

Southern Lights Toastmasters Club

June 2024

Enlightener Newsletter

A RETURN TO IN-PERSON MEETINGS

In March 2020 the world faced a significant global health crisis with the outbreak of the respiratory illness known as COVID-19.

This resulted in life being turned upside down for everyone. Governments around the world implemented various measures to try to curb the spread of the virus. These measures included lockdowns, social distancing, travel restrictions, and the closure of businesses, schools, and other public spaces.

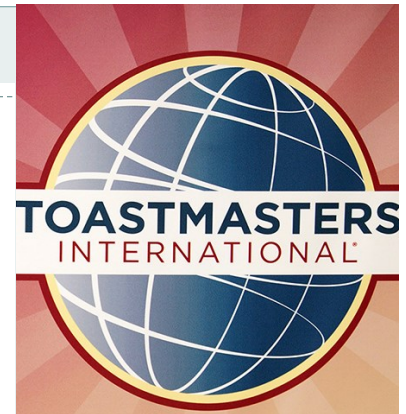
Southern Lights Toastmasters Club was no exception, and our weekly meetings were abruptly cancelled. What to do? A flurry of emails between the club's executive committee identified that we could try meeting using an online meeting portal called Zoom.

If we hadn't heard of Zoom before, we were quickly going to find out that it was a lifeline to being able to keep the club active! By mid-April 2020 and with a Zoom subscription in-hand we began an online journey that would last for two years.

In April 2022 we returned to in-person combined with online meetings. This format continued until September 2023 when the hybrid meetings were discontinued.

While both online and hybrid meetings were successful, the club's executive committee believed that only in-person meetings could provide the best Toastmaster Experience. They were proven right because the club has experienced unprecedented membership growth this past year.

As one member said, *"there's no substitute for personal interaction when the people you are communicating with are in the same room."*



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



NEIL WILKINSON 50 YEARS IN TOASTMASTERS

Two hundred Toastmasters, friends, and family gathered at the Woodvale Facility in Edmonton, on Friday, September 22, 2023 to celebrate Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM) and Past International President (PIP), Neil Wilkinson's fifty continuous years in the Toastmasters International organization. In attendance was the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, the Honourable Salma Lakhani, and her husband, His Honour, Dr. Zaheer Lakhani. Keynote speaker was Daniel Rex, CEO, Toastmasters International. Other speakers included DTM Peter Kossowan and Sheila Weatherill. Video tributes were given by several Past International Presidents. All the speakers spoke fondly about Neil's journey in the Toastmasters organization, the corporate world and as a father. Very apparent is the respect everyone has for Neil, specifically his compassion, coaching, and leadership. When it was Neil's turn to speak, he thanked his wife Jean, children, and grandchildren for their support during what he described as an incredible journey.

'A SYMPHONY OF PEOPLE BUILDING PEOPLE'



NEIL WILKINSON 50 YEARS IN TOASTMASTERS





SOCIAL EVENTS

CHRISTMAS PARTY

The annual Christmas party is always a fun club event and the 2023 party lived up to expectations.

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

Dinner was the traditional potluck and from appetizers, mains and desserts, every dish was a delicious hit.

After dinner there was a spirited gift exchange. Among the gifts were car-care products, bottles of wine, a decorative blanket, kitchen gadgets and lots of gift cards.

Many of the gifts changed hands more than a few times which added to the fun.



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. And wow, what a great variety of food we were able to enjoy this year - from charcuterie and cheese boards to onion cakes, samosas, salads galore and a delicious variety of decadent desserts!

The BBQ committee of Zeenat, Arie, Darryl, Marlene and Nigel had chosen the theme 'sports' and many came dressed in the apparel of their favourite team or sports personality.

And in keeping with the theme there were several sports activities to keep everyone busy – ring toss, cricket and croquet.

But the most popular activity was simply sitting around the firepit and chatting with each other. (And of course a spirited game of sports trivia!)



MEET THE 2024-2025 CLUB OFFICERS



PRESIDENT

Darryl Hauge

Darryl has been a Southern Lights member for over 30 years and has previously held every club position at least once.



VP EDUCATION

Nigel Bowles

Nigel has held most executive positions during his long association with Southern Lights. His last role was VP Public Relations (2023-24).



VP MEMBERSHIP

Arie de Jong

Arie joined Southern Lights in 2023 and is an enthusiast member having taken on many meeting roles.



VP PUBLIC RELATIONS

Charlena Fong

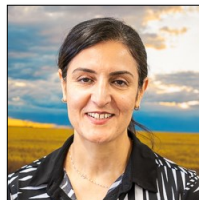
Charlena joined Southern Lights in 2023 and this is her first Club Officer role.



TREASURER

Connor Meagher

Connor is no stranger to finance having previously been treasurer of a student organization while at university.



SECRETARY

Maryam Nesari

Despite only recently joining Southern Lights, Maryam brings a lot of positive vibes to the club.



SERGEANT-AT-ARMS (SAA)

Zeenat Afzal

This is Zeenat's second term on the executive committee having previously held the position of Secretary.



IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Noel Blades

As Past President, we are in good hands as it's Noel'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.

Michelle St. Louis
(VP Education)

Wayne Sager DTM
(VP Membership)

Yeshu Desikan
(Treasurer)

*"The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things."
Ronald Reagan*

Themed Meetings

The Club's annual meeting schedule runs from early September to the middle of June.

Most years, that means thirty-nine weekly meetings.

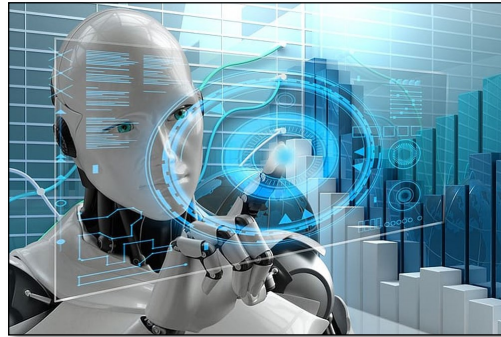
At each of the meetings, the VP of Education (this year, Michelle St. Louis) chooses a theme.

Why choose a meeting theme? Well, it helps to guide how the meeting unfolds and it challenges the members who have specific meeting roles.

The President will use the theme to ask the members a question during their opening introductions.

The Toastmaster will base his or her remarks throughout the meeting on the theme, and the Table Topics Master will base the impromptu questions also on the theme.

A SAMPLE OF THE 2023-2024 MEETING THEMES



Artificial Intelligence



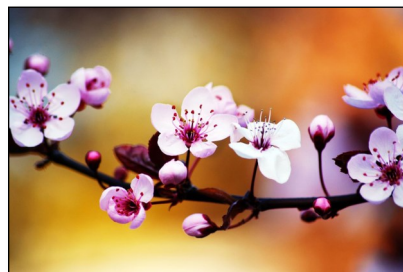
Stories of Growing Up



The Digital Age



Movies



Spring Fever



Retail Therapy

ANNUAL AWARD RECIPIENTS 2023-2024

Toastmaster of the Year — DTM Wayne Sager

Although a long-time member, this doesn't stop Wayne from excelling at everything that he does for the club. This past session Wayne was VP Membership and he presided over a tremendous growth in new members — seventeen in total. He's always willing to take on roles at short notice and coaches others to reach their goals.



Going the Extra Mile — DTM Marlene Petruch

Behind-the-scenes work is something that Marlene does very well and this is the reason she was chosen for this year's Going the Extra Mile award. She backed-up the VP Education by helping to organize the meetings on easy-Speak, volunteered for several committees, including Neil Wilkinson's 50th Anniversary, and participated in a number of out-of-club activities.



Herb Ashley Spirit of Success — Nigel Bowles

Nigel is a secret weapon when it comes to organization and knowledge, which he uses to inject a high level of professionalism into the club's activities. As this year's VP Public Relations, he redesigned the club's website which he has kept up-to-date on a regular basis. He will remain on the club executive in 2024-2025 as VP Education.



Rookie of the Year — Arie de Jong

A well deserved recipient. We have watched Arie's confidence climb in the short time that she has been a member. She's taken on many of the weekly roles and excels in each one of them. She's given five speeches this past session, attended the District conference and put her name forward to join the executive committee as VP Membership for 2024-2025.



President's Choice — Zeenat Afzal

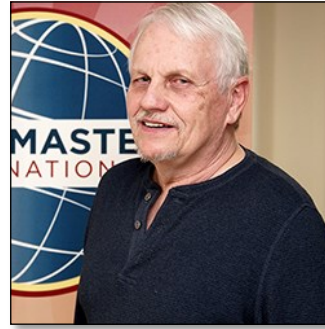
Although a relatively new member, Zeenat has grown in confidence and she has proven herself by taking on many weekly roles. She especially enjoys being the Toastmaster. She volunteered to be on several committees, and did a fine job as Club Secretary this past year. Zeenat will be staying on the Executive Committee as she is the incoming Sergeant at Arms.



CLUB SPEAKER AWARDS 2023-2024



Humorous: Tina Kirschner



Tall Tales: DTM Wayne Sager



Fall Table Topics: Nadia Daniel



Spring Table Topics: DTM Okpapi Omoaka

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit."
Aristotle, Greek Philosopher



OUR NEW 2023-2024 MEMBERS



Okpapi Omoaka
DTM



George Wang



Charlena Fong



Jason Vander
Woerd



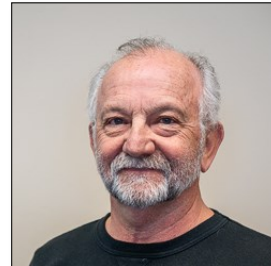
Mason Seutter



Tina Kirschner



Gus Wong



Ralph Winsor



Maryam Nesari



Navraj Deol



Laura McIntyre



Erinna Dong



Sivagar Sivabalan

Many New Faces

In September 2023, Southern Lights resumed in-person only meetings, having previously held hybrid meetings and during COVID, online only meetings.

The return to in-person meetings meant the loss of several club members who did not live in the Edmonton area.

However, the Club was confident that in-person meetings would attract people seeking the personal interaction that cannot be obtained online.

As we close out the 2023-24 session, thirteen new people have active membership in the club.

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 2023 - 2024 session.

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

