

A Toast: Even before 7 a.m.



For many people Friday means the last day of the work week and a celebration of the weekend ahead, a time to wind down, rest and relax.

But for members of the Tecumseh Friday morning Toastmasters, it's time to gear up for a lot of talking when their meeting begins at 6:45 a.m. sharp, every week. This group is a local chapter of Toastmasters International, which is a movement dedicated to the mission of "making effective oral communication a worldwide reality," according to a manual that every member receives upon joining the group. There are nine Toastmaster chapters in Greater Lafayette.

On this Friday morning, D. Sarah Stamps greets members with "Good morning, Toastmasters!" and "Welcome guests!" at the front of a large classroom in Rawls Hall on the Purdue University campus. Stamps is the 2010-2011 Tecumseh Toastmasters club president. Members of the group were peppy and well spoken, and the scene might be mistaken for a business breakfast, except that the participants were casually dressed—many in T-shirts, and many students. Stamps is a Ph.D. student in geophysics. She was inspired to join Toastmasters when she went to a program for Purdue graduate students on how to give a good presentation. The presenter was Denise Laussade, a Toastmaster herself, and seeing Laussade speak convinced Stamps to join Toastmasters. Now the women are equal Toastmasters at this Friday morning meeting—and they both have a commanding, yet friendly, presence.

While many in this group are students, anyone can join a Toastmasters group. There are no requirements with regard to education or other credentials, explains Mary Jo Turley, who has been a Toastmaster for 18 years and was a division governor in 2011. The only specific requirement is that you be at least 18 years old. Members pay \$27 twice a year for dues and a one-time fee of \$20.

Stamps opened the meeting, but Dalton Lunga, who was called "Mr. Toastmaster" during the meeting, was the facilitator, or the chair of the event, introducing all of the speakers and moving the meeting along. Lunga is originally from South Africa. Each meeting has a "toastmaster" or a host, and there are other roles for the participants as well: the grammarian, who writes a word for the day on the board; the timer, who keeps track of the time of each talk, the evaluator, and so on.

Lunga introduced each of the speakers. Jeremy Brown spoke on electronic currency. Charu Kamal spoke on his experiences as a new immigrant from India, and Junghwan Rhee spoke about all of the different things that can go wrong on a computer.

Not everyone at this Friday morning meeting was a student. There were several older adults in the



D. Sarah Stamps is the current Tecumseh Toastmasters club president.

room who joined Toastmasters mostly for professional development. Judd Dickey is a pastor at the Rossville Bible Fellowship. He says that Toastmasters has helped him with leadership skills.

"A lot of leadership is experience," he says. And Toastmasters is another experience in communication.

The other eight Toastmasters groups meet in Lafayette and West Lafayette, usually once a week or twice monthly—depending on the group. Deb Seders is a member of two Lafayette Toastmasters groups: the Lafayette Toastmasters Club and the Greater Lafayette Area Communicators or GLAC. GLAC is a group that tackles more advanced skills for leaders. Seders has been a member of Toastmasters in Greater Lafayette for more than 25 years.

In the beginning, she joined Toastmasters to improve her communication skills.

"I wrestled with my communication styles, and I didn't seem to be putting my best foot forward. I was uncomfortable speaking, and it was really difficult," Seders says. So a friend, who was a career counselor, suggested that she join Toastmasters. In addition to her own personal growth, the counselor told her that employers look favorably upon people who take the initiative to join groups like Toastmasters.

All of these years later, Seders says the Toastmasters experience has built another community for her, in addition to making her a proficient speaker who carefully organizes her thoughts before she speaks.

As the new area governor for Toastmasters in 2011-2012, Clyde Hughes wants to significantly promote it: "One of my goals is to get out into the community more and tell people how Toastmasters can help them become better employees, communicators and leaders," he says.

Stamps combined a Toastmasters project with her research as a geophysicist during a trip to East Africa in the summer of 2010.

"I was already going for my research, but Toast-



David Mattingly speaks during a Tippecanoe Talkers Toastmasters meeting.

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www.toastmasters.org or search for Toastmasters on Facebook

masters has a program called The High Performance Leadership Project, and it is about learning to use the principles of service leadership to do a rather large project.” Stamps spoke about her experiences in Uganda, Tanzania and Madagascar at a few different gatherings including the Toastmasters spring conference in Indianapolis and at her regular Friday morning group in Rawls Hall. While in Africa, Stamps used her Toastmasters skills to communicate her research to schools and universities, and she also used it while gathering data.

“In Uganda, we spent 16 days in the mountains, and you definitely needed to have good communication skills,” explains Stamps. There were 50 people on the team.

Every classroom has its own culture and climate, and so it is with different Toastmasters groups, even ones that meet just a few miles apart from each other.

The Tippecanoe Talkers meet every first and third Wednesday at noon at 914 South St. in Lafayette. At a recent meeting, about a dozen people sat in a U-shaped conference room, as Frances Schmidt, who was the “toastmaster,” opened the meeting. Schmidt says she joined Toastmasters after her husband, Lawrence Schmidt, passed away in 2002. He was a great speaker, she says, and her inspiration, and she wants to emulate him.

“When I lost my husband, I wanted to get it off my mind,” she says, and joining Toastmasters has helped her to become a better speaker.

Anni Miller also is a member of the Tippecanoe Talkers Toastmasters and earned recognition for giving a humorous speech centered around a character that she had made up for entertainment at family gatherings, named Flossie Hosseneffer, who was a pig farmer. For Miller, this was thrilling because speaking doesn’t come easily to her. In fact, she didn’t say a word for the first three months of meetings.

“There was so much going on at the meetings, I wasn’t sure I wanted to come again,” she reflects. But now she relies on the skills she has attained and she relies on the fellowship. Another Tippecanoe Talker, Don Buchman, put it this way: “I want to see us coach each other along so we all get better.” ❧

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