

Diversity in Dubai

Club draws strength from its multicultural membership.

BY CHRISTINE COOMBE, PH.D., DTM

With 29 different nationalities represented among its 56 members, Dubai Internet City (DIC) Toastmasters is proud of its cultural diversity and its role in fostering cross-cultural communication and leadership.

The club is based in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Dubai itself has one of the most diverse populations in the world, with more than 200 nationalities represented, so it is not surprising that DIC Toastmasters attracts members from diverse cultural backgrounds. One of more than 100 clubs in the UAE, its executive committee includes members of seven nationalities.

Carole Spiers, a guest broadcaster with BBC and an international expert on workplace stress, first heard about the club on a visit to Dubai. She has given speeches and education sessions to the club and is an honorary member. She mentioned the club many times in her weekly column in the *Gulf News*, the biggest selling regional newspaper in the UAE.

Members of DIC Toastmasters consider their ethnic diversity a badge of honor and source of strength. John Nolan, CC, CL, a past club president and a current Division F governor, says the club makes an effort to promote itself as an “international environment where people can come together and learn and develop.”

Diversity enables club members to grow as individuals, exposing them to different groups of people and opening their minds to different ways of life.

As the immediate past Division F governor, I had the pleasure of attending a



Dubai Internet City Toastmasters in the United Arab Emirates attracts members from widely diverse cultural backgrounds.

DIC club meeting, where I heard members from a wide variety of countries share their varied experiences. Toastmaster of the Day Assita Kone, originally from France, opened the meeting; Artie from Kazakhstan took home the trophy for Best Speaker; and Toastmasters from the Republic of Mauritius, India and the United Kingdom participated in Table Topics.

A couple of unique principles contribute to the success of the club:

DIC does not schedule meetings around any national or religious holidays. If a meeting is planned on a holiday, then members who celebrate that holiday simply skip that meeting.

The club encourages members who are non-native English speakers to take on the grammarian role. This ensures that varying perspectives are heard, and it calms members who might be self-conscious about speaking in English.

Club Success

For the 2012–2013 program year, DIC Toastmasters increased membership and achieved President’s Distinguished Club recognition for the first time. In addition, two of its members advanced to the district finals in Toastmasters speech contests. Another two members went on to serve as area governor and division governor, respectively. DIC Toastmasters also became a corporate-club mentor, with members having assisted two newly-formed corporate clubs. The club earned

President’s Distinguished recognition for the 2013–2014 year as well.

Club member Greg Pogonowski, ACB, ALB, a past area governor, credits club success to an ethos of, “We all work hard. We also play hard.” He explains that high-quality meetings are mixed with more relaxed events like an end-of-the-year club party, making the group “a cohesive unit that appreciates both the work associated with club meetings and the social aspect and camaraderie that goes along with it.”

When DIC club membership surpassed 60, another club was chartered earlier this year to ensure continued growth and success. DIC2 Toastmasters meets on the two Wednesdays of the month that DIC1 Toastmasters does not meet, and the two clubs share the same meeting location, resources and website (dictoastmasters.com).

Multiculturalism and ethnic diversity enable DIC club members to open their minds to new learning opportunities from others. Everyone benefits from diversity. As author Catherine Pulsifer says, “Without diversity life would be very boring.”

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