

Want to win big? Talk to Rosemary

People Profiles

Jun 12, 2007 12:23 AM

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Rosemary Breschuk-Chiu wears two crowns.

The Queen of Contests and the Queen of Frugal takes a prize or a coupon, waves her magic wand and makes it grow.

Minutes before picking up one of her prizes, Ms Breschuk-Chiu shifts gears and switches on her business mind.

The Newmarket single mom gets behind the driver's seat, steers the brand spanking-new pickup truck off the lot of the Markham dealership, drives it a quarter of a mile north, trades it for a four-year-old Nissan and picks up \$10,000 in cash.

"The truck was a two-seater," Ms Breschuk-Chiu explains.

"But, we're a family of four. I ended up with a fuel-efficient compact car that would seat the three kids and I had enough money to pay the rent for six months."

Not long after, Ms Breschuk-Chiu was notified she'd won a snowmobile.

"I don't like winter sports," she said. "I had no use for a snowmobile, so I sold it for \$7,000. Again, it paid the rent, giving me, once again, a little more breathing space."

Ms Breschuk-Chiu has lost track of the number of prizes she has won by entering contests over the past 25 years.

The high-spirited attractive woman puts her lifelong "nothing ventured, nothing gained" motto into play every waking minute of the day.

Being one of those rare individuals who gets by on three or four hours sleep a night, her nocturnal tendencies let her juggle four part-time jobs.

She delivers mail for Canada Post, is a child care provider and receptionist at a Newmarket fitness centre, works as a bookkeeper at an Uxbridge farm and runs a lawn-care/gardening business with her son.

A former university professor from Windsor, Ms Breschuk-Chiu reports to work before 5 a.m. and calls it a "work day" at 10 p.m.

In the meantime, she enters contests, clips coupons and figures out new ways to stretch a dollar.

"My nickname is Resourceful Rose," she laughs.

Using one of her many won computers, coupled with a well-crafted formula, Ms Breschuk-Chiu enters up to 1,000 contests a day and wins, on average, \$20,000 worth of merchandise and cash each year.

On the downside, the Hartford Crescent resident wades through at least 300 e-mails daily.

"About 200 (e-mails) are junk. I do a lot of deleting," she said.

Contesting takes time and so does winning.

The Breschuk-Chiu family recently returned from a trip to Cuba, while another prize, a cross-Canada train ride lasted 12 days.

"We went from Toronto to Vancouver. I was able to show my boys the vastness and beauty of the western provinces," she said.

Overall, May was a good month at the Breschuk-Chiu house.

"I also won six cellphones this month," she laughs.

There is a virtual treasure trove of prizes to be won in local and nationally sponsored contests, Ms Breschuk-Chiu stresses.

Meanwhile, she's more than willing to share her winning secrets. In the process of writing her second how-to-win contest booklet, Ms Breschuk-Chiu is happy to help others learn the ropes.



Mike Barrett
Rosemary Breschuk-Chiu

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"With all the booty regularly coming in, people ask why would I possibly want to share my secrets with total strangers who could, conceivably, lessen or altogether eliminate my chances at winning future contests."

Ms Breschuk-Chiu is quick to answer.

"As a Taurean and born in the Year of the Dog, I am generous by nature," she said.

Her first 92-secret booklet, published 15 years ago, was called *Outrageous Fortune*. "It was very popular. I hope to sell the second (booklet) for \$10 each," she said.

This contester is Canada proud.

"My advice to people is to stick with Canadian contests," she said. "They're tax free unlike in the United States."

But, like all good things, every once in a while, luck runs out for Ms Breschuk-Chiu.

"In one contest, be damned if I didn't get the math wrong while answering the skill-testing question. I lost out on a \$400 bike."

With computers and the Internet, contesting has changed drastically, she said.

To get information, people can Google Shop On A Shoe-String or Roboform or go to frugalshopper.ca, Ms Breschuk-Chiu suggested.

"It's not like in the old days, when you handled entry forms, envelopes and stamps," she said. "Yet, people can still use snail mail to enter contests."

It takes Ms Breschuk-Chiu three seconds to remember the oddest prize she's ever won.

"It was a Julia Louis-Dreyfus (star of *Seinfeld*) purse," she said.

"The damned thing looks like a feed bag. I had no use for it so I sold it on the e-Bay for \$300."

Ms Breschuk-Chiu remembers her first contest.

"It was 1982," she said.

"Sponsored by Kodak, I bought a 13-cent stamp and mailed the entry. I won a complete camera outfit. I have never stopped contesting, or winning since. I have reached such a point in this prosperous hobby where I am winning a large or small prize every other week or more often. I love going to the mailbox."

Ms Breschuk-Chiu keeps a set of luggage on standby.

"I've won 17 trips and they're worth between \$3,000 and \$7,000 each. I've won trips to Florida, Mexico, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Baltimore."

Ms Breschuk-Chiu knows how to tear around a grocery store at record-breaking speed.

"Over the years, I've won between \$25,000 and \$30,000 in grocery sprees," she said. "With three growing boys to feed, it all comes in handy."

As well, Ms Breschuk-Chiu has won a multitude of children's computer games, TVs, kitchen appliances, bicycles, patio sets, steak knives, furniture for every room, CD players, a day with a famous rock band, complete with two VIP suites in Toronto's King Edward Hotel, while surplus items are given to friends and charities for silent auctions.

Ms Breschuk-Chiu hasn't always carried luck on her shoulders.

Separating from her husband in 1994, she left the marriage with empty pockets, an old van and three little boys.

"We were homeless for six months," she said. "My children and I lived in a van from November to April. In fact, my youngest learned to walk in that van."

Today, the family lives in a well-decorated townhouse. At 21, the eldest son, John, is in his fourth year at university, and has a management job at Canada's Wonderland. The good-looking man also models and dabbles in acting. Julian, 19, is a second-year university student, and Eugene, 16, is a Grade 11 student at Sir William Mulock Secondary School.

The boys have had part-time jobs since they were 12. They do daily chores at home, while Eugene does all the cooking. It's obvious: The Breschuk-Chiu kids have picked up their mother's energy, optimism, work ethic and survival traits.

To ensure she made every dollar stretch its furthest, Ms Breschuk-Chiu learned shoe-string shopping.

"I shop at Value Village, Goodwill and the Salvation Army's Thrift Shop," she said.

"In grocery stores, I buy day-old bread and then I head to the cart holding the beat-up vegetables."

Yet, Ms Breschuk-Chiu isn't your usual bargain hunter. While at the store, she takes time to check out a larger scope of money-saving and legitimate prize or free product receipt opportunities.

"I keep contests, coupon searching and free-product opportunities on my mind when I'm strolling through the aisles," she said. "It's fun."

Marla Lambert is office manager at Newmarket's Persechini Fitness where Ms Breschuk-Chiu looks after children and oversees the fitness centre's reception desk when needed.

"Rosemary is great with everyone," Ms Lambert said. "When she minds the children, she's wonderful. The parents all love her. She comes up with great ideas and lots of crafts."