



18

Fall

Business

Meeting

September 14, 2025

District Director Catherine Damavandi called the meeting to order.

SAA and District Logistics Manager Beth Alemu read the disclaimer regarding Maryland's Wiretap and Electronics Surveillance Act and introduced District Director Catherine Damavandi.

Catherine recognized meeting officials:

Timer: Bea Vilme, District 18 co-webmaster

Zoom Master: Keisha Shepherd, District 18 co-webmaster

Credentials Chair: John Comberiate, DTM and Past District Director

Parliamentarian: Daisy W. Matthews

Beth read the District Mission.

Daisy reviewed the Rules of Order.

John gave the Credentials Report and Quorum Status. (For a quorum, one third of 103 club representatives must be present. There are 70 representatives in attendance, therefore quorum was achieved.) Additionally, 23 District Executive Committee (DEC) members are present, but they do not count achieving a quorum; John stated there are 93 ballots. Catherine called for objections; there were none, so the report was adopted.

Frederick Toastmasters club 1082 president Beth May inquired about a potential overlap; John stated there is an overlap between the district officers, presidents and Vice Presidents of Education (VPEs). The total votes are 93, but the total participant number is not 93.

Area 73 Director and DelDOT Toastmasters club 0776068 president Annamaria Furmato inquired about the number of votes she has, as she could only register under one office. John stated he has a master list of DEC members and officers have weighted votes based on the number of roles held.

Catherine reviewed the agenda and called for objections; there were none, so the agenda was adopted.

Daisy reviewed the voting procedures and election rules.

1. Adoption of the Spring 2025 Business Meeting Minutes

Catherine called for the adoption of the Spring 2025 Business Meeting Minutes. There were no corrections; the minutes were adopted. Catherine stated she is appointing a minute's approval committee consisting of Administration Manager Regina Pepper, Finance Manager Naomi Savaro, Chief Judge Sue Wilson and Area Director 52 Deborah Linton. The committee will collaborate, take and approve minutes, then distribute them to the District Executive Council within 30 days of today's meeting. The council can submit necessary corrections.

2. Confirm appointment of District Leaders

Catherine appointed the following members to open positions:

Division A:

Area 11 Director: Beth Alemu

Area 12 Director: Kathy Smart- Preston
Area 14 Director: Avnee Ingle
Area 15 Director: Heather Kokstein
Area 16 Director: Norma Johnson

Division C:

Area 32 Director: Antoine Gray
Area 33 Director: Bruce Arey
Area 34 Director: Lataunya Howard
Area 35 Director: Shawn Brumfield

Division D:

Area 41 Director: Alison Mee
Area 42 Director: James Bartlett
Area 43 Director: Unwoo Kang
Area 44 Director: Pat Norton

Division E:

Area 52 Director: Kathy Lipin
Area 53 Director: Carl Barsky
Area 54 Director: Diane Tichnell
Area 56 Director: Maureen Shanks

Division F:

Area 61 Director: Devonte McQueen
Area 62 Director: Jocelyn Tyson
Area 63 Director: Srinivasu Gorantla
Area 64 Director: Sudarshan Deshpande

Division G:

Area 71 Director: David Smith
Area 72 Director: Erick Darnell
Area 73 Director: Annamaria Furfato
Area 74 Director: Susanna Smith

Club Extension Chair: Ruth Miranda
Club Retention Chair: Terri Abramowitz
Club Coach Committee Chair: Nick Diplitch
Youth Leadership Resource Chair: Kemi Tomobi
Retention Committee Chair: Kemi Tomobi

District Chief Judges: Sue Wilson and Shehnaz Chaudhry
Finance Manager: Naomi Savaro
Administration Manager: Regina Pepper
Public Relations Manager: Felicia Rowe
Newsletter Managing Editors: Beth May and Christine Limparis
Webmasters: Keisha Shepherd and Bea Vilme
Parliamentarian: Daisy W. Matthews
Logistics Managers: Bea Vilme and Beth Alemu
Pathways Ambassador: Eric Darnell
Toastmasters Leadership Institute (TLI) Dean: Clyde Middleton

Catherine called for objections; there were none, so the list was adopted.

3. Adoption of the District Budget

A copy of the budget was emailed and posted on the district website. Finance Manager Naomi Savaro noted increases for area, division and TLI in person events, which will include drinks and snacks. The other change was an increased amount for the Hail and Farewell and holiday parties, as we had a larger membership than Toastmasters International (TI) projected. The increases here did not affect other budget items.

Catherine called for objections; there were none, so the budget was adopted.

4. Year End Audit Committee Report

Year End Audit Committee Report Chair Kathleen Davis-Bierman, DTM presented the report. No discrepancies were found in the review of bank statements, payment approvals and narratives.

Catherine called for objections; there were none, so the report was adopted.

5. Additional Reports – Area and Division Directors, Public Relations Manager, Club Growth Director, Program Quality Director, District Director

Division A: Area 12 Director Kathy Smart-Preston gave division director Lauren Hansen’s report.

Division C Director Shea Lynch gave her report.

Division D Director Dallas Ebenez gave his report.

Division Director E Jay Radhakrishnan gave his report.

Division F Director Lori Magoon gave her report.

Division G Director Dr. Dana Thurston gave her report.

District Officers:

Finance Manager Naomi Savaro gave her report.

Public Relations Manager Felicia Rowe gave her report.

Club Growth Director Mona Mohamed gave her report.

Program Quality Director Vincent “Taz” Ellsworth gave his report.

District Director Catherine Damavandi gave her report.

6. New Business

A. Discussion/vote on remote district leaders for the 2026-2027 year

The vote applies to the following district positions:

District Director
Program Quality Director
Club Growth Director
Public Relations Manager
Finance Manager
Administration Manager
Division Directors
Area Directors

Definition:

Remote leaders are DEC members who live in a registered domicile outside the district 18 boundaries. There are two classifications of remote leaders: fully remote and partially remote. A fully remote leader **will NOT attend** in person events as required by the district, while a partially remote leader **will attend** in person events as required by the district.

The district boundaries include Delaware, Maryland, two counties in Pennsylvania, parts of West Virginia and the eastern shore of Virginia.

The district 18 Council has the ability to determine if the budget supports remote leaders. By November of the program year, the council will have an opportunity to enable fully or partially remote leaders for the following year. Any decision made by the council remains in effect until changed. If the council enables remote leaders to serve, the council may specify which positions can be fully or partially remote.

Discussion and vote on remote leaders

Three information sessions were previously held via Zoom earlier this month.

Public Relations Manager and CMS Toastmasters club 00008470 president Felicia Rowe stated that voting to not allow remote leaders would affect her and corporate clubs as she and some corporate club members live outside of district boundaries.

Annapolis Toastmasters club 4724 vice president of education LaTaunya Howard inquired about travel expenses. Catherine noted Toastmasters Bylaws 8.3 states if the amount of travel expense incurred by a leader exceeds what it would be if the leader resided in the district, the leader would need to pay the difference.

Naomi stated if remote leaders are allowed, the next travel budget will be increased. She noted currently there is policy regarding leaders who move out of the district; they would be reimbursed at the lowest amount. However, future travel reimbursements may be limited.

Delmarva Toastmasters club 00957956 president Michael Hoy shared that TRIO members should be required to live in the district. Randallstown Network Toastmasters club 6805 president Carl Barsky inquired about the voting process. Catherine stated that each district position would be voted upon: yes, no, abstain.

Program Quality Director and SpeakeEZ club 28678761 president Vincent "Taz" Ellsworth noted that in previous years the district had area directors and a program quality director that lived outside the United States. Those individuals were not able to effectively participate in their roles due to different time zones. Taz made a recommendation: district leaders can be remote if they can drive within three hours to district events (conferences, trainings, etc.)

Tidewater Toastmasters club 1449606 president Terri Abramowitz inquired whether future district business meeting would be held remotely. Catherine stated she hasn't heard anything regarding changes; the spring business meeting will be held at the conference. Voting members unable to attend need to assign a proxy.

Kathryn Lipin suggested the following: a member's place of employment and participation in their club within district boundaries should be considered in person.

Newsletter Editor and Frederick Toastmasters club 1082 president Beth May inquired if the vote is based on expenses. Naomi stated currently officers traveling to events are reimbursed, but future travel budgets may need to be capped.

Annamarie inquired: would a partially remote leader attend at least one event? Catherine reread the definition. John stated the vote is only to decide whether to allow fully and partially remote leaders; there is no financial aspect considered.

Terri inquired about determination of budgets for remote, hybrid and in person clubs. Catherine stated that information would be decided in June/July for the upcoming year. Naomi stated she doesn't consider how the clubs are meeting; travel funds are determined for the TRIO's conference and mid-year trainings, the remainder is then divided for areas, divisions and the TRIO's further travel needs.

President of Redwood Toastmasters club 00610899 Nancy Waring inquired if the remote leaders discussion and vote is occurring due to difficulty finding members to fill positions. Catherine stated the issue arose during TRIO training in January.

Voting

John explained the voting process. Ballots were sent via Election Buddy to email accounts utilized for meeting registration.

Voting Results:

District Director

fully remote:	Yes: 15	No: 59	Abstain: 3
partially remote:	Yes: 49	No: 30	Abstain: 0

Program Quality Director

fully remote:	Yes: 13	No: 60	Abstain: 4
partially remote:	Yes: 49	No: 30	Abstain: 0

Club Growth Director

fully remote:	Yes: 15	No: 58	Abstain: 4
partially remote:	Yes: 47	No: 30	Abstain: 0

Finance Manager

fully remote:	Yes: 37	No: 36	Abstain: 2
partially remote:	Yes: 59	No: 16	Abstain: 0

Public Relations Manager

fully remote:	Yes: 32	No: 41	Abstain: 3
partially remote:	Yes: 57	No: 18	Abstain: 1

Administration Manager

fully remote:	Yes: 38	No: 34	Abstain: 3
partially remote:	Yes: 57	No: 15	Abstain: 3

Division Director

fully remote:	Yes: 15	No: 56	Abstain: 4
partially remote:	Yes: 55	No: 21	Abstain: 1

Area Director

fully remote:	Yes: 19	No: 52	Abstain: 5
partially remote:	Yes: 58	No: 17	Abstain: 1

John stated the Finance Manager, Administration Manager and Public Relations Manager positions did not reach a majority of votes. Catherine asked if another vote should be taken; he stated since there was no majority, the decision for those positions would remain open.

Daisy stated parliamentary procedures would require voting until a majority is reached, but consideration of the time taken for this vote and that another issue needed to be voted upon, the decision should be made by the TRIO. Taz inquired if the vote could be completed at the spring business meeting; Catherine replied the vote must be taken by November 1st.

Felicia asked to amend the ballot for the second vote to include the runoff for those positions. John recommended the vote be amended to allowing fully and partially remote, since there was no majority for disallowing fully and partially remote. Terri agreed with John and inquired about the practicality of a revote. Catherine read information from TI, then stated because a majority vote was not reached, the district decided those positions should not be served remotely.

Carl inquired if abstentions contributed to the lack of a majority vote and agrees with Catherine about moving to the next vote. John clarified that a majority wasn't reached because half or a third of each of the people voted; a third voted no and another third did not complete the ballot. If another vote was taken and split, we would not have the 47 votes required for a majority. A revote could be set up with fully remote for those positions not enabled.

President of Carroll County Club 2851 Bob Logan noted some people left; do we still have a quorum? John stated that a quorum has to be reached during the meeting, but as long as we have a majority vote, we can move forward. Catherine asked Daisy if she agrees; she replied yes.

B. Discussion and vote on District 38 merger

Catherine asked Sue Wilson to state her motion to the District Council. Sue stated she moved to reject the motion to merge District 18 and District 38 to become District 221, as the merger will not benefit members. President of Debedeavon Club 00750767 David Smith seconded the motion. Catherine showed the map of the proposed district 221, which would include the eastern part of Pennsylvania and the southern part of New Jersey.

In July 2025, the TI Board of Directors approved new district boundaries in regions 1-7 based on the recommendations of the Joint Realignment Committee groups. The goal was to modify district boundaries so that each new district has a minimum of 120-180 clubs. As a result, some of the new district boundaries cross over the current region boundaries.

Expected Benefits of Merger:

1. no disruptions to the day-to-day club experience
2. same leadership opportunities at club, area and division levels as members currently experience
3. fewer districts will struggle to fill leadership roles and committees
4. benefits attached to being in a larger district with a larger budget, such as better incentives, events and training options
5. a larger candidate pool for leadership positions

A poll of district members: 44 opposed, 9 approved and 7 had no opinion (not a scientific poll).

Those opposed to the merger mentioned the work, time and expenses needed to attend contests and other events.

Sue Wilson explained her reasoning: the geographic spread of the merged districts would be more than twice as wide as our current district. Some members would have to drive more than four hours to attend events. While it may be considered to reduce costs, the merger of the two districts will lessen the effectiveness of the program and result in a reduction of members.

President of Polished Professionals Club 4677485 Tony Whitten noted that the authority for district formation, restructuring and dissolution comes directly from the TI Board of Directors, as outlined in governing documents. The Bylaws of TI, Article 5 gives the board authority to establish and change districts. We do not have authority to block their decisions. Beth May suggested amending the motion since we cannot formally reject it.

Advancing Toastmasters club 665159 vice president of education Debra Linton stated she opposed the merger due to financial discrimination issues that could affect members. Taz explained he is opposed to the merger because of the impracticality of district leaders attending events many hours away. Felicia inquired about the possibility of districts having a 3 year window for improvement. Lataunya asked what will happen after our vote.

Catherine clarified that until August 2024, the TI governing documents specified that no district have less than 60 clubs. That requirement was modified in August 2025 to now state no district should have less than 100 clubs. At the January 2025 District Leaders Training, TRIOs were told that TI is reviewing districts having less than 100 clubs. (At that time, District 18 had less than 100 clubs.)

As past district 18 director, Tony Whitten participated in realignment committees that were given the directive of creating districts with 200+ clubs. President of Patuxent Toastmasters club 7412 Jessica Dorsey stated that a merger would make it impossible for some members to attend events due to distance and that we should make our voices heard on this issue. Bob inquired whether our objections would be considered by the board; Catherine stated that TRIOs were informed in January 2025 that the changes would only affect districts with 100 clubs or less, but at some point, there was a change. Per governing documents, districts have the opportunity to offer a 3 year plan. The committee was given guidelines that are not part of the governing documents, therefore Catherine believes our district can tell the board they acted outside the scope of authority here. Beth inquired: how would our merger rejection be communicated to the board?

Catherine clarified that she would write to the board stating what the committee was directed to do is not permissible per TI governing documents. MACC Standing Ovation club 05991097 vice president of education Janet Adams asked if the board was concerned about losing government clubs given our district and district 38's proximity to Baltimore, Washington and Philadelphia. Tony stated that it was a consideration, although our district doesn't have the majority of government clubs. The board also considered clubs that have 0-7 members. He noted that the proposed merger with district 38 is not the worst outcome; there were proposals to slice our district, giving parts to other districts.

Catherine responded to a chat comment inquiring: why vote if the decision to merge districts has been made? She stated she will write to TI for reasons previously mentioned above. MSU Toastmasters club 979269 vice president of education Tisha Rose inquired whether voting will make a difference. Catherine stated if we do nothing, the merger will go through.

Voting Results

To reject the merger: Yes: 60 No: 7 (Motion carried.)

Announcements

Sue Wilson mentioned 2 judges training: September 17th, 6:00 pm on Zoom. The second training was held October 6th, 2:00 pm on Zoom.

The District All Stars event – more information will be offered at a later date.

For those running contests, there will be training; more information will be offered later.

Catherine stated the next District Council meeting will be held at the spring conference on April 17th and 18th, 2026. Council members are required to attend or assign a proxy. Beth inquired whether the proposed merger would affect the conference; Catherine stated it would not.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Regina Pepper, Administration Manager/Southern Delaware secretary