

Parramatta Toastmasters Club - Where Leaders Have Been Made

By now, you will all be familiar with the rebranding of our organisation to be Toastmasters, the place “Where leaders are made”.

This Madam Toastmaster, ladies and gentlemen, is being announced to the world as if it is some recently discovered the secret. Yet tonight we are celebrating the anniversary of a club which has been dedicated to making leaders for 45 years. A quick look at some key statistics will show you just how true that statement is.

In our time, we have had two International directors, the only two ever from our District, and five Past District Governors as members.

We have also produced 31 Area Gov's while 15 of our members have achieved the ultimate Toastmasters award the gold Distinguished Toastmaster badge

Further, six different members have won the district evaluation contest final. This is the most challenging contest of all because it measures both communication and leadership skills and is only won by true leaders.

All this is a record that far surpasses the achievements of any other club in Australia.

Our pattern of producing leaders started from our very beginning in 1966 with our charter members. These men made sure that Parramatta was an outwardly focused club that took big interest in the wider sphere of Toastmasters, with 2 of them becoming Division Governors. This was reflected by our early dominance of the club championship as shown on our banner. It was also no wonder that a Parramatta contingent went to the Gold Coast in 1971 to see District 70 formed and to ensure that Parramatta was chosen to host the first ever district conference at Katoomba in 1972.

From then, to this day, Parramatta has always had a major presence in district conferences, an outgoing attitude to encourage members to participate and grow as leaders outside our club.

Not that the history of our club has been one of plain sailing, though. Rather, our history has been one of four distinct phases or periods, especially in relation to leadership development. The second phase started in 1975 after we formed the Hills District Club. Together the two clubs became very close, and for example jointly hosted the first ever district semi-annual conference in 1977. Then in following years these clubs produced many leaders, including three successive District Governors together with district secretaries and treasurers. Such was our influence that a Past District Governor christened us “the western mafia”. This is a name that stuck. It may have been meant to be an insult, but we wore the title proudly.

The third phase started when we moved to Parramatta, and had a cultural change admitting women to membership. After we moved to Berlini's restaurant in 1992 we started another golden era and we again dominated the club championship scene, being four times a top 10 club in the world in the old Distinguished Club Plan. More significantly, it was a key time for leadership production with 13 of the members who joined in the early 90s being Area Governors in the next 10 years while earning 8 DTM awards.

At the end of that decade we had some problems, but again in 2000 things turned around and we were fortunate to have many talented members join around then who went on to become very good leaders. Not only did we score 10 out of 10 goals that year, but we established a pattern that has enabled us to complete 11 years in a row this July of achieving 10 out of 10 goals, a record in our District.

That we have done so is because we have taken greater steps than ever in this last decade to recognise, preserve and develop our culture. Every club, every school, every company, even every family has a culture, an outlook, an atmosphere. Although hard to pin down, it can be immediately sensed upon entering a club as those who have visited many clubs will know.

One key to maintaining our culture in this fourth major phase of our existence has been our club website. For here we have had a place to document our history, our winners and leaders and our traditions. We have been able to record our procedures and best practices and to educate our incoming members and executive officers into all that is good about our club. For this we thank those in particular who have established our online guide to assignments, our detailed officer duty statements and our Speechcraft resources. Their work has been so important.

Finally Speechcraft itself has been critical in our role of making leaders. By having most of our new members come through Speechcraft for 20 years, those who have joined the club have been at a level where they are able to participate, not only in taking from the club, but more importantly in the giving as an equal in our quality meetings. We have also encouraged newer members to go back to Speechcraft to work there as advisers and coordinators. This has been done in order to help them grow in accordance with the motto of the club that we adopted in 1992, of being a club that “helps members, help themselves, develop the skills to help other people” since this is the essence of leadership development.

So many people have gone back into a Speechcraft to learn these skills and have then served on our club executives, growing while serving as Club President and gone on to district and corporate success.

Thus we can be totally proud of the fact that, long before it has suddenly become fashionable, Parramatta Toastmasters Club has indeed been the place for forty-five years where leaders have been made.