

**Dick Hendricks, DTM,
joined Toastmasters in 1953.**

101-Year-Old Speaks of Life Lessons

Recently, a group of professionals from the local chamber of commerce was invited to a newly opened retirement complex near Seattle, Washington. They were treated to refreshments as well as a speech given by Richard “Dick” Hendricks, one of the residents. The Toastmaster delivered a 15-minute presentation without notes. He told a joke about an elderly couple struggling with memory loss and held the audience’s attention as he outlined the impact Toastmasters can make on a person’s life.

friend for many years. The Wallingford club meets over lunch every Wednesday, in the back room of the EggCetera Blue Star Cafe. Dick never misses a meeting.

Starting Out

In 1953 Dick was employed by United States General Services Administration (GSA) as a purchasing agent for federal agencies. His duties included giving progress reports to division leaders. “I had no problem writing the reports, but when it came time to discuss them

as he learned to communicate effectively. Eventually he was selected for a promotion over two better-qualified co-workers because of the speaking and leadership skills he developed through Toastmasters, Hendricks says.

He has observed a few changes in the organization since becoming a member. “The basics in Toastmasters have not changed in the past 50 years, but there have been impressive advances in the way we accomplish those basics,” he notes. “One example has been the evolution of the educational materials. Another significant improvement is the increased focus on leadership training. Our beloved organization has indeed matured in many, many ways!”

Hendricks becomes passionate when he talks about the language lessons learned in Toastmasters, such as how words can be used as a tool. “You can use words in a song to sing, or use them to growl and bark at another person.”

Certainly Dick’s words sing, as members of the Wallingford club can confirm. “Dick is a testament to the strength of the entire Toastmasters program,” says Joey Pauley. “He was the first person I met as a prospective member of the Wallingford Toastmasters. He is inviting, friendly, humble and one of the main reasons I joined our club.

“Our beloved organization has indeed matured in many, many ways!”

– Dick Hendricks

Hendricks is 101 years old. Public speaking has been a part of his life for longer than many of us have been alive: He has been a Toastmaster for 58 years. As he told the chamber audience, “I admit to being unique, because at this age I am still able to communicate and get around.”

Hendricks, who is indeed a young-acting 101, is a Distinguished Toastmaster and a member of the Wallingford Toastmasters in Seattle. I am a fellow club member and lucky enough to have been Dick’s

in the task force meetings, I would often repeat myself, stop in midsentence and start over, grasp for words, lose my train of thought (and my audience) and generally come across as a stumblebum,” Hendricks recalls. “So when I heard about a meeting that taught people how to express themselves, I knew that was exactly what I needed.”

That year he joined the Public Service Toastmasters club, which met in Seattle and consisted of GSA and U.S. Civil Service Commission employees. He grew in confidence

Centenarian Dick Hendricks is an enthusiastic speaker who never misses a club meeting.

I am proud to spend my Wednesday afternoons with such an inspirational speaker and person.”

Pondering a Presentation

Hendricks says he can stand up and give an improvisational talk about any topic and not be frazzled. Indeed, it's a treat to watch this witty Toastmaster respond to a Table Topic. However, when he was tapped to deliver the speech to the visiting chamber of commerce group, Hendricks grew worried. Thoughts of giving the speech consumed him. When asked why, he replied, “Perhaps because at this age I have more time to think about it.”

He had no need to worry. His enthusiasm was a joy to witness. Hendricks talked to the group about life lessons he's learned in Toastmasters – and said he's still learning.

“This year I have embarked on a new highway to match my age. For those of you familiar with Highway 101 on the California coast, you will know what I mean when I say the aging process is an excursion.”

Watching Hendricks speak that day, you saw his vast Toastmasters experience and knowledge come into play. His presentation was like a primer on speaking fundamentals:

- Keep it simple.
- Include humor.
- Speak confidently.
- Project your voice.
- Know how to finish promptly and effectively.

And Hendricks walks his talk. One of the chamber members approached him after his speech and told him that he, too, was a Toastmaster. He had considered quitting his club because he was feeling too old for its predominantly younger membership. But after hearing Hendricks' speech, he was encouraged to look at his situation



differently and see himself as a mentor to the group, with something more to offer. The man invited Hendricks to speak to his club, and the centenarian happily accepted.

Recognized for his Accomplishments

In 1988, Hendricks received a Presidential Citation at the Toastmasters International Convention in Washington, D.C. This unassuming man says the highlight of

popping all over the place. What a moment! I stepped close to the President and quietly said, ‘There are hundreds of Toastmasters who deserve this recognition.’ The President said, ‘I know!’”

Last year, when Hendricks moved into the new retirement complex, he told a group of residents and staffers at an orientation session, “One of the problems with Toastmasters training is that when people become fluent,

“The basics in Toastmasters have not changed in the past 50 years, but there have been impressive advances in the way we accomplish those basics.”

— Dick Hendricks, DTM

the Convention was listening to the finalists in the International Speech Contest. “What a thrill it was to hear the winners from the eight regions making their presentations in this awesome setting!”

When it was Hendricks' turn to receive his award, then-International President John Fauvel handed him the plaque and certificate. Recalling the scene, Hendricks says:

“Hundreds of Toastmasters applauded, with flash bulbs

you can't shut them up.” Toastmasters is fortunate to have this unofficial ambassador who knows how to wrap up a speech in a timely manner, but doesn't know how to stop accentuating the positive. **T**

Arlyene Dews is a freelance writer and a member of the Wallingford Toastmasters in Seattle, Washington. Reach her at arlyenedews@yahoo.com.