



**For Immediate Release**

**Media Contact:**

Philip Williams

(916)548-2496

[philip.williams@district39.org](mailto:philip.williams@district39.org)

## **Toastmaster Shares Personal Lessons Learned from Fighting Fires in Tahoe National Forest**

**TRUCKEE, CA, October 31, 2014** – With winter weather on its way to California, this year's fire season is drawing to a close. Veteran wildland firefighter Richard Ludke returned from the King Fire earlier this month.

The demands of wildland firefighting include hiking heavy gear into remote locations and combating uncontrolled blazes. In addition to physical strength and stamina, a firefighter needs to be a good leader and a clear communicator. "On a fire line, communication is key," Ludke said. "When you're on the radio, you need to paint a clear picture using the fewest amount of words."

Ludke spent more than a decade as a full-time wildland firefighter, but now works as a Safety and Occupational Health Manager for the US Forest Service, headquartered in Nevada City, and is only called upon about twice per year to fight fires in the field. When Ludke is called out to a fire, he helps to manage the plan of attack. He's responsible for the lives and safety of an entire team of firefighters.

Ludke credits his involvement in Toastmasters public speaking clubs for helping him hone his communication skills. He has learned how to express his ideas succinctly, as well as how to listen carefully.

"Extinguishing a fire is a war," Ludke said. "You cannot predict what it will do. You have to be cautious, trust in your troops, and they have to trust you." Firefighting is traditionally a militaristic environment where harsh, firm orders are given and obeyed. Recently, Ludke said he observed that softening his tone and showing care for others enhanced his effectiveness as a leader. "It's important that people actually want to follow you. When they do, they open up and provide information even when they don't have to. It helps build trust and respect." This was a lesson Ludke said he first learned while serving as an Area Governor for all of the Toastmasters clubs in his geographical area. "I realized that I wasn't really the boss. As a leader, you are actually working for the people below you, working to make them successful."

These lessons in communication and leadership were indispensable this fall, he said, when he was called to fight the King Fire. At one point, one of the firefighters became dehydrated and had to be evacuated from a hazardous location. Ludke's team determined that a helicopter evacuation was the best course of action in this particular instance. "Because of our clear, concise communication, and the trust established between myself and the paramedics, we were able to make the right decision very quickly."

Ludke is a member of Jibboom Street Toastmasters Club in Truckee.

### **About Toastmasters International**

Toastmasters International is a nonprofit educational organization that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of meeting locations. Headquartered in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, the organization's membership exceeds 292,000 in more than 14,350 clubs in 122 countries. Since 1924, Toastmasters International has helped people of all backgrounds become more confident in front of an audience. For information about local Toastmasters clubs, please visit [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org).

###