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Toast of the town

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SAINT JOHN - When Pat Johnson first stepped foot into a Toastmasters club, she was shy, lacked confidence and was scared of just about everything.

Now, 26 years later, Johnson is the senior vice-president of the international organization and runs a training department for the B.C. Pension Corporation.

"I went from being a secretary, to a full-time trainer, to a manager, and now I run the department," she said from her Victoria, B.C., home last week. "The majority of why I'm where I am is Toastmasters skills, for sure."

Johnson will address more than 120 delegates in Saint John next month when members from across the Maritimes and New England gather to improve their communication skills.

The conference, at the Delta Brunswick Hotel, runs from Nov. 6 to 8.



Pat Johnson

Johnson said the Toastmasters organization - which has several clubs in the Saint John area - attracts people who want to learn how to speak more professionally at work or prepare for job interviews or even give a toast at a wedding.

But you also learn how to listen carefully, she said.

"It's one of those dying skills."

Jim Kokocki, an active Saint John Toastmasters member, said the conference participants will practise giving humorous speeches and giving good feedback, as well as learn tips on how to manage their own clubs effectively.

He said he's been involved for 22 years, and he's still working on his skills.

"I don't think you ever truly master communication and leadership skills. You need to keep practising."

There are 26 clubs across New Brunswick, as well as some workplace clubs. It costs about \$100 a year to join.

But it's a small investment when you think about the benefits, Johnson said.

"When you stop to think, communication skills, listening, thinking and speaking are huge. Who doesn't need them? And if out of that you get confidence to present yourself, it's pretty powerful."

To find a local Toastmasters club, go to www.toastmasters.org