

EXECUTIVE Toastmasters:

Raising the bar for over fifty years...

By Bob Maher, ATMS, 2011

With due apology, in advance, for not being able to mention all the very unique, and diverse, individuals who have made **EXECUTIVES Toastmasters** the outstanding Club it is today...

THE EARLY YEARS... "If you couldn't talk fishing or hunting, then brother, you couldn't talk!" That's just the way it was in 1955, the year when Clint Murchison (yes, that Clint Murchison of Dallas Cowboys fame) chartered Executive Toastmasters as the Corporate Club for his oil company. The Club met every Wednesday morning at 7 AM in The Melrose Hotel. The group was originally packed with attorneys and oilmen who were allowed to speak on two topics and two topics only: fishing and hunting. "For many years it was strictly a Corporate Club," says George Crawford, the most senior of the Club's current roster.

George Crawford, DTM, Member of Executive Toastmasters since 1974. George and his 'faithful sidekick' (wife for life)Katie, now deceased, mentored many of our current Members, inspiring them to assume leadership roles in speaking contests, starting new clubs, and aspiring to area, division, and district leadership roles within Toastmasters International. Infamous for not only his persistence on the need for gentlemen to button their suit coats (the prevalent dress code in the eighties)... but also for his unique speaking style and range of speech topics over the years.

"Occasionally they'd let 'outsiders' in," continues George, "But they'd only let in those outsiders who knew how to hunt and fish." George was not invited in due to any particular knowledge of hunting or fishing, rather, he was sought after based on his contacts in Mr. Murchison's oil company.

At the time, the active roster had dwindled to eight Members, still mostly oilmen and attorneys from the Murchison clan...leading to Executive's historically significant Board decision to 'open the doors to outsiders' in order to increase membership. "We decided to let people in who were serious about working on their communication and leadership skills," states Mr. Crawford.

A MAJOR LEAGUE TRANSITION... In many ways, transition and evolution had become the best ways to describe the incredible history of Executive Toastmasters. The new 'open door' led to what is, and is still today, the 'microcosm of the real world' represented by the Club's evolving Membership roll. The late seventies and early eighties was a time of fantastic growth and development for the Club with the entry of many clearly diverse, professional and managerial individuals from a wide range of industries and entrepreneurship.

Enter the likes of Clark Scarborough, Dale Phillips, Ron Jantz, Bob Maher, Bob Henley, Allen Feltman, Jeff May and Jerry Rotuno... have you noticed the distinct MALE theme, here? The **Club's first FEMALE was Belkes Raznosky**, from the Dominican Republic, cherished for her boundless energies and enthusiasm for Toastmasters. She was soon joined by Alice Willhoitte-DTM, Renee Thomas (both still current Members), Mary Frances Burleson (heir apparent to Ebby Holiday), June Feltman, and Leticia Ferrer (also still current and our newest private pilot) to name a few of the gender breaking 'pioneers'... Women used to have their own Toastmistress organization... "Women just didn't come to meetings...it wasn't done—locally or internationally," reminds Mr. Crawford, "Women have added a welcomed new dimension to Toastmasters International."

Bob Maher, ATMS, Member of Executive Toastmasters since 1980. Bob fondly calls Executive Toastmasters his window to the world and "laboratory for experimenting with verbal and leadership skills"... A professional Career Consultant for over thirty years, he has spoken in all forty eight continental states and around the world. Known, early on, for his ability to twist and manipulate our "Word-of-the-Day" into puns, metaphors, alliteration and other stretches of the English language... Bob has evolved along with the Club to always tell us 'what he really wants to talk about' in Table Topics. He was the originator of our Holiday **FAMILY** Roundtable events.

There have been other significant challenges and changes over the years... not the least of which has been the location for our meetings. From our roots of the Melrose Hotel, we have utilized many different restaurants and other locations, currently we enjoy our affiliation with **The Egg and I Restaurant** in Addison.

Another constant 'pressure' is the infrastructure and organization imposed by Toastmasters International. Unique to Executive Toastmasters is the counting of "indefinite statements" that tend to weaken the power of our speech. From a heritage of 'flying by the seat of our pants' we have come to embrace the structure provided by TI programming, while maintaining our culture of independence and innovative leadership.

We've become sticklers for time management of our meetings, because we know Members must get on with their work. We no longer pay the Club Treasurer \$300/month, as instituted by Mr. Murchison, to assure the proper accounting of our funds—rather, relying on an all volunteer Board of servant leaders.

Today's meetings tend to run themselves under the guidance of the day's Toastmaster and the overall leadership of our Board. A Toastmaster's meeting has three distinct elements. **Table Topics**—extemporaneous speaking topics to challenge our ability to think quickly and "off the cuff" on a variety of topics... **Evaluation** of each formal speech—constructive, non-threatening feedback from fellow Members that enables us to learn and grow, developing our basic Toastmaster skills and the vital leadership skill of providing focused speaker feedback... And last, but certainly not least, is that we have broadened the boundaries of our **Formal Speech** topics from a steady diet of hunting and fishing to include the following categories...and much MORE:

WORLD TRAVEL... through the eyes of many, notably Gloria Scala Vance, Leticia Ferrer and her eternal quest of 'the next solar eclipse' and Eric Harrison, always in search of leading edge fashion in shoes.

PROFESSIONAL AND MANAGERIAL ISSUES... brought to us by published authors, sought after public speakers, and a wide range of corporate managers and executives who have graced our Membership roll.

Mark Siegel, DTM, a Toastmaster since 1984, who joined us in 2002, our most recent DTM who has been instrumental in our attainment of multiple President's Distinguished recognitions over the recent years. He is the V.P. of National Accounts for an international service provider and regularly speaks on sales management issues and topics. He is our Toastmaster "ambassador," bringing TM International to us and advancing Toastmasters to the public.

ECONOMIC INFO AND ADVANTAGE... ideas and strategies from some of the brightest financial services professionals among us. Topics have ranged from basic budgeting to stock market trends to... there seems to be no boundary!

PARENTING SKILLS, specifically fatherhood... as presented from the experiences of Allen Feltman, Jim Mercado, and Tom McCarthy. Often humorous, but always informative and timely... we still await our first speech from any of the many experienced and respected mothers among us (a challenge... grinning again)

"Bleeding edge" **TECHNOLOGY** and the ever evolving world of applications... an ongoing resource to the more technically challenged. A LOT has changed, and been spoken about, over the years... mostly in laymen's language!

And the requisite "**CELEBRITY WATCH**"... from sports icons, to political figures at all levels, to historical figures of note, including Lynn Shevack's characterization of Texas's own Kinky Freeman!...and, thanks to Clark Scarborough back in the eighties, "Conan the Barbarian!"

All this and more...and give us a gold star, we don't run visiting Area Governors and other TI dignitaries 'out of the Club on a rail' like we used to. George reminds us that, "For a long time when any Area Governor, or the like, would come visit us at Executive Toastmasters, the Murchison clan would kick them out of the meeting – "NO OUTSIDERS ALLOWED!!!!

We are a lot more civil, these days.

AND EXECUTIVE TOASTMASTERS TODAY... No "*History of Executive Toastmasters*" would be complete without a snapshot of the present and a look toward the future. You see, as a Club devoted to personal and professional development as speakers and leaders. We are passionate about honoring our past, building on the strengths of our present, and, as important, having an evolving vision toward the future.

You can't experience Executive Toastmasters without being aware of its *'dynamic diversity'* and family-like qualities. There's a reason why we attract that sort of guest and new member... and a reason why we retain our evolving core group of long term Members. It's an honor and privilege to grow as people, speakers and leaders within such a powerhouse group.

No current snapshot of our 'family' would be complete without revisiting the 'chickification' (a word created for us by Wade Wimbish, one of our newest Members) of Executive Toastmasters. Once **Belkes Raznosky**, kicked the door open, our ranks have been blessed over the years with leaders loaded with speaking talents and skills, like **Alice Willhoitte, DTM**, our second most senior DTM in the Club who has held TM leadership roles up to District Governor...

Lynn Shevack, ACS-ALB, a Toastmaster since 2002 who joined us in 2004. She brings her quick wit and sharp tongue to our mix, always catching our occasional slips backward into iconoclastic male-bias...and keeps us focused on appropriate grammar as one of our key speaking habits. She has long been involved as coordinator of our Mentoring Program, another of the unique strengths of Executive Toastmasters, another reason why we sustain our high quality Membership roster. She is our family's 'Big Sister.'

More recently, we've benefited from both the speaking skills and leadership of Lisa Zahn, CC, a practicing Attorney, and Nicole Payseur, ACB, our 'Queen of the metaphor,' a former practicing Attorney (from NYC, no less) who has joined our more entrepreneurial ranks in her business pursuits.

Technology revisited... We are committed to our Members' personal and professional development as reflected in our communication portal... a LinkedIn Group, 'Executive Toastmasters'...

We could not capture the snapshot of the present and our vision for the future without giving special thanks to Hillyer Lange, CC for her tireless and very creative work on our website, www.executivetm.com .

Like the history and 'story' of Northern Ireland, we hope the story of Executive Toastmasters keeps evolving and growing richer each year. It's hard to 'finish' this most recent attempt at capturing the essence of the Executive FAMILY... so let's at least pay homage, and give equal time to the impact of creativity in speech topics that some of our sibling brothers have brought to our table...

Like Eric Post, ATMS-CL, who keeps our inner child front and center with his wit and dramatic presentation style, and brings mastery of both Toastmastering basics and infrastructure to our table... and Chris Robinson, CC, who always has memorable and well researched topics to share with us... and the 'last word' goes to the youngest of our family's siblings, Wade Wimbish, CC, our champion of the male bias, whose energy level, wit and natural charm makes him the perfect Prince of our more social needs—the occasional "Happy Hour," always well conceived, organized, and received by the Executive Toastmasters family.