

Toronto: A World Within A City

The 2005 International Toastmasters Convention

Mike Raffety, ATM-B/AL, Lt. Gov'r of Education and Training

Last week was the Toastmasters International annual convention, in Toronto. There were a lot of people there from Chicago, including Dietmar and Heidi Wagenknecht (Dietmar is the Immediate Past District Governor), Bruce Burrow (new District Governor), Mike Raffety (now Lt. Governor of Education and Training), Carolyn Arthur (now Lt. Governor of Marketing), Dick and Char Storer (Dick is a Past International Director).

Also attending were Karen Vierneisel, Arun Aggarwal, Barbara Baker, Cordelia Barlow, Rhonda Craven, Carol Henry, Will Hsiung, Melinda Mitrovic, Bernie Perlstein, Patrick Stevenson, Mary Swopes, and Ferle Terry. Dietmar was handing out yellow ribbons to attach to the conference badges that said "Distinguished District 30", in celebration of our accomplishments last year.

Throughout the convention, it was exciting to meet and talk to people from all over the country, North America, and the world. Australia always has a large contingent there. Having been to two previous international conventions, it's fun to meet people you know from previous years. And just like in District 30, everyone is very friendly and ready to met someone new.

Seating at the major events (including meals) is assigned based on when you register, and unless you register with people you know, it means you are frequently seated with new people, and you leave every event with new friends.

Wednesday: Board of Directors Briefing and Opening Ceremonies

The convention began with a Board of Directors meeting on Wednesday, where we heard about various and sundry administrative details, such as minor changes in district boundaries, proper use of the non-gender-specific word "chairman", and some interesting statistics about the just-completed year. I've added some numbers for District 30 for comparison.

Statistic	International	Percent change	District 30	Percent
Membership	211,000+	+4.4%	3,167	+5.7%
Total clubs	10,500	+4%	156	+4.7%
Net club growth	901	--	7	--
CTMs earned	19,714	+0.5%	268	+2.7%
ATMs earned	8,681	+3.8%	92	-2.1%
Leadership awards earned	8,413	+5.6%	126	+11.5%
Distinguished districts	48	Most since 1980	--	--
Distinguished divisions	--	65.7%	5	-17%
Distinguished areas	--	85% (69.3% last year)	23	N/C
Distinguished clubs	4,541	+3.6%	63	-1.5%

Perhaps the most significant announcement at the briefing was that effective July 1, 2006, the CTM (Competent Toastmaster) designation would be changed to CC (Competent Communicator), matching the CL (Competent Leader) award, and the ATM (Advanced Toastmaster) would become AC (Advanced Communicator).

This is in line with the effort to put the leadership track on the same footing as the communications track, making Toastmasters truly a Communications AND Leadership organization. The DTM (Distinguished Toastmaster), at the peak of both tracks, is unchanged. And in a few months, the AL (Advanced Leader) will be changed to AL-Bronze and AL-Silver (no AL-Gold at this time).

The requirements for CTM/CC, ATM-B/AC-B, ATM-S/AC-S, and ATM-G/AC-G are unchanged. There will be a two-year grace period (7/1/2006 to 6/30/2008) during which either the old or new leadership track may be followed.

On Wednesday evening, the opening ceremonies included a procession of many dozens of national flags, representing the worldwide reach of Toastmasters International. The U.S. flag was carried by District 30's own Heidi Wagenknecht!

Then we heard a talk about "Flawless Execution" by Anthony "A.B." Bourke and Paul "Pitch" Molnar of The Afterburners (<http://www.afterburnerseminars.com/>), drawing some very interesting parallels between fighter pilots and Toastmasters, and how important it is to keep focused on the important stuff – don't get distracted by trivial things that just don't matter, or your mission may crash and burn.

Thursday: Educational Sessions, Golden Gavel Luncheon, and Candidates Showcase

Thursday was mostly educational sessions; I found the "Extra! Extra! Read All About It" session to be especially interesting, with lots of ideas about new ways and means to publicize Toastmasters and pick up new members and even new clubs. For example, in the business section, you might read about a company that's growing and hiring more people.

The Golden Gavel award was given to Marcus Buckingham (<http://www.marcusbuckingham.com/>) at the Thursday luncheon (at right, standing in the center), who had some great insights into what makes people successful. He suggested focusing on people's strengths as being more important than focusing on improving on weaknesses – obsess on what's good, rather than what's broken, and put people where they can use their strengths.



Of course, as is traditional, all the distinguished District Governors (and their spouses/partners) were sitting on the stage for the Golden Gavel luncheon, and Dietmar and Heidi looked proud sitting up there in the bright lights (see picture below). They were sitting in the front row, but the prestigious seats are way up in the back, next to the Golden Gavel recipient. Some may recall that Earl Bateman was sitting up there two years ago in Atlanta, when District 30 was #3 in the world!



Thursday afternoon saw more educational sessions, and I attended a panel discussion with several distinguished District Governors, who talked about the leadership challenges they faced – and how they overcame them. Thursday evening was taken up by the lengthy candidate showcases, where the districts were allowed to submit written questions for the International Director candidates. (International Directors are the Toastmasters International Board of Directors – the primary qualification there is that one must be a Past District Governor.) After the showcase, the attendees from District 30 met in Bruce Burrow's room to discuss the candidates.

Friday: Annual Business Meeting, Hall of Fame, and Baseball Game

Friday started early with the annual business meeting at 8 AM, where the main items were electing nine new International Directors, and voting on the dues increase. The director elections went smoothly – each contested position had the candidates speak for two minutes.

Our newly-elected International President is Dilip Abayasekara, who will be coming to District 30 for our spring 2006 district conference. For Region V (which includes District 30), Charles Albright was elected International Director, which is a two-year term. Region V has another International Director who was elected last year (staggered terms), Dick Poirier.

The dues increase was debated for about 20 minutes, and all those against the proposal got a chance to speak (alternating with those in support), but then it came time to vote. In the end, 77.5% of the ballots were cast in favor of the increase, a large majority.

There were two Friday luncheons, one for club officers, and one for non-officers and guests. In the former, we recognized clubs that were distinguished, and we heard a great address from Cindy Ventrice about how to motivate volunteers.

In the afternoon, the Hall of Fame recognized the many accomplishments of the past year. Perhaps the best was when District 30 was recognized for being a distinguished district, and everyone from Chicagoland got to go up on the stage and shake hands with Jon Greiner, International President. Mike Raffety (past LGM) was recognized with the Excellence in Marketing award for achieving club and membership goals, Bruce Burrow (past LGET) was recognized with the Excellence in Education and Training award for achieving CTM and ATM goals, and Dietmar Wagenknecht (past DG) was recognized for leading the district to meet and exceed all of its goals for the year.



Friday evening was a cocktail reception and a trip to a Toronto Blue Jays baseball game! Pictured here are Mike Raffety and Bruce Burrow. It was quite fun, and we got to see the International President, Jon Greiner, throw out the first pitch. The Cleveland Indians won, 9 to 3.



Saturday: World Championship of Public Speaking and President's Dinner Dance

Saturday started off bright and early with the regional breakfast – conference attendees from all the Region V districts met at 7 AM to “roast” the outgoing Region V International Director, Joan Diehl (seated in this picture, with Bruce Burrow) and congratulate the incoming Region V International Director, Charles Albright.



We also heard announcements about candidates for next year. Both Dietmar Wagenknecht (our own Immediate Past District Governor) and Del Calderini (Past District 54 Governor) announced they are running for International Director, to be voted upon at the June 2006 regional conference in Indianapolis (with a runoff, if necessary, at the August 2006 international convention).

Then the highlight of the conference, the World Championship of Public Speaking, was next, with a packed audience. Johnny Uy (now first Vice President for Toastmasters International) was a very funny and entertaining Master of Ceremonies. Region V was represented by Stefan Koehler from Wisconsin, and he had a great speech about life in East Germany entitled “Thank you, Dad”, but unfortunately, he didn’t place in the top three.

Lance Miller (from Los Angeles, at center in this picture of the top three) won first place with a great speech entitled “The Ultimate Question”, which was about validating people’s lives – the sound effect he used repeatedly, “cha-ching”, represented the sound of a stamp validating a parking card. I think everyone agreed he deserved the honors, he was clearly a step above all the other contestants with a great topic and incredible delivery.



Saturday afternoon had a few more educational sessions, including an exciting presentation from Dr. Harry Wong, a renowned expert in using structured learning for maximum impact, and another session about how to influence others and recognize the “filters” we all have, while avoiding conflict.

The conference came to a conclusion with the President’s Dinner Dance, where the outgoing International Directors were recognized and thanked, and the incoming International Directors were placed in office. Jon Greiner (the outgoing International President) spoke about his past year and how much it’s changed him, and then Dilip Abayasekara (the new International President) told us about his vision for the coming year (“Find Your Voice, Serve Your World”) – and also about his father’s death just eight days before.



The evening ended with dancing to a live orchestra, with most people going home the following day, Sunday. (Barbara Baker is shown dancing here.) After the dancing, the die-hards went to the international sing-along organized by Ted Corcoran, Past International President – which went until 2:30 AM!

Next year’s annual convention is August 23-26, 2006 at the Washington Hilton, in Washington, DC. Hope to see you there!