

Southern Lights Toastmasters Club

June 2025

Enlightener Newsletter

I would like to thank all of the members of Southern Lights for their support and assistance over the last year. It has been truly an honour to be part of the Southern Lights team, and to be part of the year's accomplishments. I won't repeat all of the individual achievements, but suffice to say that we are all super proud of all of the educational, contest, leadership, and new member achievements.

When we look at our club, we are fortunate to not only have a strong roster in numbers, but incredible depth. There are few clubs that have a Past International President, are celebrating 46 years, have two Charter members, 5 DTMs, and two more DTMs on the way. The mentorship, experience, and history that is brought forward is invaluable.

We have newer members that have achieved lofty educational and leadership goals, and now becoming mentors themselves. All of this is the sign of a healthy club.

It is also important to continue to improve as a club. We don't want to stagnate. An important part of that equation is bringing in new members, with new ideas and perspectives that re-energize the club. We're ending the year with a healthy roster, and a waiting list of potential new members.

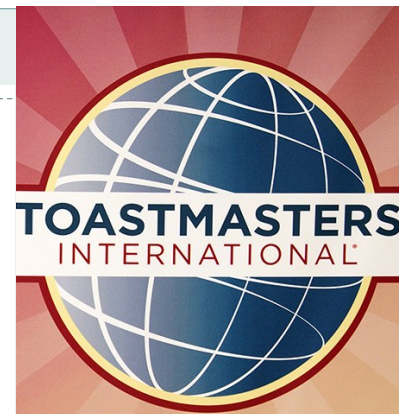
We learn best when we have fun, and in my opinion, we do have a lot of fun, not only at the formal meetings but also with our club functions.

Thank you again to all of the members for all of your help over the past year, without which the club would not be as successful.

Darryl Hauge

Outgoing Club President for 2024/2025

"We learn best in moments of enjoyment."
- Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, Founder of Toastmasters International



**President's Distinguished
Club, Number 3684**

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"Toastmasters isn't just about public speaking; it's about personal growth, leadership, and building confidence one speech at a time."

www.southernlightstm.ca

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF TOASTMASTERS



Pictured Back Row (Left to Right): Nigel Bowles, Neil Wilkinson PIP DTM, Zeenat Afzal, Liubov Antoniuk, Marlene Petruch DTM, Wayne Sager DTM, Bob Wang, Diane Gunn, Noel Blades, Juergen Abildt DTM, Nav Deol, George Wang

Front Row (Left to Right): Graciela Morales (Area C8 Director and Honoured Guest), Arie de Jong, Maryam Nesari, Rhonda Lagace, Okpapi Omoaka DTM, Charlena Fong, Erinna Dong

Southern Lights Club members and guests celebrated the 100th anniversary of Toastmasters International on October 2, 2024, with a themed meeting complete with decorations, snacks, and a birthday cake!

The meeting started with a toast by Juergen Abildt, DTM, to the Founder of Toastmasters, Dr. Ralph C. Smedley. Diane Gunn served as Toastmaster for the meeting.

Nigel Bowles was the Table Topics Master and asked questions that prompted members to reflect on events and changes in our society over the 100-year period.

Charter member, Neil Wilkinson, DTM PIP, graced the club with an inspiring speech about the history of TM and interspersed his presentation with clips from the excellent documentary, "100 Years of Confident Voices". One of his messages is a reminder to the members of the importance of being of service and helping others.

Marlene Petruch, DTM also had a fun contest to guess the collective years of Toastmasters membership within Southern Lights. Zeenat Afzal was the lucky winner with the closest guess!

We concluded the meeting with a group photo and standing in front of a board with posters and Post-It notes with names written of each current member and the year they joined Southern Lights.

Congratulations to Toastmasters International on their 100th Anniversary!



SOCIAL EVENTS

CHRISTMAS PARTY

The annual Christmas party is always a fun club event and the 2024 party lived up to expectations.

For the third year in a row, Sanjay and Yeshu opened their lovely home and welcomed many club members and guests.

Each member brought a dish for the potluck dinner, a wrapped gift for the exchange, and non-perishable food items to donate to the Edmonton Food Bank. After dinner, a fun gift exchange was held with a few gifts being “stolen” twice, including a much-coveted Santa’s boot containing an assortment of goodies!

Many conversations between attendees occurred throughout the evening. Overall, it was a festive celebration for the club members and their loved ones in attendance.



CELEBRATING 45 YEARS OF SOUTHERN LIGHTS



Pictured Back Row (Left to Right): Nigel Bowles, Noel Blades, Sherry Schaefer, Melanie Lizotte, Michelle St. Louis, Juergen Abildt DTM, Marlene Petruch DTM, Neil Wilkinson PIP DTM, Nav Deol, Wayne Sager DTM, George Wang
Front Row (Left to Right): Charlena Fong, Arie de Jong, Rhonda Lagace, Nadia Daniel, Lesley Revell, Erinna Dong, Liubov Antoniuk

The Southern Lights Toastmasters Club celebrated their 45th Anniversary on January 23rd, 2025! It was a momentous occasion for the club !

Congratulations to the club and may Southern Lights continue to inspire, encourage, and support members to grow, excel, lead, and serve fellow club and Toastmasters members on their journeys!

To learn more about the club's history, please visit the [blog post](#) on the club's website.

DISTRICT 99 TOASTMASTERS CONFERENCE



The annual District 99 Toastmasters International Conference was held in St. Albert from May 30 to June 1, 2025. Southern Lights was well-represented throughout the conference with members attending throughout the weekend.

Laura McIntyre and Nigel Bowles bravely entered the first-ever Comedy Night where they each delivered a funny stand up comedy routine!

Okpapi Omoaka competed in the International Speech Competition and won! (More about his speech competition journey on page 9)

Overall, members enjoyed the education sessions, contests, keynote speakers, and the opportunity to visit and network with other fellow Toastmasters.

Thank you to all the dozen members who attended, volunteered, participated, and organized!

Special congratulations and THANK YOU to Diane Gunn and Rhonda Lagace who spent many hours working hard to organize this wonderful conference!

SOCIAL EVENTS

ANNUAL BBQ

Each year, following the last regular meeting we hold our annual BBQ – a tradition that everyone looks forward to.

It's hosted by Darryl and his wife Rita at their beautiful acreage located SE of the city.

The club provides beef burgers and everyone who attends brings a dish to complement the meal. A wide array of food was shared including chicken wings, salads, and desserts!

The BBQ committee of Darryl, Marlene and Nigel had chosen the theme 'Canadiana' and many came dressed in their Canada apparel.

A game of bocce was played by some the members.

But the most popular activity was simply sitting around the firepit and chatting with each other into the late evening.



MEET THE 2025-2026 CLUB OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

Arie de Jong

Arie joined Southern Lights in 2023, and last season served as the club's VP Membership and won the Triple Crown award.



VP EDUCATION

Okpapi Omoaka DTM

Okpapi joined TI in February 2014. Prior to joining Southern Lights in 2024, he served the Lighthouse Toastmaster club and District 94 in various leadership capacities. He was also actively involved with the establishment of Gavel Clubs in High Schools.



VP MEMBERSHIP

Marlene Petruch DTM

Marlene is a veteran of Southern Lights, and was President of the club twice (2005/06 and 2011/12).



VP PUBLIC RELATIONS

Nadia Daniel

Nadia is a seasoned Toastmasters member and completed two Pathways: Presentation Mastery and Dynamic Leadership, this past season.



TREASURER

Nigel Bowles

Nigel is a Charter Member and has held most executive positions during his long association with Southern Lights. His last role was VP Education (2024-25).



SECRETARY

Sherry Schaefer

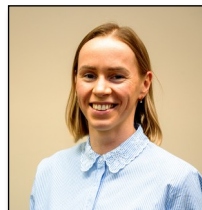
Sherry joined Southern Lights in 2024 and this is her first role on the executive committee.



SERGEANT-AT-ARMS (SAA)

Liubov Antoniuk

Liubov is a newer member of Southern Lights and has experience with the role as she occasionally filled in as SAA last season.



IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Darryl Hauge

As Past President, we are in good hands as it is Darryl's responsibility to guide and advise the new Club Officers.



Club Leadership

In May of each year, club members elect the Club's Officers for the next session, which begins in September and runs until June the following year.

It's long been a tradition that members serve one year in a particular position and then rotate into a different one, or vacate the executive to allow newer members to experience serving.

Club Officers can, and do, make a real difference in the club - by providing guidance, making decisions, and helping to shape our direction. This can have a significant impact on the club's success.

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Thank you to the outgoing Club Officers.

Charlena Fong
(VP Public Relations)

Connor Meagher
(Treasurer)

Maryam Nesari
(Secretary)

Zeenat Afzal
(Sergeant-at-Arms)

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."
- John F. Kennedy

ANNUAL AWARD RECIPIENTS 2024-2025

Toastmaster of the Year — Diane Gunn

This year Diane was a member of 5 clubs, including Southern Lights. She was a charter member of Speak Yourself club, and mentored the Global Voices club which became World Lights. She was the Treasurer for World Lights, the SAA for Brownlee's, and the SAA for Speak Yourself. Diane was recognized as the Division Director of the Year for District 99 for the 23/24 year. She was the Area Director for B14 this past year, and was a key organizer for both the Division contest and the District Convention. Without the effort of a person like Diane, clubs like ours would simply not be as successful.



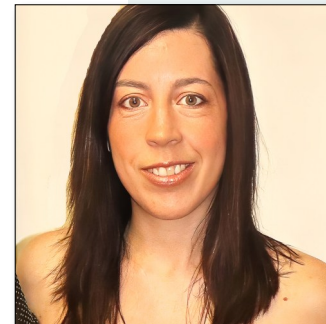
Going the Extra Mile — Nigel Bowles

Nigel is one of those members that is always raising the bar for himself, and by default does the same for our club. He is the definition of organization, and is involved in every aspect of the running of the club. He is always early to the meetings to set up, and provides the opening slides based on the meeting theme. If there are questions on parliamentary procedure, he is our go-to guy, and gave a talk in October to explain the proper procedure. Nigel served on the executive as our VP Education this past year which is one of the heavier roles, and was instrumental in putting together those quality meetings that we strive for. A first for this year, he bravely put himself out there to participate in the Stand-up Comedy (a first for the D99 Convention), and did a "Stand out" job!



Herb Ashley Spirit of Success — Arie de Jong

Arie is always available to assist. She consistently makes herself available to help with set up for the regular weekly meetings, volunteers for the Christmas party committee, helped with the District Convention as a volunteer, and served on the Executive as our VP Membership. It's not long ago that Arie gave her icebreaker and almost left because of nerves. It is apparent that she has grown in confidence in both communication and leadership. Arie did a wonderful job in her role as VP Membership this past year, including completing both rounds of Club Officer Training. We truly appreciate the effort and positive attitude that Arie displays and provides to our club.



Rookie of the Year — Maryam Nesari

Maryam started off the Toastmasters season with a bang by giving a speech at the first meeting of the year in September, then went on to complete the Presentation Mastery path by June of 2025. She was also active in all of the other meeting roles, including General Evaluator, Speech evaluator, Grammarian, Ah counter, Timer, and Table Topics evaluator throughout the year. She presented some wonderful speeches, with memorable imagery, and showed tremendous growth with a final "Reflect on Your Path" speech in June. Maryam served on the executive as our Secretary, completed both rounds of Club Officer training, and attended the District Conference. Most importantly, she has a work ethic and an attitude of self improvement that we can all aspire to.



President's Choice — Okpapi Omoaka DTM

Okpapi is a relatively new member who joined the club in April of 2024. He raised the bar in presentations, in evaluations, and in how we conduct our meetings. He presented a dynamite speech at the club International Speech Contest and won! He went on to win at the Area, Division, and at the District Conference. He will be competing at the Regional level, and has a chance to go on to the International Convention in Philadelphia. This is a remarkable accomplishment considering the level of competition as you go from Club through to District, and on to higher competition levels. No matter how well he does, he has a compelling desire to improve further. We can all derive inspiration and learn from this positive attitude.



CONGRATULATIONS TO OKPAPI OMOAKA DTM!

Congratulations to Okpapai Omoaka DTM who won the International Speech Contest at the District 99 Toastmasters Conference in St. Albert, AB on May 31, 2025! It was a high-caliber competition and he won among five exceptional finalists in the district.

Many of the Southern Lights club members showed up to support Okpapi throughout his contest journey, and most especially at the District 99 Conference with a dozen enthusiastic and proud Southern Lights club members in attendance!

Okpapi moved on to the Regional Quarter Finals and unfortunately did not advance to the Semi-Finals. Southern Lights is very proud and thrilled to watch and follow Okpapi in the past few months deliver his impactful speech. He is the first Southern Lights member to ever win the District 99 International Speech Contest!



CLUB SPEAKER AWARDS 2024-2025



International Speech Contest:
Okpapi Omoaka DTM



Evaluation:
Noel Blades

Congratulations to Noel Blades who won the club Evaluation contest, finished second in the Area B9 contest, and competed in the Division B contest!

2024-25 SEASON BY THE NUMBERS

- 34** TOTAL MEMBERS
- 38** WEEKLY MEETINGS
- 74** PREPARED SPEECHES GIVEN
- 22** PATHWAYS LEVELS COMPLETED
- 8** PATHWAYS COMPLETED
- 11** MEMBERS WHO COMPLETED PATHWAYS LEVELS
- 20** MEMBERS WHO WON **BEST TABLE TOPICS**, WITH **OLYA ABILDT** WINNING THE MOST AT **4** TIMES
- 14** MEMBERS WHO WON **BEST EVALUATOR** WITH **WAYNE SAGER DTM** WINNING THE MOST AT **5** TIMES

"Be brave. Take risks. Nothing can substitute experience."

- Paulo Coelho

OUR NEW 2024-2025 MEMBERS



Liubov Antoniuk



Melanie Lizotte, Vamsi Vinakari,
Cam Jackson



Sherry Schaefer

Active new members as of June 30, 2025

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TOASTMASTERS BENEFIT MEMBERS

Congratulations to five members who switched jobs this past season: Nadia Daniel, Arie de Jong, Nav Deol, Charlena Fong, and Bob Wang!

For Nadia, she leveraged Toastmasters' Level 4 Public Relations Strategies project to craft a "Hire Me!" speech that doubled as her elevator pitch—she aced the interview and smoothly transitioned from clinical trials in pediatric oncology to cardiovascular research.

For Bob, Toastmasters helped him build confidence for his interview. He answered some of his job interview questions much like Table Topics and used his Toastmasters experience in leadership and team-building as examples. Fortuitously, one of his interviewers is a fellow Toastmaster and his statements resonated with her.

Regularly practicing their public speaking and leadership skills through Toastmasters helped all of them during the job application and interview process. This is an excellent example of how participating in Toastmasters can benefit members in their personal and professional lives. Toastmasters provide a safe place for members to practice and improve their public speaking, form friendships, and have fun in the process!

"You can choose courage or you can choose comfort, but you cannot have both."

- Brené Brown

CONGRATULATIONS TO MEMBERS COMPLETING LEVELS AND PATHWAYS!

Level 1

Arie De Jong	Leadership Development
Maryam Nesari	Presentation Mastery
Zeenat Afzal	Presentation Mastery
Charlena Fong	Strategic Relationships
Nav Deol	Dynamic Leadership

Level 2

Arie De Jong	Leadership Development
Maryam Nesari	Presentation Mastery
Charlena Fong	Strategic Relationships
Noel Blades	Visionary Communication

Level 3

Arie De Jong	Leadership Development
Maryam Nesari	Presentation Mastery

Level 4

Juergen Abildt DTM	Dynamic Leadership
Juergen Abildt DTM	Engaging Humour
Maryam Nesari	Presentation Mastery

Level 5 and Pathways Completion

Juergen Abildt DTM	Dynamic Leadership & Engaging Humour
Rhonda Lagace	Dynamic Leadership
Nadia Daniel	Presentation Mastery & Dynamic Leadership
Wayne Sager DTM	Presentation Mastery
Maryam Nesari	Presentation Mastery
Lesley Revell	Team Collaboration

Triple Crown Award

Juergen Abildt DTM	Arie de Jong	Maryam Nesari
Nadia Daniel	Rhonda Lagace	

CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations!

From being inducted as a new club member, completing assignments in the Toastmasters Pathways educational program, and to competing in club speech contests, we celebrate all of our member's achievements.

The accompanying photos are just a small sample of the various acknowledgments and recognition given to club members throughout the 2024 - 2025 session.

These achievements have gone a long way in helping Southern Lights Toastmasters to become a President's Distinguished Club.



MORE PICTURES FROM THE 2024-25 SEASON

