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# Local restaurant owners recognized by Toastmasters International

**Dale Woodard**

LETHBRIDGE HERALD

It's an honour worth raising a glass to.

For their efforts uniting their employees to become proficient, confident public speakers and communicators, Toastmasters International has recognized McDonalds Restaurant owners Jordan and Julie Brown with the Corporate Recognition Award for their involvement in the Eyeopener Toastmasters Club.

Jordan and Julie were presented the award via a Zoom conference by Toastmasters International First Vice-President Matt Kinsey Tuesday afternoon.

"(Tuesday) was our bi-weekly meeting," said Jordan. "Matt tuned in from Florida to join us. It was an honour to have him as a special guest. He did the award presentation. We did get a brief heads up, but it is still a shock and surprise. We never expected this."

The McEyeopener Toastmaster Club has a satellite club made up of 14 employees from the Coal-dale, Brooks and Taber McDonalds restaurants.

"It's something we've added to complement our company's own learning and development program to help us improve our public speaking as well as leadership skills," said Jordan, who started the McEyeopener Club in January.

Jordan joined Toastmasters roughly five years ago in Lethbridge at the Eyeopener Club.

At the time he was working at a McDonalds in Lethbridge under his father's company and met Chuck and Bev Leblanc, president and vice president, respectively, of the Eyeopener Toastmasters Club, who were doing leadership training.

"At that time I didn't know what to expect or what it was,"

said Jordan. "I said I would come check out a meeting and I ended up joining the club. From there, it was a cool environment to practise things and learn and develop."

Toastmasters International is a worldwide non-profit educational organization which helps individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.

The organization's membership exceeds 358,000 in more than 16,800 clubs in 143 countries and since 1924, Toastmasters International has helped people from diverse backgrounds become more confident speakers, communicators and leaders.

When Jordan became an operator at McDonalds he decided to incorporate his Toastmasters experience into his staff.

"I told myself I would love to be able to share this experience with my team," he said.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the McEyeopeners Club had to meet via Zoom conferences.

"It provided the opportunity for us to try this online," said Jordan. "So we started our McEyeopener Club a few months ago just as an opportunity to have the team practise speaking."

Jordan said a lot of his team members are new to Canada.

"So English is actually a second language for them. Just the opportunity to learn to speak in front of others and practise English has been a big growth opportunity and a confidence booster," he said. "The way I would describe (Toastmasters) is it's a group of friends that get together and meet weekly or bi-weekly and have fun while learning how to develop into a more proficient speaker. While you're doing that you'll also learn leadership skills and skills such as how to lead a meeting, how to provide and receive feedback and how to run a club and serve on a board. There are a ton of leadership skills that can

be developed along the way and I think the key thing is you learn this while having fun and making friends."

Jordan said there was initially a bit of resistance among his team members when he first introduced the Toastmaster concept.

"Initially they were asking 'We're going to do what?' There was some fear and uncertainty," he said. "Now that we're a few months into this you can tell the team is really enjoying it. We just finished a meeting a couple minutes ago and my phone has been lit up with texts from everybody saying it was a good time and they're looking forward to the next one. So I can tell there is some good positive energy building with it. Not only are we developing our own personal leadership skills, but I believe this Toastmasters Club is helping us gel as a team. I know that will eventually lead to us being better leaders in the workplace or better people at home or in the community. It just has a ripple affect in everybody's life."

Jordan said the McEyeopener Club continues to work with the Leblancs.

"They are still very involved and we couldn't do this without them."

Jordan said the hope is to one day see more McDonalds franchises partner with the Toastmasters.

"One of my dreams would be that we could make this a success that McDonalds sees is something special for our team and perhaps McDonalds looks to partner with the Toastmasters organization and form McDonalds clubs across Canada. That is definitely long term thinking, but I believe in what Toastmasters does and that it can help us in the workplace."

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