COMMUNITY

Boost your speaking and leadership skills

By Colleen Sparks

Katherine Creech used to lose sleep for days, riddled with anxiety before she had to give a speech to colleagues at the company where she works.

Six months after joining the Valley Toastmasters Club in North Central Phoenix, she said she felt more at ease talking to groups and her boss told her she had "made enormous improvements" in public speaking.

Creech, 45, a director of operations at a B2B communications company, is among the 23 members of the club that meet to polish their public speaking and leadership skills at 6:15 a.m. every Thursday at Church of the Beatitudes, 555 W. Glendale Ave.

The group is affiliated with Toastmasters International, a worldwide, nonprofit, educational organization that has assisted thousands of people with their speaking, listening, thinking and leadership abilities. Members give formal, prepared speeches and also tackle impromptu speaking on diverse subjects called "table topics" at meetings.

"It's a safe and supportive environment," Creech said. "It's more about opportunities for growth and feedback. The goal is to leave the individual motivated and inspired."

Joel Konopken, 66, a retired accountant and president of Valley Toastmasters Club, joined a Toastmasters Club in the East Valley in 1992 as a way to bond with his wife. He said at the time he also knew he had problems communicating with colleagues.

"I was kind of full of myself and I think it showed," Konopken said.

He said participating in Toastmasters has helped him relate more to people and make eye contact when talking. The organization also helps people know their audience, as well as use "vocal variety," organize their speeches and effectively use body movement. At each meeting up to three formal speeches are given and evaluators give each speaker feedback and coaching. Other members can provide written feedback.

"It's not just speaking, it's leadership," Konopken said. "We have a lot of fun."

Members of Valley Toastmasters, as well as other Toastmasters clubs, also teach public speaking fundamentals to non-members at businesses, nonprofit organizations and colleges through the Speechcraft program. Some Toastmasters members teach young people similar skills in the Youth Leadership Program.

Membership in the Valley Toastmasters costs $11.50 a month and you must be at least 18 years of age. To learn more about Valley Toastmasters, visit https://valleytoastmasters.net.

More library branches opening Sundays

There will be more chances to check out books and other offerings at more branches of the Phoenix Public Library.

Starting Sunday, Sept. 22, four additional locations of the library system will be open from 1 to 5 p.m. on Sundays. They are Acacia Library at 750 E. Townley Ave.; Agave Library at 23550 N. 36th Ave.; Desert Broom Library at 29710 N. Cave Creek Road; and Desert Sage Library at 7602 W. Encanto Blvd.

All 17 Phoenix Public Library locations will now be open on Sundays. To learn more, visit www.phoenixpubliclibrary.org.

Phoenix to turn plastics into fuel

The city of Phoenix Public Works Department has formed a partnership with Renew Phoenix that aims to turn plastics destined for the landfill into fuel.

This repurposing of what's known as "Plastics 3-7," or low-value plastics, is the latest venture in the city's "Reimagine Phoenix" initiative to increase its diversion rate to 40 percent by the end of 2020. The goal is to reach zero waste by 2050.

The plan is for Renew Phoenix to work with the city to build a facility to process the materials on the city's Resource Innovation Campus.

This involves a proprietary chemical recycling process to reverse the plastic back into its basic molecular structure, which will allow them to convert the plastic waste into fuel. Renew Phoenix will bring as many as 15 full-time jobs to the Valley after investing more than $5 million dollars in the project.

Once at full production, the project is expected to divert 10 tons per day of mixed plastic waste, which is equal to 60 barrels of liquid fuel.

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