

Club promotes communication, leadership

By **DAVIN PETERSON**
For the News and Messenger

Do you want to improve your public speaking and leadership skills?

Toastmasters International provides a world-proven path to success, and the Lake Ridge Toastmasters club is one of the best to help you walk that path happily and productively.

The Lake Ridge Toastmasters was founded in 1992 to help community members build their communication and leadership skills.

"We call ourselves a working laboratory. We learn by doing," said founding member Sharyn Jarzombek.

The Lake Ridge club is consistently top ranked among all clubs in the world as a "President's Distinguished Club." Toastmasters International comprises 250,000 members in more than 12,500 clubs in 106 countries.

Within this framework, the Lake Ridge club is part of District 27, which extends from the Potomac River to the Rappahannock River in the south and Front Royal in the west. Six Lake Ridge members have served as district governors, and two have become international directors of Toastmasters International.

The Lake Ridge club is widely considered the "premier" club in the Washington metropolitan area, and it remains open to new members from all walks of life. More than half of its members have been in the club for less than two years. They thrive because of the number of experienced club members who mentor their growth.

The Lake Ridge Toastmasters meet at 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays at the Tall Oaks Community Center on Hedges Run Drive. The weekly meetings are so mem-



Members of the Lake Ridge Toastmasters meet every Wednesday at the Tall Oaks Community Center on Hedges Run Drive. {Submitted photo}

bers with busy work and travel schedules can attend at least two meetings a month.

A typical meeting features three "project" speeches; short, extemporaneous presentations called Table Topics; and a period in which the club members provide constructive feedback.

The club aims to provide an active participatory opportunity for every member present, for example: speaker, speech evaluator, timer, Table-Topics master, Table-Topics respondent, grammarian, and master of ceremonies.

"We learn best in the moments of enjoyment," said Dr. Ralph Smedley, the founder of Toastmasters, in describing the formula for improving public speaking.

Practice is also important. In this spirit, the club provides a fun, productive environment in which members can learn, practice and improve their communications and leadership skills. Members ultimately overcome their fear of public speaking by sharing their views through speeches to sup-

portive club members, which in turn helps them develop the confidence to address a range of audiences outside of the club.

"I was very uncomfortable with public speaking when I joined Toastmasters 10 months ago, but everyone helped me to feel welcome from day one. It is a very encouraging environment," said member Brenda Beamon.

Upon joining the club, each member receives the Competent Communicator Manual to get started on the road to "ToastMastery." The manual comprises 10 speaking projects to develop a basic foundation for public speaking.

Upon completion, the member is designated a "Competent Communicator" and becomes eligible to undertake advanced manuals to enhance one's persuasive speaking, technical presentations, storytelling, special-occasion speeches, humorous and entertaining speeches, public-relation speeches and talks for managers. New members also receive a Competent Leader

manual to develop or strengthen one's leadership skills.

"I feel extraordinary support at Lake Ridge Toastmasters, which gives me enough peace to grow as a person, as a member of our community, as a professional, and as a mother," said new member Jocelyn Lopes. "Weekly practice strengthens our communication skills, which includes good listening, and leadership, which means service, and better helps me to understand our potential as citizens."

Members credit their toastmaster skills as invaluable for job promotions, saving families through better communication and yes, even talking their way out of a traffic citation—the power of Table Topics.

The club has more than 40 members and is open to everyone over 18. For more information, visit <http://lakeridge.freetoasthost.us> or attend a meeting.

Davin Peterson is a member of the Lake Ridge Toastmasters club.