

Friday, October 23, 2009

Toastmasters raise glasses on 85th year

Rancho Santa Margarita-based organization held celebration in Tustin.

By JOHN CRANDALL

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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TUSTIN – It's been 85 years since the club began, strictly speaking.

Created in Oct. 22, 1924, the original Toastmasters International club met in Tustin Thursday to celebrate the anniversary of a nonprofit organization that has taught millions of people to improve skills in communication, public speaking and leadership.

Founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley held the first Toastmasters meeting in the basement of the YMCA in Santa Ana to teach young men public speaking. Since then Toastmasters has grown to more than 250,000 active members in 12,500 clubs in more than 106 countries.

Executive Director Daniel Rex spoke about Smedley's legacy to a group of well-wishers and members of the still-active Smedley Chapter 1 at Cranbrook Senior Living.

"He understood how vital communication is," Rex said. "He knew that communication is not optional."

More than four million people have been involved in the group since that first meeting 85 years ago, according to Rex and he thanked the club for continuing the tradition.

"So Smedley Chapter 1 members take a bow, be proud of your legacy, be proud of your contribution to the world, of your contribution to human kind," Rex said.



Andy Waddell, Jeff Littleton, Nancy Sanchez and Evan Stow, left to right, perform at Thursday's Toastmasters International 85th anniversary celebration in Tustin.

JEFFREY ANTENORE, FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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A number of famous people have been involved with Toastmasters: the founder of Mrs. Fields Cookies Debbie Fields Rose, Governor of Hawaii Linda Lingle and host of MSNBC's Hardball Chris Matthews.

At the celebration, congratulatory letters and proclamations from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, First Lady Michelle Obama and Orange County Supervisor Bill Campbell rested next to a table of snacks while jazz music played in the background.

Speakers at the meeting included Thomas McKerlie, a former 31-year member of Smedley Chapter 1, and Helen Blanchard, the first female Toastmasters International president.

Blanchard told the story of how in June 1970 she was able to convince the members of a club in San Diego to let her in, even though the club was men-only at the time.

After discovering she couldn't apply to the headquarters under the name "H. Blanchard," the club leadership said she'd have to file a first name.

"I can remember the president (of the local club) turning to me and saying, 'Helen, what male name would you like?'" Blanchard said. "I had to admit I had never given that a bit of thought."

Her club eventually decided on to give her the name 'Homer,' a name Blanchard said she held until Nov. 1971 when women were allowed to join clubs on federal property. Even now Blanchard's email has the name "Homer" in it.

In honor of the anniversary, the City Council of Tustin proclaimed October 2009 Toastmasters' Month at their Oct. 20 meeting.

A number of longtime members attended the meeting in Tustin like Santa Ana resident Artie Hardison who has been part of Toastmasters for about 20 years.

She said she's excited about the organization reaching its 85th anniversary.

"Even though I've gotten over my fear of speaking, I still continue to participate because I love the program," Hardison said.

Toastmasters' headquarters has been based in Rancho Santa Margarita since 1990.

Rancho City Councilman James Thor, president of the local Toastmasters club, said that he has to speak a lot and the organization has helped him immensely.

"It's been the best thing for me," Thor said. "It's tried and true and it works. And it works very well."

To find a local club or for more information on the entire organization visit www.toastmasters.org.

Contact the writer: 949-454-7308 or jcrandall@ocregister.com or twitter.com/newsguy777 or facebook.com/newsguy777

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Toastmasters International members display a congratulatory letters from California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger at Thursday's Anniversary Celebration.

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Toastmasters International past International President Helen Blanchard, who was the first female president in the organization's history, speaks at Thursday's event in Tustin.

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Toastmasters past District Governor Thomas McKerlie, a member for thirty-one years, makes an address at Thursday's 85th anniversary celebration.

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Daniel Rex, Executive Director for Toastmasters International, delivers a message from the organization's President, Gary Schmidt, at Thursday's celebration.

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10 Tips for Public Speaking

Know your material. Pick a topic you are interested in. Know more about it than you include in your speech. Use humor, personal stories and conversational language – that way you won't easily forget what to say.

Practice. Practice. Practice! Rehearse out loud with all equipment you plan on using. Revise as necessary. Work to control filler words; Practice, pause and breathe. Practice with a timer and allow time for the unexpected.

Know the audience. Greet some of the audience members as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers.

Know the room. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.

Relax. Begin by addressing the audience. It buys you time and calms your nerves. Pause, smile and count to three before saying anything. ("One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one-thousand. Pause. Begin.") Transform nervous energy into enthusiasm.

Visualize yourself giving your speech. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and confident. Visualize the audience clapping – it will boost your confidence.

Realize that people want you to succeed. Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. They're rooting for you.

Don't apologize for any nervousness or problems – the audience probably never noticed it.

Concentrate on the message – not the medium. Focus your attention away from your own anxieties and concentrate on your message and your audience.

Gain experience. Mainly, your speech should represent you — as an authority and as a person. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. A Toastmasters club can provide the experience you need in a safe and friendly environment.

Source: <http://www.toastmasters.org/tips.asp>