

May 4, 2021 – Pacesetters 30th Anniversary Speech
Given by Alex Campbell, long time Pacesetters Member

Well, it is 30 years for Pacesetters and I want to say what a great pleasure it has been for me to be a member of this club for over 25 of those years. A lot has changed in 25 years and I will be reminiscing a little about the early days.

I wasn't originally a Pacesetter. I started at another club called Centennial TM. I joined Toastmasters because I was to be the MC at a big wedding anniversary party for my parents with hundreds of guests, and knew this was going to be a big challenge.

I got a few speeches under my belt at Centennial, but when we came after a summer break, found that all of the club's executive had resigned so the club shut down. I was on the lookout for a new club and Pacesetters is where I ended up, because of Irene and also because it was a friendly, relaxed atmosphere that made it fun to attend. I remember attending another club where everyone wore a suit & tie, and it was all very formal. This isn't what I felt comfortable with.

I had the privilege of being a co-member with Irene Murray, our club founder. Most of you don't know Irene, so I thought I would let you know what history I know of her.

Irene grew up during the depression in rural south Calgary and I remember a speech she gave talking about the mop of red hair she had as a child. She also told us that the cartoon figure, Betty Boop, was her favorite. She collected Betty Boop memorabilia and brought some in for us to see.

She married, had children, and then her husband died when Irene was still a fairly young woman so she became a single mom and had to support herself and her family. She said that to make a better living she had to overcome her shyness and gain some self-confidence so decided that Toastmasters was the vehicle for that.

Irene liked to say she was the first woman Toastmaster in Calgary. In 1966 when she decided to join Bow Valley Toastmasters, it was an all men's club.

Women were not recognized so she had to register with TMI without disclosing her first name or her sex.

Wasn't long before Irene had broken down this barrier and founded her own all-women's club called the Golden Gavel club in 1973.

Irene was very active in TM, becoming a DTM and competing in speech contests at a very high level in both Canada and the US. I remember that on a slow meeting night Irene would bring in audiotapes of some of the speeches that were given at the international contests and would give us tips that we could glean from these speeches. I especially remember the speech where the speaker left his hospital bed to give the speech, and then returned to the hospital where he died the next day. I was sorry to hear that after this valiant effort, he came in second. Had he not been at death's door, I am sure he would have won.

- Irene was the Calgary Toastmaster of the year in 1978.
- She became the first female District 42 Governor in 1980.
- Irene founded over 15 clubs, including one at the Bowden Penitentiary to help rehabilitate the inmates. But Pacesetters was where she spent most of her time since I became a member.
- Irene eventually founded her own business as a public speaking coach, and for 10 years she coached many speakers, including the Olympic athlete medal winners on their speaking skills.
- What I remember most about Irene, was how she could pull a great speech out of her memory banks at the drop of a hat, or respond to any table topic with an outstanding mini-speech. She also was a master of insightful evaluation. Irene could do it all - she has a wonderful gift.
- And she cared about the club, mentoring many members with issues they were having. She fulfilled every executive role in the club and prompted many of our members to get involved in roles outside of the club.
- Despite her declining health and her inability to attend meetings, we kept her on the Pacesetters roster so she could receive her Toastmasters magazine and our emails up until she died in 2019.
- We can be very thankful that Irene founded this club and was so supportive for so many years.

Let's talk about the locations:

- When I started we were in the Health Plus building, jammed into a tiny conference room.
- Fortunately, we moved from there to a Christian School where we had a whole classroom.
- Then we had an opportunity to save some money & move to Midlands United Church which was a great venue. Unfortunately, after a few years, the church had to give the property back to St. Mary's College.
- We stayed at St. Mary's College until it drained our bank account, and sporting a deficit of over \$400 we moved to our present location at St. Sebastien School. I hope we can stay on at St. Sebastien after the pandemic is over.

Let's talk about the program:

- When I started, we received the Competent Communicator manual in the mail and we did the 10 speeches to get our Competent Communicator award. After that, there were other Advance Communication manuals that one would work through to get the Bronze, Silver, and Gold designations.
- Then came the Competent Leadership manual in the early 2000s with 10 projects to achieve the Competent Leader award. It also had Bronze, Silver & Gold awards.
- Now we have Pathways, with multiple paths to achieving our goals.
- Another area that was emphasized, especially by Irene, was Parliamentary Procedure. Our meetings always included a business meeting and if there was no real business to transact, we made frivolous motions (I move that spring come earlier this year) and debated them just to practice. At each meeting, we appointed a Parliamentarian that adjudicated the business meeting and gave a tip if there was no meeting. Now Parliamentary procedure and Roberts Rules of Order are no longer part of the Toastmasters program. The ribbons were red, white & blue, not all blue as they are now.
- I think going mono-chromatic was a step backward – the multi-colored ribbons looked a lot better in my opinion.
- We didn't have a mentorship program until one of our now retired members, Isabel Suarez, started it back in 2015.
- Some ideas that we incorporated into a meeting over the years were conducting debates, reading the phone book with great vocal variety, and listening to championship speeches. We don't do much of this now.

Let's talk about people.

- Over that time I have seen many, many people go through the club.
- The club membership has dipped down below 10 so we have had our challenging times. But in recent years membership has been well over 20 and is now over 30.
- Whenever I bump into former members, we share some fond remembrances of the club.
- Toastmasters has been a great help to me, because, unlike many speaking programs that last a few weeks or months, TM is something you can stay with for a long period and keep your speaking skills at a pretty high level, so you are never stumped if you have to get up and make a speech.
- I also have had a lot of pleasure in seeing how much people progress by being a part of Toastmasters, and for some, it is life-changing. I know of several former members that changed their careers as a result of being in Pacesetters.

Well, it has been 30 years for Pacesetters, 25 + years with Pacesetters for me, and I still find that Tuesday evenings are a highlight of my week, I hope it is the same for you.