

SCRIPT: GREG GAZIN

Introduction of Bob Steadward and the Presentation of the 2026 C & L Award

Madame District Director Marg Faryna, distinguished guests, fellow Toastmasters, and friends.

The Toastmasters International Communication and Leadership Award was established in 1971 to honour a leading citizen, typically a non-Toastmaster, who demonstrates exceptional communication and leadership in their field and community.

Over the years, many prominent leaders in Alberta and Saskatchewan have been recognized with this award, including the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker, former Prime Minister of Canada; Christine Silverberg, former Calgary Police Chief; the Honourable Peter Lougheed, former Premier of Alberta; and the Honourable Lois Hole, former Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

This afternoon, we are honoured to add another distinguished name to that list, someone from right here in our own community...Dr. Robert D. Steadward.

One of Canada's most accomplished and decorated citizens, he is respected locally, nationally, and around the world for his pioneering work in adaptive sport, helping develop programs and equipment so athletes with disabilities can train and compete.

Known to many as "Dr. Bob," he is also a respected teacher, author, sport scientist, and global community volunteer.

Throughout his career, Dr. Steadward has demonstrated what Toastmasters is all about, clear communication, visionary leadership, and a commitment to empowering others. His personal mission has been to make the world a better place.

As District Director Marg Faryna stated:

“Our District recognizes Dr. Steadward as an outstanding member of our community whose influence reaches far beyond our city. He epitomizes the core values of Toastmasters, Respect, Integrity, Service and Excellence. His ability to communicate a vision of inclusion and bring people together to achieve it makes him an inspiring and deserving recipient of this award.”

Bob had humble beginnings, born and raised in Eston, Saskatchewan, nearly 80 years ago, his journey began with a love of sport and a desire to make a difference.

Originally enrolled in dentistry at the behest of a friend, he wasn't sure he wanted to look into people's mouths all his life. He wasn't very successful in his earliest days of university academically. He returned to university to pursue kinesiology, earning a Bachelor of Physical Education from the University of Alberta in 1969, followed by a Master of Science and a PhD. He has since been awarded multiple honorary Doctor of Laws degrees.

In 1967, while serving on the organizing committee for the Wheelchair Games, he began to understand the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

As he has said: “One of the greatest challenges and opportunities has been to break down attitudinal barriers, which are often far more difficult than physical ones.”

That realization became a driving force in his work—and helped shift the conversation from disability to ability.

In 1978, he put that thinking into action, founding what is now called The Steadward Centre for Personal and Physical Achievement at the University of Alberta, a world-renowned facility that today serves thousands of individuals each year through programs supporting fitness, sport, and research for people of all abilities.

His work extended beyond the local community.

Bob played a central role in the creation of the International Paralympic Committee in 1989 and served as its founding president until 2001. During his tenure, participation grew from 37 nations to more than 170 worldwide. And during this time, the Paralympic Games became firmly established alongside

the Olympic Games, and saw one city host both events. elevating their global profile and impact.

His contributions have been recognized through 26 honours and distinctions at the local, national, and international levels.

Among them, he has been appointed a Companion of the Order of Canada and an Officer of the Order of Canada, and is a recipient of the Alberta Order of Excellence.

He has also received the International Olympic Order and the International Paralympic Order, among the highest honours in global sport.

He has also been inducted into seven halls of fame, including Canada's Sports Hall of Fame.

Additional recognitions include the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond and Platinum Jubilee Medals, and the King Charles III Coronation Medal, as well as being named Edmontonian of the Century in 2004 and Albertan of the Century in 2005.

Despite these many accomplishments, Dr. Steadward is widely known for his humility.

As he has shared:

“I live a pretty humble life, and I sometimes get embarrassed when people build me up.”

Among the many honours Dr. Steadward has received, he has shared that one stands apart.

Last July, during a ceremony in Maskwacis AB, surrounded by elders, Dr. Steadward was gifted a ceremonial headdress and given a Cree name in recognition of his decades of impact supporting Indigenous communities and people living with disabilities.

The honour was presented by Grand Chief Willie Littlechild, a longtime friend and former classmate.

He was given the name Paskwâwi-Mostos Pimohtêwin—
(Phoentic Pronunciation Pass-kwaa-wee-Moss-toss Pim-oh-tay-win)
or Chief Walking Buffalo.

For Bob, “the honour’s not just symbolic, it’s also spiritual, and it’s about what you’re called to keep doing.”

Dr. Steadward is also a devoted family man. He and his wife, Laura, have been married for 59 years and have two daughters and four grandchildren, two boys, two girls.

I had the privilege of being Bob’s neighbour in the Malmo Plains community for over 30 years, and I saw another side of him firsthand.

It began with his love of gardening—but with so many children in the neighbourhood, he wanted to make it fun for them.

That led to 66 garden gnomes throughout his yard, often moved and rearranged, something the neighbourhood children would look forward to. In fact his grandchildren then took it upon themselves to do the shuffling.

Even today, he still sees some of those gnomes in other yards, after giving them away over the years.

It’s a small story, but I believe it reflects a generous spirit and a desire to bring joy to others.

I’ve only scratched the surface of Bob’s lifelong commitment to service. I haven’t even mentioned his life coaching Olympians Jamie Salé and David Pelletier, members of the Edmonton Oilers, and country singer Brett Kissel.

You may have noticed the images on the screen.

What you’ve been seeing is the recently unveiled **Steadward Paralympic Journey Display** at the Saville Community Sports Centre.

Located on the second floor and open to the public, it captures the history and

global impact of what has been built over decades, through photos, medals, the torch, and the headdress.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my honour to present the 2026 Toastmasters Communication & Leadership award to Dr. Robert. D. Steadward. Bob, please join me on stage.

...Present award to Bob

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