

Toastmasters Treasures...Profiles in Performance

by Peggy Lynn, CTM/CL, PR Reporter



"I always tell people that I only have two regrets in my life: Number 1) less exposure to the sun being so fair-skinned, and Number 2) wished I'd joined Toastmasters thirty years ago!" **Ford Ross** is

emphatic at what a positive thing his Toastmasters experience has been since joining Topeka's **Heartland** club in January, 1999. Thinking back in the public speaking arena, the most memorable recollection of his Fulton MO, Westminster College Public Speaking Class was that he "GOT a D!" Ford claims that he "has always been rather petrified of public speaking!"

He never overcame the acute anxiety which he found causing loss of sleep for a couple of days prior to a presentation. Yet, by all other means, he was "competent" to get up in front of the group as Chairman of the Board of the Stormont-Vail Foundation in Topeka, for instance. Why, Ford even had a script at his fingertips then but thought reading it was not what other board members deserved hearing from him. Impromptu "speaking SHOULDN'T be that hard" was his assessment! He "would try speaking extemporaneously and it NEVER worked out!" Of course, Ford may have been harder on himself than his colleagues, but he stands firm on these opinions.

About the same time as this tale gripping the new Foundation Board Chairman, Ford decided he'd "had enough!" He was already an accomplished businessman. Toastmasters was something he'd thought about for twenty years and, I don't exactly want to call Ford a "SLOW-LEARNER" but, he will be the first to say, "I just needed to get off my duff and finally do it!"

His career was firmly in place but the episodes of missing sleep and gut-wrenching talks still nagged him. They finally put him over the edge. He had been reading a book then about "thinking outside the box, going outside of one's comfort zone." As an avid pilot, a seemingly fearless and bold adventurer, Ford found he was still "petrified of public speaking!" Ford LEAPed into Toastmasters starting just like the rest of us! "One thing I learned was you really DO have to prepare AND rehearse!" My "extemporaneous speaking never worked" and "Table Topics has helped me tremendously there." Amazed at the beauty and simplicity of the Toastmasters Communications and Leadership Program, Ford Ross is now officially the "COMPETENT" speaker he has always wanted to be with his CTM! Ford's ATM Bronze is within this year's grasp with only four speeches to go! Ford Ross, CEO and President of Topeka-based M-C Industries, acclaimed executive, is looking forward to his TOASTMASTERS goals!

A topnotch record was already in place before Toastmasters and Ford admits, career-wise, his life didn't change a lot since joining. Now as Immediate Past Chairman of Stormont-Vail Foundation, and the mentioned President and CEO of M-C Industries, which specializes in custom manufacturing, Ford's leadership skills with 350 employees, multi-state and international operations, continue to be quite admirable! However, Area T2 Governor Joanna Kuczera, ATMB/CL, "mined" Ford as a "treasure" for different reasons. She says, "He is a good example of how Toastmasters can help no matter what one does in real life.

" Enjoying his Toastmasters experience immensely as noted in his "only regrets" comment, Ford has been constantly amazed at the caliber of people attracted to Toastmasters. "I listen to their IceBreakers and am just blown away! Toastmasters people are just great and so supportive of their fellow club members!" Even though he had the career going full speed, personally conquering his fear of public speaking has meant a tremendous amount to him.

Conquering the skies, then the podium. Ford and his wife have even bred a second generation of Toastmasters with their middle daughter in Palo Alto, CA, having a blast with her club out there! Ford's working on the two other "wonderful daughters" living in Chicago and St. Louis. Obviously, his networking skills development starts at home!

You can reach this TREASURE within our midst, Ford Ross, at fross@mcind.com but you may not get a reply just yet. Ford and his lovely wife of 37 years, Catherine, may still be on their relaxing Alaskan cruise vacation where, away from work and the PC, the enthusiastic badminton player is no doubt seeking anyone up to the challenge of keeping the birdie not only on the court, but on board!