

**Toastmasters to Help Economic Fuel Participants
by Courtney Hunt-Munther, The Eureka Reporter
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Public speaking can be one of the most intimidating and dreaded tasks, which is why many people avoid it at all costs. But for those who have mastered it, public speaking can become a tool to better communicate in their personal and professional lives.

Toastmasters International groups help members learn the arts of speaking, thinking and listening. Through practice and constructive criticism, members learn to think on their feet and articulate their thoughts, which in turn fosters self-confidence and personal growth, according to the Toastmasters Web site (www.toastmasters.org).

For entrepreneurs, developing communication skills can breathe life their businesses, inspiring employees or potential investors, which is why on March 27, local Toastmasters will help participants in the Economic Fuel student business challenge prepare for the upcoming elevator pitch segment of the competition.

From 6 to 9 p.m., Economic Fuel participants are encouraged to take part in an elevator pitch practice featuring several panels of local Toastmasters who will listen to each team's two-minute business presentation and give immediate feedback.

Each participating team will then regroup and present their pitch to a different panel of Toastmasters, taking into consideration the feedback they just received.

In all, four separate Toastmaster panels will judge the Economic Fuel teams' elevator pitches, helping to prepare them for the judged speeches the following day.

Economic Fuel coordinators organized this event to provide a forum for participants to hone their speaking skills and prepare to respond to questions the panel may have. The event will be held at HSU's Natural Resources Building, Room 101. For more information, visit www.economicfuel.org.

Toastmasters is making a difference in communities all around the world, including Humboldt County, which boasts three clubs — two that meet in Eureka and one in Fortuna. Area Gov. Rebecca Kimbel, who joined the organization just over two years ago, believes the

organization makes a profound impact on many levels of a person's life.

"It's designed to help each and every individual gain self-confidence and find their personal excellence," she said. "If you have good communication skills you'll have good relationships, you'll develop an empathy for listening ... you'll develop an understanding for people's needs."

For business owners, Kimbel believes leadership and communication are absolutely essential, particularly when it comes to inspiring employees and creating an economically viable enterprise.

"If you're a good employer, you must have good leadership skills because you want to make your employees find personal satisfaction in their job," Kimbel said. "When you can provide that, you have a better company, better relationships. It affects your money as well as your life."

Mark Bailey, the president of the Eureka Lunch-Bunch Toastmasters, agreed with Kimbel and added that the public speaking side of the organization is also critical for entrepreneurs.

"You never know when you're going to be asked to say something that might be important," Bailey said. "It's important to get it right the first time because you may not have a second chance."