

Southern Lights Toastmasters Club

August 2026

Enlightener Newsletter

The year started off with a bang and what a year it has been!

With many new members joining us, Southern Lights continued to grow in energy, enthusiasm, and community spirit. To both our new and seasoned members, thank you for making this year truly exceptional. My time as President has been deeply meaningful, and it has been an honor to serve in this role.

This club embodies the best of Toastmasters through education that empowers, leadership that inspires, and achievements that reflect dedication and teamwork. Together, we reached President's Distinguished, a milestone that speaks volumes about the commitment of every member who stepped up, supported one another, and contributed to our success.

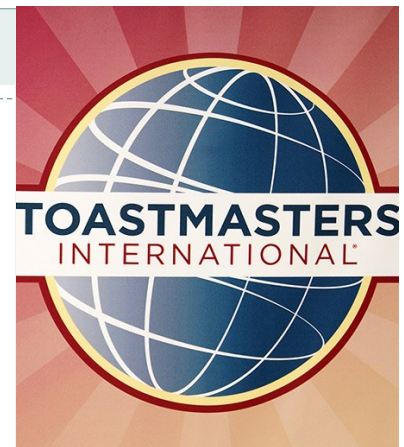
On a personal level, I learned a lot, faced challenges, and grew as an individual. I'm proud of what we accomplished, especially seeing so many newer members confidently step into executive roles. I am certain they will do a fantastic job in the year ahead.

As I pass the torch to our incoming President, I'm excited for the fresh energy and new ideas they will bring. Although my term is ending, my commitment to Southern Lights isn't. This club has my continued support, and I look forward to cheering on your achievements in the coming year.

Thank you again to all members of Southern Lights for making this club as successful as it is. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed.

See you in the fall!

Arie de Jong
Outgoing Club President
for 2025/2026



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

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"I'm proud of what we accomplished, especially seeing so many newer members confidently step into executive roles."

"Understanding comes through communication, and through communication we find the way to peace"

- Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, Founder of Toastmasters International -

www.southernlightstm.ca



SOCIAL EVENTS

CHRISTMAS PARTY

Our annual Christmas party once again brought members together for an evening of great food, laughter, and holiday cheer. The 2025 celebration was graciously hosted by Diane, who welcomed club members and their guests into her beautiful home.

As always, everyone contributed to the festive potluck by bringing a favourite dish to share, a wrapped gift for the traditional gift exchange, and non-perishable food items in support of the Edmonton Food Bank.

The evening also featured a variety of fun games that put everyone's Toastmasters skills to the test. Along the way, a little friendly competition—and perhaps a few questionable tactics—resulted in Monopoly money mysteriously changing hands, keeping everyone laughing throughout the night. The festivities concluded with the always-popular gift exchange, adding one final dose of holiday fun.

Throughout the evening, members and guests enjoyed catching up, sharing stories, and celebrating the holiday season together. It was another wonderful Christmas gathering filled with good company and festive cheer.

SUMMER BBQ

Unfortunately, Mother Nature had other plans this year, and our annual Summer BBQ was cancelled due to inclement weather. While we missed the opportunity to gather outdoors, we look forward to bringing members together at next year's BBQ!

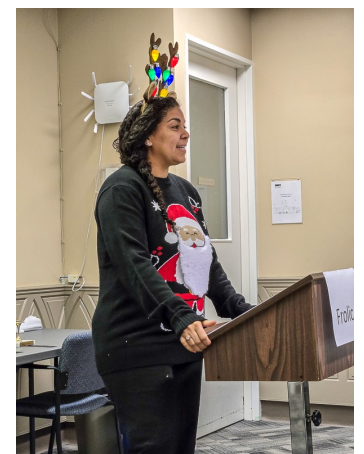
DISTRICT 99 TOASTMASTERS CONFERENCE



The annual District 99 Toastmasters International Conference was held at the Delta Hotel in Edmonton from May 1–3, 2026. Southern Lights was once again well represented, with many members attending, volunteering, competing, and supporting the conference throughout the weekend.

Members enjoyed a weekend of inspiring keynote speakers, educational sessions, speech contests and opportunities to network. A heartfelt thank you to all of our members who attended, volunteered, participated, and helped make the conference a success.

PICTURES FROM THE 2025-2026 SEASON



OUR NEW 2025-2026 MEMBERS



Benjamin Basnett



Brett Liu



Jackson Schulz-Kingsley



Jitendra Shersingh Rawat



Mohammad Afrouziyeh



Robin Changarathil



Tim Johnson



Troy King

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

— Lao Tzu —

CONGRATULATIONS TO MEMBERS COMPLETING LEVELS AND PATHWAYS!

Level 1

Sherry Schaefer	Presentation Mastery
Maryam Nesari	Motivational Strategies
Connor Meagher	Dynamic Leadership

Level 2

Sherry Schaefer	Presentation Mastery
Maryam Nesari	Motivational Strategies
Nigel Bowles	Presentation Mastery

Level 3

Nigel Bowles	Presentation Mastery
Charlene Fong	Strategic Relationships
Wayne Sager	Engaging Humor

Level 4

Bob Wang	Motivational Strategies
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Level 5 and Pathways Completion

Darryl Hauge	Presentation Mastery
Wayne Sager	Presentation Mastery

"Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out."

— Robert Collier —

ANNUAL AWARD RECIPIENTS 2025-2026

Toastmaster of the Year — Marlene Petruch

Marlene Petruch received Southern Lights' highest honour in recognition of her outstanding dedication, leadership, and unwavering support of the club. From organizing contests and serving as Chief Judge to stepping into executive roles and ensuring meetings and events ran smoothly, Marlene consistently went above and beyond. Her commitment, reliability, and willingness to help have made a lasting impact on Southern Lights and the Toastmasters community.



Going the Extra Mile — Wayne Sager

Wayne Sager received the Going the Extra Mile Award for his exceptional dedication and willingness to step up whenever the club needed him. Whether preparing last-minute speeches that inspired fellow members or volunteering to serve as Vice President Membership after unexpected executive vacancies, Wayne consistently went above and beyond. His reliability, positive attitude, and quiet leadership have made a lasting impact on Southern Lights and exemplify the spirit of this award.

Herb Ashley Spirit of Success — Darryl Hauge

Darryl Hauge received the Herb Ashley Spirit of Success Award in recognition of his unwavering dedication to the success of Southern Lights. A Past President, Darryl once again stepped forward to serve as Treasurer when the club needed him most. He is often one of the first to arrive, ensuring meetings are set up and run smoothly, while always taking the time to make members feel welcome and supported. Whether mentoring fellow members, helping behind the scenes, or quietly stepping in wherever needed, Darryl's kindness, reliability, and commitment embody the true Spirit of Success and make Southern Lights a stronger club.



Rookie of the Year — Mohammad Afrouziyeh

Mohammad Afrouziyeh was recognized as Rookie of the Year for his enthusiasm, rapid growth, and outstanding involvement since joining Southern Lights. In his first year, he completed Level 1 of his Motivational Strategies Pathway, delivered several engaging speeches, embraced a variety of meeting roles, and readily stepped in as Sergeant-at-Arms when needed. His positive attitude, willingness to help, and genuine interest in connecting with fellow members have made him a valued part of the club. We look forward to seeing him continue to grow as he begins his new role as Club Secretary.

President's Choice — Nigel Bowles

Nigel Bowles received the President's Choice Award in recognition of his exceptional contributions to Southern Lights that extend beyond any single role. From delivering educational sessions that encouraged members to pursue leadership, to keeping meetings running smoothly, mentoring fellow Toastmasters, and bringing energy, humour, and creativity to every meeting, Nigel consistently goes above and beyond. Whether arriving early to set up, solving last-minute technical issues, or finding new ways to improve the club experience, his dedication and enthusiasm make Southern Lights a stronger and more welcoming club.



AWARD NIGHT



AWARDS & RECOGNITION

Southern Lights members had another outstanding year, with several members recognized for their achievements and contributions to the club.

Speech Contest Winners

- **International Speech Contest:** Charlena Fong
- **Humorous Speech Contest:** Nigel Bowles
- **Table Topics Contest:** Nadia Daniel
- **Evaluation Contest:** Wayne Sager

Congratulations to all of this year's award recipients for their dedication, leadership, and excellence. Your contributions continue to make Southern Lights a vibrant and successful club.



CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS

Rhonda Lagace

I'm excited to share that I will be serving as the Division Director for Division I in the newly formed District 208. This is a wonderful opportunity to take on a new challenge and help shape the future of our District, and I'm truly looking forward to what we can accomplish together. As I step into this role, I'm also seeking a few volunteers to join my Division Council—an Assistant Division Director Program Quality to support training and contests; an Assistant Division Director Club Growth to help monitor the TI dashboard and recognize club achievements; and a Secretary to coordinate meetings and capture minutes. If you're interested in being part of this journey, I would love to connect!



Mohammad Afrouziyeh

I completed my level 1 in Motivational Strategies on May 15. Level 1 pushed me to speak more boldly, listen more intentionally, and embrace feedback with a little less fear and a lot more gratitude. What made it truly rewarding was the support of my club. Every evaluation, every encouraging nod, every shared laugh during a meeting helped me get here. To all my fellow members: thank you for creating a space where learning feels energizing and progress feels possible. I'm excited for the next steps on this path, and even more excited to keep growing alongside all of you in 2026!

Noel Blades

This past year, I served as the Area Director for Area A3, which is in the same division as Southern Lights. I did not originally plan to be an Area Director, but after a long conversation with Neil Wilkinson, he convinced me to step up. I am so glad that I took the opportunity. Before taking this position, I had no idea what the job entailed. As an Area Director, you are responsible for supporting and visiting the clubs in your area, which typically includes about five clubs. Area Directors visit each club at least twice a year and submit an official report to the District through the Toastmasters website. Along with these visits, we plan the Area contests and assist struggling clubs in any way we can.

At first, I was nervous because I had not visited another club in a long time. However, I really started to enjoy the position as I saw how other clubs operated and met a lot of great people along the way. We have many experienced Toastmasters at Southern Lights who would make fantastic Area Directors. If you have any interest at all, please come chat with me or any of the other past Area Directors in our club.



MEET THE 2026-2027 CLUB OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

Charlena Fong

Charlena has been a dedicated member of Southern Lights for several years and has previously served on the executive in multiple roles.



VP EDUCATION

Nigel Bowles

Nigel is a Charter Member and has held most executive positions during his long association with Southern Lights.

VP MEMBERSHIP

Diane Gunn

Diane is a long-time Southern Lights member and an active Toastmaster across many clubs. Her experience and welcoming spirit make her an excellent fit for helping our club grow.

VP PUBLIC RELATIONS

Position open

TREASURER

Darryl Hauge

Darryl brings a wealth of experience to the executive and is known for his dedication, reliability, and commitment to supporting the club.



SECRETARY

Mohammad Afrouziyeh

Mohammad joined Southern Lights in 2025 and this is his first role on the executive committee.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS

Troy King

Troy joined us in 2025 and his enthusiasm and willingness to get involved have already made him a valued member.



IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Arie de Jong

Arie provides valuable guidance and mentorship to the new executive team, helping ensure a smooth leadership transition and the continued success of Southern Lights.



Club Leadership

Each May, members elect the Club Officers who will lead Southern Lights during the next Toastmasters year. Serving on the executive is a rewarding opportunity to develop leadership skills while helping guide the club's continued success.

President's message

Charlena Fong

I am honoured to serve as the President of the Southern Lights Toastmasters Club for the upcoming 2026-2027 season! I am proud to be a member of a dynamic, diverse, and supportive club. We had an excellent and memorable season under Arie's leadership, where we achieved the President's Distinguished status! I am looking forward to collaborating with our new Executive Committee and to another stellar season where we continue to have engaging meetings, learn, grow, support, and celebrate each other, welcome new members, share good-natured laughs, and have fun!

"The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers."

— Ralph Nader —

MORE PICTURES FROM THE 2025-2026 SEASON

