

HISTORY OF DISTRICT - 79

The Toastmasters movement of the Gulf Corporation Council has started in Saudi Arabia, Eastern Province more than sixty years ago back in 1953 with the chartering of the first community club in ARAMCO by expatriates working in Dhahran, a corporate club in Dhahran American Air Base and one in Jeddah American Consulate in the early 1960's. Later in 1964 Bahrain first club Manama 2916U was chartered. Then fourteen years later Dhahran 1059U was established in 1978. This was followed by Riyadh Club 6897U of Saudi Arabia in 1988, the Indian club 1836U of Bahrain in 1989 and the Oasis Club 8258U of Khobar, Saudi Arabia. The network of clubs expanded to include other GCC countries starting with UAE which added luster to this Toastmasters fraternity by chartering the first club of Abu Dhabi Chapter 1950U in 1995. Qatar became the fourth GCC country to join by establishing its first club Doha 7148U in 1997 followed by Kuwait which chartered the first Kuwait Club 7980U in early 1999. Oman did not wait too long to make its mind to be part of this great learning organization which promotes self development and fellowship and therefore decided to establish its first Muscat Club 6646U in July 1999. The icing on the cake came as TMI approved Jordan as a member of GTC in March 2000 when the International Club of Jordan was chartered and brought new energy to our prestigious district.

Same as our founder DR. RALPH C. SMEDLEY who never envisaged founding a World Wide Organization when he initiated the first Toastmasters Club in 1923, The Toastmaster Members of Manama, Indian Club Speakers Forum (both from Bahrain) and Dhahran Toastmasters (from Dhahran, Saudi Arabia), when they held their 1st Joint meeting in 1989, did not even dream that it will result in what it is today! As the joint meeting turned out to be a great success, it was decided to continue with the same in the succeeding years. Once Oasis Toastmasters (Al Khobar) was chartered in 1991, it became a joint meeting of 4 clubs later followed by Riyadh Toastmasters Club (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia). After each joint meeting, the presidents (and some members from each club) used to meet together and discuss about the coming years' joint meetings. In 1993, representatives of all 5 clubs formed a body called GULF TOASTMASTERS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (GTEC) comprising of Presidents and Past Presidents of the participating Clubs. TM. Horace Caviness of Riyadh Toastmasters was elected as the 1st Chairman of GTEC. The other Toasters who served as GTEC chairpersons were TM. Enola Thomas (Riyadh - 1994) and TM. Vijay Bolor (Manama - 1995).

In the early of 1996, TM Horace Caviness (Riyadh) promoted the idea of the formation a 'Territorial Council' for the Gulf region with the Presidents and Vice Presidents of Education as its executive committee members (this is among the first steps towards the formation of a Toastmasters District), and which was welcomed by all members. Thus GULF TOASTMASTERS COUNCIL (GTC), with 9 clubs was formed. Later, as and when Toastmasters Clubs were formed in U.A.E., Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan and Oman, they also joined G.T.C.

Toastmaster Mathews P. Kurien of Oasis was elected as the first Governor (1996 – 1999 – 2 terms) of ‘Gulf Toastmasters Council’. The other Toastmasters who served as GTC Governors are: Toastmaster Manoj Megchiani (Doha – 1999 - 2001) and Toastmaster Janaki Prasad Pattanaik, (Riyadh – 2001-2002), Toastmaster A. Ponnuchamy (ICSF – 2002-2003) and Toastmaster Mohammad Murad, (Dubai – 2003-2004), Toastmaster Intiaz Ahmed (Jubail, Saudi Arabia- 2004 2005). Then several Toastmaster leaders served as District-79 Governor including Vijay Bloor from Bahrain, Sonny Varghese from Qatar, RK Radhakrishnan UAE, Philip D’Milio from Bahrain, George Thomas from Qatar and later was elected as International Director , and finally our first woman District Governor Uma Radhakrishnan from UAE who later served as Region-11 Advisor.

While in 1989 it was just a joint meeting of 3 Toastmasters Clubs of Bahrain and Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, over the years GTAC has steadily but surely developed into one among the biggest events of the Toastmasters Calendar with Toastmaster members of about 100 clubs spread in seven countries all over the middle-east; next only to the ‘Toastmasters International Annual Conference’ held once in an year involving Toastmasters from all over the world. Every year, all the member clubs of GTC meet at the GULF TOASTMASTERS ANNUAL CONFERENCE (GTAC).

Until 1991, the meetings were conducted as normal Toastmasters Joint meetings. From 1992 onwards (until 2002 – In the District Council meeting, it was decided to drop Evaluation Contest from District Contest to find more time for Educational seminars and Workshops), 4 Toastmasters Contests (viz. International Speech, Humorous Speech, Table Topics and Evaluation) were held.

Just as Dr. Ralph C. Smedley organized the 1st Toastmasters meeting to help the community in interpersonal communication, which has over the last 80 years transformed in to the leading movement with more than 9000 member clubs spread over 110 countries serving more than 3 million people, the first joint meeting of 3 Toastmasters Clubs held in 1989 in Bahrain has now resulted in a Toastmasters District (District 79) with a phenomenal growth more than 200 member clubs spread all over the middle-east with more than 5000 members enabling them to develop and enhance their communication and leadership skills.

The phenomenal growth of Toastmasters movement in the region in quantity and quality has resulted in the reformation of District 79 into two separate districts, D-79 in Saudi Arabia and D-20 which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Oman, Jordan and Lebanon. Both districts have shown great potential of growth and proven record of being among the best Districts within the ‘Toastmasters International’. It’s not surprising both district have already produced champion speakers and Leaders and will celebrate soon having the first leader DTM Mohammed Murad as the International President.

District-79 has become number one in the world just one year after its reformation led by the first District Governor DTM Khaled Matlagaitu and has grown into a very successful district the second year by keeping its legacy as President Distinguished led by visionary leader DTM Nazeer Gazaq Alqasem who helped transform its operation using state of the

art technology to conduct business meetings and election. The legacy of District-79 being President Distinguished continued under the leadership of District Governor DTM Saif Ali Sheikh in 2014. We are sure current leadership led by District Governor DTM Joey Villanueva will continue the legacy of great achievements and keep our beloved district as one of the best in the world.