

District 56 and a History of Toastmasters in Texas

District 56 was officially created as a result of a north-south split of District 25 along the 31° North Latitude on July 1, 1957. This was designed to be at the beginning of the 1957 – 1958 term for both District 25 and 56.

But you cannot tell the full history of District 56 without going back to the history of Toastmasters in the state of Texas and Dr. Louis Tompkins of Wichita Falls, Texas. We could not have known it in 1948, but just as Texas retained the right to split into 5 states when it first joined the union, the original Texas Toastmasters District (# 25) began a 50 year journey with as few as 12 clubs, but with a destiny of growth that would allow it to eventually become five different successful Toastmaster districts before the end of the 20th Century.

The Texas District

Dr. Louis E. Tompkins was a very determined man. You could see it in his face and the way he walked. With his short-cropped hair and his Germanic features, one would think he was a football coach or a successful farmer. Only his hands would indicate his true profession. As he walked back to his office on that cool fall day in Wichita Falls, Texas in 1948, this very busy and successful dentist was very happy. He had just received word from Toastmasters International founder, Dr. Ralph Smedley, that the widely scattered clubs in the whole state of Texas and part of Louisiana had been granted their charter as Toastmasters District 25. For three years Dr. Tompkins had been a faithful attendee at Toastmasters International conventions, having begun as a charter member of the Wichita Falls Toastmasters Club, which was started in April 1945. Because he knew the Toastmasters organization at all levels and had spearheaded the drive to obtain the district charter, Dr. Tompkins was named as the first District Governor of this new district.

There were only twelve clubs in this new district in 1948. Because of the large area the district encompassed, it was going to be difficult to govern them. One of these 12 clubs was club # 505 which was active then and remains active in Houston, Texas today. Up to this time, many of the clubs operated independently of each other. The structure of the meetings was different from club to club. Dr. Tompkins knew the job was going to be difficult, but he was excited about the challenge. He knew what Toastmasters training had done for his life and he wanted to share it with others and to help the organization grow in Texas.

He sent a telegram to the president of each club, informing each of them of the good news, urging them to increase their membership, and to start making plans for their first district conference. Dr. Tompkins visited several of the clubs during his term, which lasted more than a year, trying to mold the clubs into the desired structure.

When their first District 25 Conference was held in Dallas in 1950, the district had 19 clubs. At that conference, Joe A. Shirley was elected as the new District Governor.

District 44 is Created for West Texas

By the time Dr. Tompkins handed the reins of the district to Joe Shirley, it was clear to him that the district was too large. Many of the clubs were in the northeast part of the state and the Shreveport Club was large, and some clubs were in Houston and several more in far west Texas. There were hundreds of miles between the clubs of north and west Texas, with no clubs in between. Discussion with the leaders of the west Texas clubs revealed a desire to establish their own district, and plans were made accordingly.

In 1953, District 25 voted to split into two districts with the creation of District 44 in the western part of the state, effective July 1, 1954. Districts 25 and 44 each had their own district governor for the 1954 – 1955 term.

District 56 is Created for South Texas

During the 1954 – 1955 term, District 25 still proved to be too large. The successful creation of District 44 proved that smaller districts could be governed more effectively. Smaller districts also provided more opportunities for leadership training. So, just three years later, on September 15, 1956, at a District Council meeting at the Melrose Hotel in Dallas, Texas, District 25 Governor Vic Ballowe gave a status report on dividing the district once again. At that meeting, the following resolution was adopted unanimously:

- RESOLVED that District 25 shall be divided into two districts, 25A to be known as the Northern District and 25B to be known as the Southern District, as of October 1, 1956.
- The dividing line shall be a point fifteen (15) miles north from DeRidder, Louisiana, west to a point fifteen (15) miles south of Temple; thence west to the line of District 44.
- All funds shall be divided January 1, 1957, upon the ratio of number of active clubs in each reformed district.
- District Governor Vic Ballowe will act in a supervisory capacity during the year as the two sections of District 25 ready themselves for separate operations. Lieutenant Governor Smith will head the Northern Section and Lieutenant Governor Polsen will head the Southern Section, assuming the duties normally required of the District Governor.

The split off of District 56 was more formally established on July 1, 1957. It was given the number "56" by Toastmasters International. The new northern district was allowed to retain the number "25". The new boundaries of District 25 were designated as follows:

DISTRICT 25

- On the North by the Texas-Oklahoma boundary
- On the east by a North-South line approximately 29 miles east of Shreveport, Louisiana
- On the South by the 31st Parallel
- On the West by a North-South line approximately 40 miles west of Wichita Falls

Later in 1981, the western boundary of district 25 was expanded slightly by encompassing all of Wilbarger County, at the expense of District 44.

This new southern district (now called District 56) included all of South Texas (Houston, Galveston, Pasadena, Beaumont, San Antonio, and Austin). The exact number of clubs in District 56 when it was established is not known. The first District Governor was Alston McAnear, a member of the Houston CPA Toastmasters club. As far as we know, we have only one club left in District 56 that was also a part of District 25 when Houston was. High Noon Toastmasters (club # 505) was chartered on August 1, 1947 and may have been called the Nooners in 1957.

In August 1957 and immediately after the split, the geographically smaller but more efficient District 25, with 41 clubs and 781 members, hosted the 26th Annual International Convention in Dallas, Texas. International Director J. O. Grantham from Waco, Texas and Bob Smith from Dallas, who had attended the 1956 International Convention in Detroit, Michigan, headed the steering Committee for the Dallas International Convention. Note that the International Convention would not be held in Dallas again until 1990 when District 25 with 203 clubs and 4,258 members would host the event, and District 56's David Brooks would become the World Champion of Public Speaking.

District 56 – The First 10 Years (1957 – 1967)

It was during this decade (1964) that Toastmasters issued the very first Able Toastmasters Award (ATM). Times, they were a changing.

The first decade of District 56's existence saw growth in membership. District 56 started with 60 Toastmaster clubs. The district was divided into the Eastern Division, Western Division, and the Southern Division. The Eastern Division was

made of up clubs in Houston. The Western Division was made up of clubs in San Antonio and Austin. The Southern Division was created to facilitate the formation of clubs from Victoria southward to the Rio Grande Valley, which included two Mexican clubs ... one in Matamoras and one in Monterey.

District 56 – The Second 10 Years (1967 – 1977)

In the second decade, the district gained ten clubs. Additional growth that occurred in Austin necessitated the formation of the Northern Division. Also, during this decade the first district-level Evaluation contest and the first district-level Table Topics contest ever to be held in Toastmasters International were held in District 56.

Toastmasters itself was doing some pretty basic changing during this decade and moving quickly in the direction of the organization that we know today. It was in 1968 that the first Competent Toastmaster (CTM) Award was issued for completing the Basic Manual. In August of 1969, the first Communication and Leadership Manual was introduced at the International Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. This was followed by the very first Distinguished Toastmaster Award (DTM) issued in 1970.

In August of 1973, Houston, Texas hosted the 42nd annual Toastmasters International Conference at the famous Shamrock Hotel. Delegates made history with their decision that Toastmasters would allow women to become members.

Toastmasters remained nearly all male until around 1980 and the very last all-male club in Houston did not actually admit a woman member until around 1987. That last all-male District 56 holdout, Sharpstown Toastmasters (club # 2243), remains a successful club today with plenty of women members.

On July 1, 1977 and as our second decade came to a close, only 15 of the Houston area Toastmaster clubs that existed on that date, would still be in existence in 2004. The 15 clubs listed below are an important part of our heritage and our past. Nine of these clubs were created during our second decade of existence.

The list of the 15 oldest clubs from those who were still active and meeting here in District 56 in 2004, are as follows:

Club Name	Club Number	Charter Date
High Noon	505	01-Aug-47
Southwestern	2995	01-May-59
JSC	3116	01-Mar-60
Sharpstown	2243	01-Mar-63
Silver Tongue	1620	01-Sep-63
Greater Houston	2386	01-Jul-65
Greenway	2280	01-Feb-70
Park 10 Talkers	2359	01-Jun-72
Daybreakers	839	01-Jan-74
Clear Lake Toastmasters	43	01-Jun-74
Elocutioners	2208	01-Jul-74
Easy Risers	109	01-Sep-74
1960 North Houston	2659	01-Apr-75
Sunrise	2468	01-Oct-75
Spaceland	745	01-Feb-76

District 56 – The Third 10 Years (1977 – 1987)

The third decade for District 56 included more growth. The district nearly doubled in the number of clubs with a total membership in excess of 3,500. This growth required reorganization. The district was reorganized into five divisions (Gulf Coast, Central, Eastern, Western, and Northern). These five divisions represented 31 areas.

Pat London was the Select Distinguished District 56 Governor during the term marking the 30th Anniversary of the district.

District 56 – The Fourth Decade (1987 – 1997)

During the fourth decade of District 56, several exciting things took place. District 56 worked itself from being the world's number 13 district in the world in 1986 to a high of the fourth district in the world according to Toastmasters International's ranking. District 56 earned the designation as "Distinguished District" for eight of ten years for this decade. Membership soared in more than 200 clubs. During this decade division boundaries were again redrawn ... this time into ten divisions, which were designated by the letters G through P. This decade also marked the establishment of Toastmasters University, which was renamed as Leadership and Management Program (LAMP).

It was also during this fourth decade, that three new and special District 56 awards were created in order to help allow the District Governor to recognize excellence in the district.

The first of these awards was created in May of 1988. The BERT MANN SPIRIT OF SUCCESS AWARD is given in memory of Bertam H. Mann, DTM, PID. Bert was an example of “spirit of success.” Throughout his career as a patent attorney, he brought his Toastmasters experience into leadership positions of civic, church, and community organizations. This award is given to a District 56 Toastmaster who works unselfishly year after year on behalf of Toastmasters.

The second of these awards was created in August of 1989. The DAVID ABEL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE AWARD is given in memory of Toastmaster David J. Abel, DTM. Toastmaster Abel, of Austin Texas, was District 56 Governor for 1985 – 1986 and he always inspired and challenged everyone to the highest level of performance. It is awarded to a District 56 Toastmaster for exemplary achievement in either professional performance or performance of responsibilities.

The third of these awards was created in May of 1994. The SUZY GORMLEY AWARD is given in honor of Maxine Sue Gormley, DTM (September 3, 1946 – June 8, 1991). Suzy was born with a heart disease, but was not bound by the disease. She was a remarkable woman who served as a benchmark for many Toastmasters. In spite of the illness, she lived every moment to its fullness. She was committed to Toastmasters and served as District 56 Governor for 1982 - 1983. This award is given to a District 56 Toastmaster who serves in spite of medical difficulties.

District 56 International Directors

Joe Westerlage	1968 - 1970
John Shultz	1974 - 1976
John Staha	1976 - 1978
Alene Hayes	1993 - 1995
Jean Riggs	1996 - 1998
John Smelser	2001 - 2003

Additionally, during the first forty-five years of District 56, six Toastmasters from the district served as International Directors: Joe Westerlage (Houston), John Shultz (Houston), John Staha (Austin), Alene Haynes (Houston), Jean Riggs (Deer Park), and John Smelser (Richmond).

By the end of the 4th decade, District 56 had at least two International Speech World Champions: Charles Stewart and David Brooks. On July 1, 1997 as our fourth decade came to a close, only 73 of the Toastmaster clubs that existed on that date, would still be in existence in 2004.

District 50 is Created in the North

All the while that District 56 was growing, our parent district to the north was doing exactly the same thing. District 25 grew at a healthy rate until it peaked in 1966 with 61 clubs and 1,237 members. After that year, except for minor increases occurring in isolated years, the number of clubs and the total membership suffered a fairly steady decline until District 25 bottomed out in 1976 with 41 clubs and 872 members. Then under the leadership of District 25 Governor Dick Dodds (1977 - 1978), the number of clubs increased to 48 and the membership jumped to 1,039. From that point on, District 25 has enjoyed tremendous growth with an increase in the number of clubs each year often exceeding the total number of clubs in existence at the time of its founding in 1948 (12 clubs). On November 2, 1991, the District 25 Council once again voted to pursue dividing the district. Keeping Dr. Tompkins' home club # 305 Wichita Falls in District 25, the Eastern section was designated as District 50.

The boundaries that took effect on July 1, 1994 were as follows:

DISTRICT 25

- On the North by the Texas-Oklahoma boundary
- On the East from the Texas-Oklahoma boundary southerly along the Eastern boundary of Cooke and Denton Counties, the Western side of I35E within Dallas County, the Eastern boundary of Johnson, Hill, McLennan, and Falls counties.
- On the South by the 31st Parallel
- On the West by a North-South line approximately 40 miles west of Wichita Falls, except including all of Wilbarger County.

DISTRICT 50

- On the North by the Texas-Oklahoma boundary
- On the East by the Texas-Arkansas, Texas-Louisiana boundary, except including all of Caddo and Bossier Parishes in Louisiana.
- On the South by the 31st Parallel
- On the West from the Texas-Oklahoma boundary southerly along the Western boundary of Grayson and Collin counties, the Eastern side of I35E within Dallas County, the Western boundary of Ellis, Navarro, Limestone and Robertson counties.

The dividing up of our parent district to the north did nothing but show District 56 the way things were to be in the south part of Texas as well.

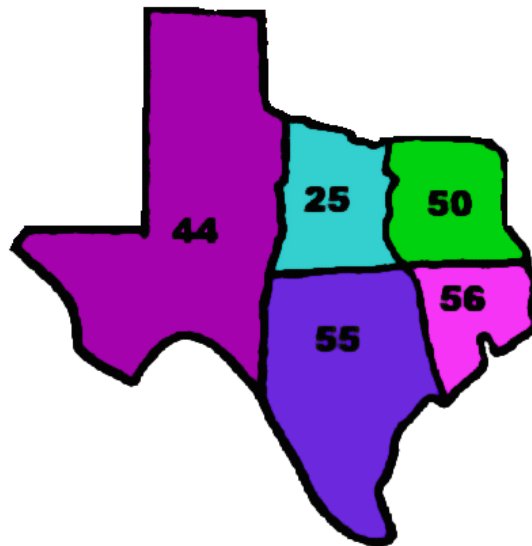
District 56 – The Fifth Decade (1997 – 2007)

District 55 is Created as District 56 Splits

In the fifth decade of District 56 (July 1, 1997) and only 3 years after the split between 25 and 50, District 56 was split east-west into two districts. The new district formed was called District 55 on the west side of the former district (San Antonio, Austin, and Corpus Christi). To the east, District 56 included all the clubs in Houston and the surrounding areas. It was after this east-west split, that the legal description for the boundaries of District 56 became:

- Northern: 31° North Latitude
 Western: From the Northern District boundary and the Brazos River, South on the Brazos River to State Highway 1093 to State Highway 60, including all of Bay City, South on State Highway 60 to the Gulf of Mexico.
 Eastern: the Eastern edge of the State of Texas excluding Jefferson and Orange Counties.
 Southern: the Gulf of Mexico.

In this case, the District 56 identity remained on the east side due to the presence of the High Noon Toastmasters club in Houston, Texas. High Noon Toastmasters (# 505) was the oldest club in District 56. Founded on August 1, 1947 before any Toastmaster District existed in Texas, it remains one of the older clubs in Texas.



By July 1, 1997, the old Texas district of Dr. Louis E. Tompkins had officially become five full districts and now made up 5 of the 9 Toastmaster districts that are included in Region III. Some of the smaller border details are not included in this history, and remain information that still needs to be researched. This includes how District 44 obtained a small piece of the Oklahoma panhandle and

gave up El Paso, Texas to District 23 in New Mexico. It is also not known when Louisiana District 68 obtained one of the counties in east Texas.

John Smelser was the 1997 – 1998 District Governor during the 40th Anniversary of District 56, in addition to being the first post-split District 56 Governor. He was able to achieve a “Distinguished” status to help celebrate that anniversary. After that year, District 56 began a steady drop in membership and clubs for the next three terms, due in part to two elected LGM’s having to drop off of the district staff before the end of their terms ... both of these were due to family matters.

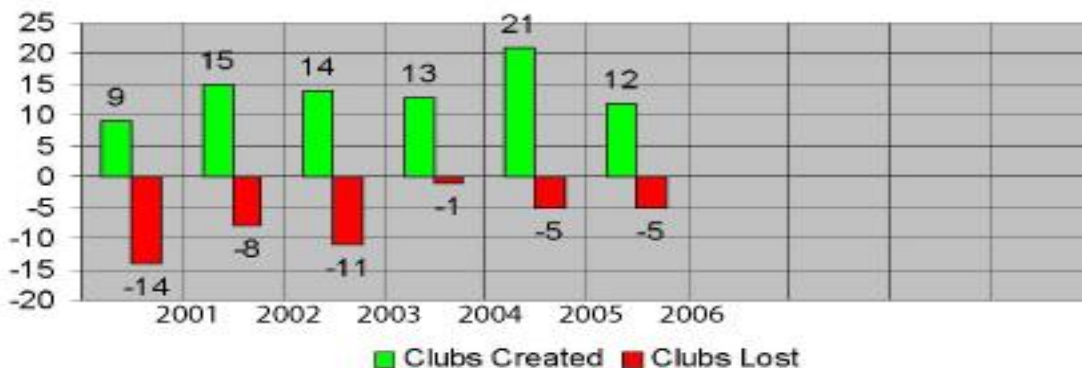
Under District Governor, Sharon Sharp, District 56 hosted the June 2002 Region III Conference in Galveston, Texas.

District 56 Reverses a Period of Decline in Membership

The 21st Century arrives, and the decline in the number of District 56 clubs was halted and reversed. Marcia Hudgens was the first full-term District 56 Governor in the 21st Century (2001 – 2002), and she was assisted by then LGM John Moffitt who received his LGM training under Senior International Director John Smelser. Marcia Hudgens became a Distinguished District Governor on the world stage in August of 2002.

The following term (2002 – 2003) saw an elected district governor move away from the district, the LGET (John Moffitt) become an “acting district governor” for much of the term, and finally the appointment of a previous district governor (Kevin C. Smith) to head up the district leadership for the last 2 ½ months of the term. Kevin had not achieved “distinguished” during his previous term as district governor and took the helm with fresh legs and clearly some determination. Under Kevin’s leadership, the district was able to be distinguished for a second term in a row.

John Moffitt took office as District 56 governor on July 1, 2003. He was able to close out his three years in district leadership by leading District 56 to Select Distinguished Status for 2003 – 2004, as well as having all 6 divisions at President’s Distinguished and 19 of 20 Area Governors at Distinguished or better. Club growth in this term was achieved more by keeping the existing clubs than by starting new clubs.



District 56 then received the Excellence in Leadership Award for having been Distinguished or better for three years in a row, the first in District 56 since Ferol Beer's 1992-1993 team.

Max Rasquinha followed up in the 2004 – 2005 term with another Select Distinguished Status, narrowly missing President's Distinguished by just a few points and one position in rank. District 56 received a second Excellence in Leadership Award in as many years.

Allen Prescott's 2005 – 2006 team continued with the growth in both members and clubs, but the Toastmaster's International President would not allow District 56 to receive distinguished status as a district and a third Excellence in Leadership Award. History would prove that this disappointment would not slow down or stop the continuing growth for Toastmasters in southeast Texas.

Toastmasters International introduced a change to the educational awards as the Competent Toastmaster Award became the Competent Communicator Award and the Advanced Toastmaster Awards became the Advanced Communicator Awards. The meaning of the Competent Leader Award was changed and a separate Competent Leader Manual was introduced. In addition, the Advanced Leader Award was expanded into the Advanced Leader Bronze and Advanced Leader Silver Awards.

50 BY 50 FOR 56

In January of 2004, District 56 started "50 by 50 for 56," a program to achieve 50 new DTMs by the 50th anniversary of the District in 2007-2008. To the delight of the District, this goal was completed early, in December 2006. On May 5, 2007, the District took special pride in honoring those who stepped up to the challenge and completed their DTM during the last three and one-half years. During a special ceremony at the 2007 Spring Conference, each of the 50 DTMs received a gold-colored, Texas-shaped DTM badge.

District 56 – The Sixth Decade (2007 – 2017)