

March 18, 2014

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

Do you dread the thought of speaking in front of people? Would you like to tune-up the delivery of your comments in a work meeting? Or do you love making presentations to groups and connecting with your listeners?

If any of those questions resonated with you, then you would love Toastmasters. And Humboldt County has three clubs that would welcome you as a guest any time.

I belong to the Eel River Early Birds in Fortuna. We meet at 7 a.m. on Mondays at City Hall. Between the two clubs in Eureka there is a Noon meeting every Thursday at the Prosperity Center on E Street.

I had always been curious about Toastmasters. I enjoy public speaking but I thought if I went to a Toastmasters meeting I would speak in front of a group of people that would tear apart every sentence, criticize every motion and inflection, and basically tell me how bad I was.

My thoughts could not have been further from the reality of Toastmasters. I walked in to a nurturing environment and was gently guided to improving my speaking techniques. There are no instructors in Toastmasters, your growth and improvement come from feedback and practice.

Impromptu speaking, or speaking off-the-cuff, is my weakest skill. Toastmasters has “Table Topics” at each meeting and it helps keep me as ready as I can be for those situations. Usually when I’m called on out of the blue to make a statement my head will swim, my mind goes anywhere and everywhere except to the topic at hand. When I’m done I will wonder “why didn’t I remember to say what I meant to say!”

Practicing with table topics at Toastmasters has helped me tremendously in that area.

There are even positive side benefits to becoming a Toastmaster member. You gain leadership skills, become a better listener, and increase self-confidence.

In the last few years Toastmasters International has revitalized its education program and renewed its focus on leadership and modernized its communication program.

Their current goals are:

- *To provide tailored learning to help members meet personal and professional goals

- *Create communication and leadership skills relevant to real-world experiences in a globally evolving marketplace

- *Construct a clearer path for achieving education awards

Think about visiting a Toastmaster meeting soon. You will be welcomed with open arms.

Business owners and managers, think about supporting your employees with a membership to Toastmasters.

In closing I want to acknowledge that Fortuna lost a couple of the great one last week. Faye Riley and Jimmie Ballinger passed away. You might remember Faye from one of the FBID TV ads a few years ago and Jimmie rarely missed a Chamber dinner in spite of being in a wheel chair. You will be missed.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment.