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Confident president leads club's golden anniversary celebration

By Mark Raeber - Progress Staff Writer

Ted Gayford said he was once a timid man, who felt uneasy in the spotlight. But through his membership in Toastmasters International he has been able to shed that self-effacing demeanor.

Participation in the organization has even given him the confidence to step forward and lead the O'Fallon Toastmasters club as president while it celebrates its golden anniversary.

The local club observed its 50th anniversary on April 24. To recognize the milestone, Mayor Gary Graham and the O'Fallon City Council proclaimed April 16 as Toastmasters International Day in the city.



Ted Gayford is leading the O'Fallon chapter of Toastmasters International as president while the local club celebrates its golden anniversary. - PROGRESS/Mark Raeber

As club president, Gayford has been responsible for overseeing the anniversary celebration, which included a gala dinner in mid-April that, naturally, featured a series of speakers.

Gayford said the O'Fallon club has about 22 members who meet at 7 p.m. every Thursday in a conference room at the Community Financial Center on the corner of Lincoln Ave. and Highway 50.

A native of Chicago, Gayford earned his undergraduate degree in history at Western Illinois University in Macomb and his master's degree in library science at Dominican University in Chicago.

He has been library director at the East St. Louis Community College Center for about a year. There he oversees a collection of more than 5,000 volumes available for use by the college's 1,000 students.

Before moving to the metro-east Gayford worked for a publisher in New Jersey that specializes in printing reference materials.

Describing his path to becoming a librarian, he said, “I had an internship during my senior year at Macomb that made me decide to go to graduate school. So I just went from there.”

Discussing his membership in Toastmasters, Gayford said he first became involved with the organization while in college in Chicago. He joined the O’Fallon club when he accepted his post as librarian at the East St. Louis college.

“I became a Toastmaster because I have to do public speaking for work — I do training sessions several times a month — as well as the fact that I was kind of a timid and self-effacing person,” he said. “And Toastmasters has helped me become more outgoing and to be a better public speaker.”

He then went on to explain, “Toastmasters is an organization that is dedicated to speech. It is dedicated to making people confident speakers and it is dedicated to making people leaders. That is what it does at its core.”

And, he said, the organization’s formula works.

“Public speaking is like cooking food,” Gayford noted. “We all enjoy eating food but that does not make us great cooks. And just because we speak on a regular basis everyday, we are not all great speakers.

“Toastmasters allows us to constantly practice, week in and week out,” he said. “It allows us to see where our weaknesses are and where are strengths are. And it allows us to build upon those strengths.

“By having consistent meetings, where we are always able to come back to improve ourselves, makes us better speakers,” Gayford said.

And he may be living proof of the club’s adage that practice makes perfect. He excelled this year in the organization’s spring international competition, which focused on inspirational speeches. He won at the club level, area level and district level. But he came up short at the division competition, where he pitted his oratorical skills against those of Toastmasters from throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area.

Gayford, who lives in Edwardsville with his wife Katy and daughter Sadie, 2, said that, while he now enjoys speaking in public, whenever he steps up to a rostrum deep inside his chest cavity a slight twinge of fear is still there. But by using breathing techniques and other keys he has learned through Toastmasters he is able to control those butterflies.

“At this point I know nothing bad can happen,” he said. “I am not going to die so I know I can carry on with it.”

Read more: <http://www.bnd.com/2011/05/13/1707385/confident-president-leads-clubs.html#storylink=misearch#ixzz1MfIOUFPN>