

Los Oradores Toastmasters

Where Every Word of Spanish or English Counts

Los Oradores thrives as a bilingual club!

"¡Hola! ¿Cómo estás?" "Bien, good. How are you?" Wander into a Los Oradores Toastmasters meeting and you'll hear Spanish and English spoken—sometimes more Spanish, sometimes more English, depending on the evening.

"We're pretty laid back about this," said Sal Salgado, a founding member. "We're a bilingual club, and members are welcome to speak in either language. Sometimes members want to practice their second language and sometimes they want to improve their speaking skills in their first language."

It all works for Los Oradores. Members believe it is this welcoming spirit and low-stress environment that keeps people coming to the club.

Beginnings

The group was started in 1989 by Enrique Peña, a small business owner who came to Iowa from Colombia to attend college and stayed; Bertha Murillo, a Pioneer Hybrid International employee who emigrated from Mexico as a young bride; and Sal Salgado, a business owner whose parents emigrated from Mexico to West Des Moines before he was born.

All had been active in Toastmaster's clubs. "We felt there was a need to offer leadership and public speaking training in Spanish as well as English," said Peña.

"I felt Los Oradores would serve as a welcoming group for bilingual individuals, as well as those at all levels of Spanish and English," added Murillo. "It would be a place where people might find

automatic acceptance of who they are."

The founders were soon joined by Marilyn Miller, who owned a translation business and had lived in Colombia as a student, and by a number of Pioneer employees. Members were Latinos from Mexico, Chile, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Colombia along with Anglos with a strong interest in Spanish.

"I joined because it was a great opportunity to keep up my Spanish," said Miller. "Equally important, it feels like a family that always welcomes and values newcomers."

Others have joined the club over the years because they needed a place to practice the Spanish they were learning in school or adult education classes.

"We studied so hard to learn Spanish as adults," said longtime member Lee Wolf. "My wife and I feared we'd forget it all unless we kept practicing." The couple visited the club and found not only the practice they needed, but also a group of new friends.

Benefits

One of the benefits of being a bilingual club is that new people are always being drawn to the club. "People do come and go," said Dayna Weltzin, a past president. "We have a core group of members who have been with Los Oradores for years, but there are always people who move out of the area and new people who come into the group."

Another benefit is the mix of cultural backgrounds, ages and occupations. "We're such a varied

Los Oradores

- *Bilingual Spanish/English Club*
- *Meets at the Urbandale Public Library*
- *Meets 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month at 6:30 PM*

Los Oradores welcomes individuals at all levels of Spanish and English



Past president Clemen Wilcox came to the United States from Colombia.



"We felt there was a need to offer leadership and public speaking training in Spanish as well as English," says founding member Enrique Peña,

group," continued Weltzin. "We have members from all walks and stages of life—from those who are just starting their careers to members who have retired. It's a great mix of people."

It's the Toastmasters format that makes all this possible. Members grow not only through speaking their second language, but also through the many opportunities to take on leadership roles.

Immediate past president Clemen Wilcox remembers her start. "Since I didn't speak any English, I came to Los Oradores looking for people who could speak my language. What I found was a fantastic group of people who could help me grow in my second language, improve my speaking skills, and who have become like a family to me."

A Social Group

Members of Los Oradores enjoy each other's company. After

each meeting, members of the group gather at a local Mexican restaurant for dinner or a snack.

"It's the combination of our regular meetings with their interesting speeches and table topics and our 'meeting after the meeting' that forges such close bonds," said Mindy Uhle, current president. "We sit around the table laughing and talking in Spanish and English about our lives, languages, the differences and similarities between our countries of origin, and the topics of the day. It's fun."

Los Oradores Offers Encouragement

"We'd like to encourage anyone who wants to start a bilingual Toastmasters club," said Miller. "We'd be happy to answer questions or help you strategize."

Los Oradores can be found at the following Web site: www.langtechinc.com/losoradores

Starting a Spanish/English club

1. Partner with members of both communities—Latino & Anglo.
2. Create a new club with a new culture, or commit yourself to changing the culture of your club.
3. Recruit members interested in learning and speaking a second language.
4. Recruit members who currently speak a second language.
5. Identify language resources in your community and let them know about your club.
6. Welcome guests and allow them to visit as often as they like before joining.
7. Publicize your new club.

Please feel free to contact us for more information.

*Mindy Uhle – President
mindyuhle@yahoo.com*

*Marilyn Miller – Vice-President
davidnmarilyn@msn.com*

*Clemen Wilcox – Past President
clemen@langtechinc.com*

*Forrest Corson
forrest.corson@langtechinc.com*

Visitors are always welcome at our meetings.