

The image shows the top section of the OregonLive.com website. On the left is the OregonLive.com logo. To its right is a banner for Campbell's Light soups with the text "Watch your weight and your budget at the same time." and "So many, many reasons it's so... M'm! M'm! Good!®". Below the banner is a search bar with "Site Search" and "Search Local Business Listings" tabs, and a "Go" button. A navigation menu follows with categories: Home, News, Opinion, Sports, Entertainment, Living, Interact, Jobs, Autos, Real Estate, Classifieds, Shop, Place An Ad. A secondary menu includes: News, Business, Education, Environment, Metro, Obits, Photos, Politics, Special Coverage, US & World, Weather, more News. Below the menu is a map of Oregon with a red dot in the Clackamas County area, and the text "CLACKAMAS COUNTY NEWS Oregon local news from Happy Valley, Lake Oswego, Milwaukie, Oregon City and West Linn".

From student to master of art of public speaking

by Nicole Dungca, *The Oregonian*
Thursday September 03, 2009, 5:00 AM

Seeing 39-year-old Gary Schmidt in an interview is seeing a man in rapture.

Absent are the nervous habits that plague the average person: hand-wringing, "ums," "ahs," babbling responses.

Instead, each answer is accompanied by a wide, almost mischievous, smile, as if Schmidt has just thought of the perfect anecdote for your question -- and most of the time, he has.

It's hard to believe this is the same guy who did so badly at one job interview that the interviewer suggested a visit to Toastmasters International, the 85-year-old organization targeted at improving public speaking and leadership skills.

Fourteen years after joining Toastmasters, the once-bumbling, self-conscious Milwaukie native has become the organization's president and a testament to the program's potential.

"The power of Toastmasters is really embodied in Gary," said Dorothy Cottingham, a fellow Toastmaster who has known Schmidt for more than 10 years.

When she first met him at a districtwide training session, he hardly spoke and seemed terrified of saying something wrong. These days, Schmidt, a public affairs manager for Clackamas County, is the one bringing up innovative ideas at meetings.

"He used to be the one who would hang back, but now he's moving forward and putting his hand out first to meet people," she said.

Schmidt, who is single and lives in Clackamas, grew up in Milwaukie. After he graduated from Lewis and Clark College with both a bachelor's and a master's degree, he went on multiple job interviews that made him feel hopeless.

Over the years, three separate mentions of Toastmasters -- one from the job interviewer, another from a self-help book and another from a close friend -- brought him to the club's doorstep. On a Thursday night in 1995, Schmidt attended his first meeting of a Clackamas County chapter.

The first few sessions were traumatizing, he said.

Members had to give various speeches, some prepared and others on the fly. He was sure he wouldn't return to the club after the first meeting, but a personal call from another club member persuaded him to stay. Toastmasters soon became a Thursday night ritual.

He worked on becoming more confident by looking people in the eye, slowing his pace and calming his nerves.

His improvements made people take notice. When he joined former Sen. Gordon Smith's office in 1999, he was the quiet co-worker who only spoke when prompted. Over time, Schmidt became a communications point man, speaking on behalf of the senator at public events and leading various forums.

"Gordon always joked that people enjoyed seeing Gary speak more than seeing him," said Kerry Tymchuck, Schmidt's former supervisor who served as the state director for 12 years.

Longtime Toastmaster members know Schmidt's ability to listen will help him mold the organization into what members want it to be. His age will also help attract younger candidates to a club with a median age of 45.

The most important goal for Schmidt is helping other Toastmaster members achieve their goals - - whether it's being able to speak in front of a small group or gain more leadership skills.

And, of course, he is hoping to keep learning from the club.

"No matter how good you get," Schmidt said, "you can always get better."

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