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## **Learning Strategist Promotes Mental Gymnastics**

*by Don Robinet*

CHATHAM - When it comes to your brain, it's a case of use it or lose it.

That was the central message presented during a humorous talk by educator and author Brian Thwait's during a sold-out dinner presentation held June 6th at the Active Lifestyle Centre.

The Hamilton resident was in town as part of the Celebration of Learning Speaker Series offered by the Tri-County Literacy Network.

"Engage your brain," said Thwait's to the gathering of about 175 people. "Do something different once in a while."

Thwait's, who specializes in practical learning strategies, said even doing something as simple as switching the hand you usually brush your teeth with challenges your brain in ways that help you keep mental sharpness as you grow older.

"Push your brain to try new things," he said, urging the crowd to stay active, keep busy, become an expert in something, and learn something new.

He said people should find something they enjoy doing that challenges their brain. For some, it could be doing crossword puzzles — but, if you don't like doing crosswords, find something else.

Thwait's said people are concerned as they grow older about forgetting things. He said names are the most common thing people forget, followed by forgetting where they put things, such as keys.

He joked, "Forgetting where your keys are once in a while is no big deal, but forgetting what they're for is."

Thwait's offered some memory tips to the crowd, saying they need to make mental pictures of the things they want to remember because the brain stores pictures better than words, and that making a story out of those pictures keeps you from forgetting.

He said scientists are learning more about how the brain works all the time, with much of that research happening in the last 20 years.

Thwait's said that in 1990 U.S. President George H. W. Bush said that the '90s would be the Decade of the Brain, as he promoted research into neuroscience. (He then joked, "I think he was worried about one of his kids!")

Thwait's is the author of *The Big Learn: Smart Ways To Use Your Brain*.