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## Toast of the Town - Manager receives national leadership award

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By **Larry D. McCaskill (Army Contracting Command)**



*Photo credit* **Larry D. McCaskill (Army Contracting Command)**

*A recipient of Toastmasters International's Excellence in Leadership Award, Lillian Cooke uses her speaking ability and leadership skills in her personal and professional life.*

*For Lillian Cooke, making an acceptance speech is anything but a traumatic or stressful experience. For her, it's second nature.*

*The deputy resource manager with the Expeditionary Contracting Command, Cooke is the recipient of Toastmasters International's Excellence in Leadership Award. The award was presented to Cooke at the Toastmasters International Convention this summer in Connecticut.*

*The award is presented to district governors whose districts have met the goals in club growth, membership growth, competent communicator awards and advanced communicator awards for three or more years, as established by Toastmasters International.*

*According to Suzanne Frey, Toastmasters International Public Relations Office, the award is presented for outstanding leadership and continuity of achievement that helps Toastmasters International make effective communication a worldwide reality. As the district governor for District 27, Cooke reigns over more than 220 clubs with approximately 4,000 members extending throughout Northern Virginia, Southern D.C., and Southern Maryland.*

*"I've had the pleasure of working directly with Lillian for the past two years and have known her for a few more," said Kristin Nicholson, an International Director for Toastmasters International. "Lillian is a focused, dedicated volunteer who is committed to ensuring the success of those around her. She has the ability to flow easily through conflict and controversy to create an atmosphere of fun and success. Lillian is a team-builder and works to include others in planning and performance. Lillian has done an outstanding job for our organization, and I believe she would bring enthusiasm and outstanding results to any future endeavor she commits herself to."*

*Cooke has been involved with Toastmasters for more than 10 years. Her first involvement occurred via persistence.*

*"I went to a meeting to get a friend of mine to stop bugging me about going to the meetings," said Cooke. "I was already a professional speaker. And I thought to myself, the evaluations will make me a better speaker so why not."*

*Toastmaster's evaluations include identifying a speaker's strengths and offering suggestions for improvements.*

*"Weaknesses are a negative and we don't do negatives in Toastmasters," she said with a slight giggle. Life has been very positive for Cooke in the organization. In the relatively short amount of time she's been with the group, she has accumulated numerous accolades.*

*She has received the District 40 Division Governor of the Year Award, the Excellence in Marketing Award, and the Excellence in Education and Training Award at various International Conventions.*

*"I've always been an extrovert because I learned to speak to groups and dialogue with people at a very young age," said Cooke, who found out early in life that public speaking could be profitable. "I began speaking in church from the time I was old enough to recite a poem or participate in the Christmas and Easter plays. Then I became a featured speaker at neighboring churches for their youth programs. The church to which I was invited would give me a topic or a Bible verse to speak about, and I would take it from there.*

*"I've never met a microphone that I didn't like," she said, flashing her trademark smile. Her Toastmaster's life has been influenced by many but she credits Jim Smith, a past international director, as having made the biggest impact on her.*

*"He decided to mentor me when I was a "green" Toastmaster just beginning on the leadership journey. He has a wealth of knowledge, and he is willing to share it with all," said Cooke.*

*She currently mentors the next crop of leaders. The Toastmasters' way is to mentor those coming up in order to ensure that future leaders have the necessary leadership tools to continue their tradition of excellence.*

Anyone interested in joining the organization can visit their website at **[www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)**.

