

Lamorinda Toastmasters Club Builds Communication Competence

By Jean Follmer



Lamorinda Toastmasters President Mike Martin addresses the group Photo Jean Follmer

On Tuesday nights, members of the Lamorinda Toastmasters Club gather at Veteran's Memorial Hall in Lafayette. As a local chapter of Toastmasters International, the Lamorinda Toastmasters Club seeks to provide a supportive, positive environment for members "to develop communication and leadership skills, which in turn foster self-confidence and personal growth." Every week, members take turns giving and evaluating both prepared and impromptu speeches. Many people have a great fear of public speaking and Toastmasters offers a safe place to practice the skill and become a more effective communicator. Chris Young has been a member of the Lamorinda Toastmasters Club for over a year. He says "It's a good group. It's definitely been helpful because I had a lot of anxiety about public speaking." Vice President of Public Relations Patrick Schwerdtfeger said when it comes to public speaking people either "like it and want to do it more often or hate it and want to hate it less."

The meetings follow a specific format and members are assigned duties. Some duties include (Inspirational) Thought for the Day, Humorist, Word for the Day/Grammarians and Ah Counter. The meet-

ing opened with President Mike Martin reading the Mission Statement and introducing the Toastmaster of the evening. Toastmaster Thomas Cloney began the meeting by asking Bronwyn Burman to stand and present the Thought for the Day. Burman was leaving for vacation soon, so suggested "start on your vacation a little early" by slowing down phone calls a few days before starting a vacation in order to feel more relaxed once the vacation started. Cloney then introduced Scott Lambert as the Humorist. It's the job of the Humorist to deliver a joke to the crowd. President Mike Martin was assigned Word for the Day/Grammarians. Each speaker needs to try to incorporate the Word for the Day into their speech and Mike kept a tally of those who did. As Grammmarian, Mike said his role was to "listen to language used and comment on particularly wonderful construction." Ah Counter Grace Castro was "looking for fillers, crutches, etc...anything you use to give you time for the next speech or thought."

It was a big night for prepared speeches with Betsy Maness delivering her seventh speech and Josh Sauberman delivering his tenth speech titled "Pride (in the Name of

Friends)". The 10th speech is a milestone in Toastmasters because its completion designates the speaker a Competent Communicator. The first 10 speeches are contained within the Competent Communication manual and all have different goals. Scott Lambert said there are fifteen other manuals which focus on specialties and are geared to various careers and special occasions. In addition to developing their communication skills, members can also choose to further their leadership skills by taking on leadership roles. Lambert has always worked for himself, so says "I never was a leader, so I'm learning how to lead; I'm learning to listen and facilitate." Patrick Schwerdtfeger said "Toastmasters changed my life. I know how to run meetings now."

An evaluator is assigned for each speech and the evaluator is required to present an oral evaluation to the group. The evaluator offer both accolades and suggestions and comments on whether or not the speaker achieved the goals they set for their speech. Some of the evening's goals included not referring to notes, not standing behind the podium, not using crutches, etc.

After speeches come Table Topics. Table Topics are short impromptu speeches that members and guests are invited to give. The speaker draws a card, reads the question and begins giving a speech on the topic. The Table Topics Master Nancy Proconier kindly invited this Lamorinda Weekly reporter to give a Table Topics speech (after a jarring performance, I will stick to writing). Member Chris Young faired much better on his Table Topic saying "I do it every week." That old adage, "practice makes perfect" clearly has some merit when it comes to public speaking as does "I feel your pain".

If you're looking to improve your communication

and/or leadership skills in a positive environment, consider visiting the Lamorinda Toastmasters Club. They are an extremely welcoming, professional and fun group of people. They range from college students to working professionals to senior citizens and their levels of communication confidence and competence vary widely. No matter where you are in life, effective communication is the key to success.