TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL

District 27 Toastmasters

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President's Distinguished Club - Alexandria Treetop Speakers

President's Distinguished Club - Alexandria Treetop Speakers



From Left to Right: Rob Raffles, CC: Treasurer, A. Allan Damen, VCP: President, Lisa Velenovsky, SR1: Vice President of Education, and Tommy Walker, CTM: Secretary

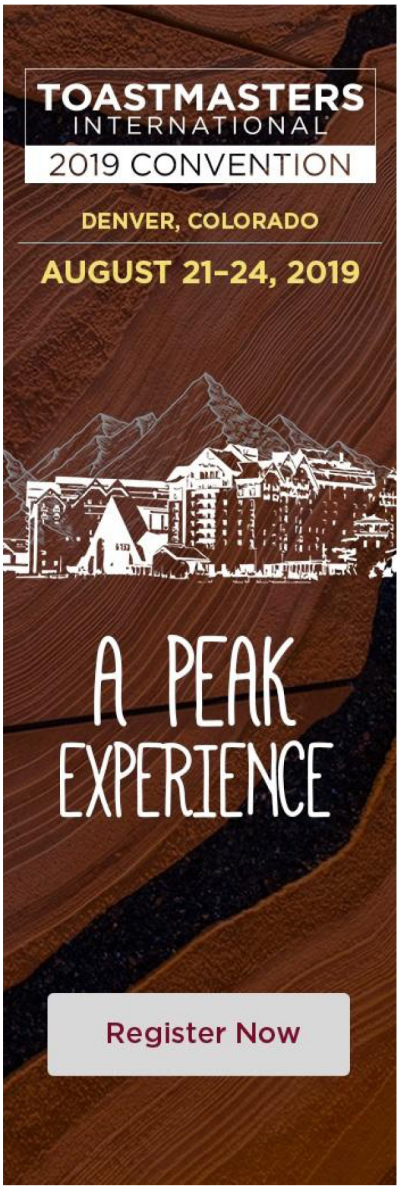
This is the second consecutive year in which Alexandria Treetop Speakers hits it big with the President Distinguished status. It is an unlikely success story of the underdog club turning into a powerhouse over the course of two years. It all about the determination and perseverance that took office in 2017.

Treetop, in the old days, was a failing club that could not even achieve the Distinguished Club status in the 2011-2012 year. There were not enough members to sustain the club anymore. Officers barely stayed in their position, and left the club in the matter of few months. The high turnover of Alexandria's old town area was not helping.

In 2017, however, two new members joined the club and were able to transform the club around. Lisa Velenovsky and A. Allan Damen (AKA Damen) were guests in the same meeting in April 2017. Damen eventually joined the club in May of 2017, and Lisa in June of 2017. The original officers of the 2016-2017 team started falling apart, which was becoming the norm at Treetop. Only 2 officers remained in their position: Tommy Walker Jr (President), and Rob Raffles (Treasurer). Damen and Lisa did not shy away from the challenge, and decided to join the officer team. Lisa, who had no previous experience in



Toastmasters 2019 Convention



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Toastmasters, took on the most difficult role in any club (Vice President of Education), while Damen took on two officer roles (Sargent at Arms and Vice President of Public Relations). They were both the first Toastmasters to use pathways in Treetop's history.

There were meetings in which the officers would come to meetings, and find no members or guests present and eventually had to cancel the meetings. It was looking grim for Treetops at the time, but the officer team did not give up. Damen decided to take matters seriously and transformed the digital outlook and promotional philosophy of the club. He totally changed the website look, established new accounts for social media, and regularly updated them. He relied on word of mouth, visiting conferences, and participating and helping in contests to put Treetop on the map again.

Tommy, Damen and Rob worked together to hit as much educational goals as possible. Damen in particular was able to win the Triple Crowns pin for finishing an entire pathway (5 levels) during that year.

Eventually, membership started to improve, but the high turnover was not helping. Tommy organized a Hawaiian themed open house, and Damen organized two other open house events (Christmas and Spring Season) which helped a lot. Treetops was eventually barely able to hit the membership goal of 17 members. However, no new members were interested in becoming officers at that stage.

Lisa, Rob and Tommy discussed amongst themselves and convinced Damen to run for President for the year 2018-2019, which Damen accepted. The club elected Damen as the new president.

By the time Damen took office, the membership was down again to less than 10 members. Things were not looking good for the club long-term. The officer's team was not able to commit in the same manner they did the previous year. Tommy had health issues, Rob was travelling most of the time, and Lisa had a new job position, which limited her attendance to only one meeting a month, and did not allow for a flexible schedule.

So, Damen took on 4 officer roles (President, Sargent at Arms, Vice President of Public Relations and Vice President of Membership). He also had to fill in the Vice President of Education role most of the time. No pressure, however, overpowered Damen. He devised a new plan to run the club. He established an online payment system for dues, introduced a new friendship system between the officers and the members. He also devised a novel idea. He introduced club fee discounts if new members would commit to a year in advance, instead of the 6-month membership limit.

But, even Damen could not handle what was at store for him by November of that year. He got really sick, and was in and out of the hospital. There was a risk that no officers could make it to some meeting. Despite being out of a medical operation, Tommy had to step in and be there for the club. Both Tommy and Damen defied the pain, and ran the club meetings at their most vulnerable moments.

Damen's plan started to bear fruit. More, members started to join the club, and feel attached to it. Damen worked tirelessly on creating new opportunities for new members to be interested in officer roles. He invited them to come with him to TLI (officer trainings). Seasoned

members also showed more interested in serving the club that was in turn serving their needs. Lisa and Damen achieved a new milestone for the club, by organizing a DTM workshop for the first time since 2010 for TM Delmy Vialpando who granted her educational award to Treetop.

By the end of the Toastmasters year, and the new elections on the horizon, Damen was able to motivate and convince a brand new officer team to serve the club for the Toastmasters year 2019-2020. None of the previous officer team is taking on any officer role. Armed with a fresh look and approach to the club experience, the new officers' team of 2019-2020 will work on achieving their goals under the leadership of the club's president Xavier Wong.