

Media Announcement – January 25th 2007

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For Immediate Release:

Asheville Toastmasters Have Much To Celebrate

(Asheville) – It was just two years after the end of World War II, the House Un-American Activities Committee was about to begin their investigations of communism in Hollywood, Walter Frederick Morrison invented the Frisbee, and in England, Cambridge University finally agreed to admit female students. It was also the year that a small group of businessmen, lawyers and other professionals began to hold regular meetings of a communication and leadership club in Asheville. The year was 1947 and the club was called Toastmasters.

The Asheville Toastmasters club, as it became known, is now the oldest surviving club in the Carolinas, part of an organization with more than 10,500 clubs representing total membership of over 200,000 in 90 countries.

The Toastmasters mission involves encouraging members to develop communication and leadership skills, which in turn foster self-confidence and personal growth. Despite the name, the organization has little to do with raising a glass or proposing toasts, but is mainly focused on helping members to prepare and deliver speeches, along with developing the skills required to persuade, motivate and lead others. With these noble aspirations, it should be little surprise that, some 60 years later, Asheville Toastmasters is still going strong.

Just four years after the club was formed, a young attorney named G. Edison Hill was invited by a local businessman to join the Asheville Toastmasters club. He quickly realized that here was an opportunity to not only refine his own public speaking skills, allowing him to be more effective when addressing a judge and jury, but also to help others in the community to become better communicators. He soon became a busy advocate for the Toastmasters experience, attending regional and national events. It was at one of these events that he was introduced to Dr. Ralph Smedley, the founder of the Toastmasters organization who had formed the first club at a California YMCA in 1924. Hill invited the organization's founder to visit Asheville and attend a meeting of what was still at that time, the only club in the area. Smedley agreed, and to this day one of the club's proudest mementos is a photograph of Edison Hill with Dr. Smedley, standing atop the Battery Park Hotel. The story is all the more remarkable for the fact that Hill remains a member of Asheville Toastmaster to this day, still regularly attending meetings after 56 years.

Today, there are some 139 clubs in North Carolina of which 24 are in the western part of the state. The newest club in the Asheville area is Ridgefield Toastmasters, hosted at the

offices of Dixon-Hughes in South Asheville. This club, chartered back in September was actually sponsored by the Asheville club.

“This was a remarkable case of the oldest surviving club in the Carolinas sponsoring the newest club,” remarked current Asheville Toastmasters club President, Keith Challenger. “At a time when so many volunteer-driven organizations are struggling to maintain and grow, it’s very refreshing to see people attaching so much importance to communication skills.”

This year, Asheville Toastmasters club members are planning to celebrate the 60th anniversary with several events, including special meetings and a reunion which they hope will attract many former members. The fear of public speaking still ranks number one in the minds of most people and while that continues, clubs like Asheville Toastmasters will continue to provide an invaluable service. One that remains relevant 60 years later.

Asheville Toastmasters club meets every Thursday evening at Denny’s Restaurant on Patton Avenue

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