMusic is offering the chance to win \$5,000 and a Toshiba laptop, Black Diamond cheese is giving away a 2008 Ford Escape, Flare magazine offers the chance to win a five-night trip to Hong Kong -- the list goes on and on.

While some contests require proof of purchase to enter, many are open to anyone and can even be entered several times.

"Companies are using contests more and more as a way to get people to their websites," Ms. Wilman explains. "There are so many contests these days, and now you can enter most of them online or by text message, instead of mailing in forms like you used to do."

In addition to tapping Internet resources, Ms. Wilman credits her winning streaks to a community of fellow testers who share tips and tricks.

While there have been testing communities in the United States for years, the trend is just catching on in Canada. Ms. Wilman helped start a Durham Region testing club called the Winner's Circle, which meets monthly and she is also on the organizing committee for the first annual National Testers Convention, taking place in Toronto next month.

For more information on Ms. Wilman and links to testing resources, visit www.contestqueen.com.

Fast Facts

Interested in meeting local testers?

The Winner's Circle, Durham Region's testing club, meets monthly at Casey's restaurant in Ajax, 36 Kingston Rd. E. The next meeting is Sunday, Aug. 26, at 1 p.m.

Want to learn the tricks of the trade?

The first annual National Testers Convention takes place Sept. 21-21 at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto. Visit www.contestconvention.com for more information.