



Rotary Club of Santa Rosa West

Bulletin for July 28, 2008 Teaching Literacy at the Sonoma County Jail

By Anne Abrams

Preliminaries



President David McDonald welcomed everyone to the "cool club" meeting at St. Rose.

Thanks to the following Rotarians for their assistance with today's meeting:

Secretary: **Janet Codding**

Cashier: **Chris Young**

Greeter: **Bill Dodson**

Tickets: **Dale Sipe**

Rotary Moment: **Gary Lucas**

Photos: **Jim Valinoti**

Bulletin: **Anne Abrams**

Program: **Susan Nowacki**

The Pledge: President David called on **Brian Herndon** to lead us in the salute to our flag.

The Rotary Moment: **Gary Lucas** offered page 1 and page 2 moments this week, the latter being: "Trust in God and plow your fields. God can't do everything."

Visiting Rotarians and Guests

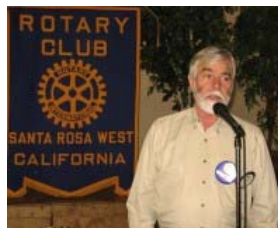
Bill Dodson announced that all the visiting Rotarians came last week and not this week.

There were a few guests of Rotarians:

Pam Davis introduced colleague **Casey Williams** and **Rich Pratt** introduced his wife, **Kathy**.

Ken Prouty introduced his lovely granddaughter **Katherine Sand** from Indiana who plays varsity golf at her school and has been named Most Valuable Player of her golf team. Congrats, **Ken!**

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Coming Up:
8/4 - Jim Hinton and John Hathaway discuss their trip to Africa
8/11 - Dr. Mark Netherda - HIV work with Orphans in Namibia
8/17 - BBQ social at Mike and Maureen Merrill's house in Windsor. Bring spouse, grandchildren. If it's warm, we swim! Details to follow.
8/25 - SOS (Save Our Students) Program, John Palmer
8/25 - State of the City and Update on Gang Issue - Former Mayor Jane Bender and Ernesto Olivares



Announcements and Such:

President David McDonald announced he will not attend the meeting next week as he will attend an insurance convention somewhere out in the desert, Palm Springs? Las Vegas? **Past President Chris Parr-Feldman** (2005-2006) will conduct our meeting.

Ginny Pitts announced a party at the Merrill's home for August 17, and Golf BBQ is next Friday. **Ginny** needs help with the BBQ.

Also **Ginny Pitts** is hosting a Rotary Social Committee meeting on Tuesday at her home on Olivet Rd. from 5:30 to 7:30. All welcome to come.



Sunshine Report:

Tarina Hall announced some good news. **Dolores Zeni** is now home from the hospital and Bob is driving to the meeting on his own...Great news!!! On the down side **Diane Winsby** suffered the loss of her son **Steven** last week from a sudden illness. Our hearts go out to **Diane** as she copes with this terrible loss. We passed around two cards for her to sign.



This from the Press Democrat in case you missed it: "[PARDINI, Steven Ray](#)."

CRAB FEED CHAIR REPORT:

Bill Dodson and **Chris Young** presented to the club for discussion an idea for our next big fundraising event. They would like to choose two major charities supporting youth and children to receive the bulk of support from each of the Live Auction (Sonoma County Children's Museum) and Silent Auction (Chops).



The Children's Museum was once housed at the Codding mall and now is a mobile exhibit visiting classrooms and the Sonoma County Fair this year on two days. Jeanie Schulz is involved with this project and hopes to raise funds to transform a church she owns near the Snoopy Museum into the Children's Museum. We would support their capital campaign.

Chops is an established center for youth at \$1 per year membership to teens living in Santa Rosa. It was built with funds from the estate of **Charles DeMeo**. They need support for ongoing programs. For more information see: www.chopsonline.com

The idea is to attract prospective donors to a "Charity Event to Support Youth" rather than to a "Crab Feed" in hopes of increasing our ability to obtain funds for youth in Sonoma County. It would create a strong theme for the charity event.

There was concern among club members that the club continue to have the ability to fund international projects, SOS Program and other local charities. It was suggested that instead of saying 100% of funds go to the selected charities that "most" funds would go to the named charities, thereby achieving some flexibility in how the funds were spent while achieving the objective. Having the Roseland University Prep School the focus of the event last year was very successful in that we made a record amount for the annual event. Concern was expressed about "hearsay" that Chops was "under-used" and some populations of the community "won't go there". Suggestion was made to obtain information about current frequency rates of usage of the facility and services.

It was decided to continue discussion over to the next meeting on August 3rd as we were running out of time for discussion.

Raffle

Brian Jamar drew a marble but not the right one. Jim Underhill took home a bottle of Zmarzly wine.

Program: Teaching Literacy at the Sonoma County Jail

Illiteracy - A Prison within a Prison"

Susan Nowacki introduced our speaker **Karen Whissen**.

Karen is a teacher of English literacy at the Sonoma County jail and the North County Detention Center near the airport, formerly called "the honor farm." **Karen** is a former middle school teacher from Kennelworth School in Petaluma. She has worked since 1997 as a literacy tutor and has been awarded volunteer of the year by Sonoma County Sheriff Dept. When she is not teaching she is playing golf, gardening, and traveling.



Karen began by stating how she got into this line of work. The illiteracy rate in Sonoma County is 20%. They are not immigrants. Typically they are individuals who are 30 years old, white, a high school drop-out with no job skills. They can't read or fill out application forms. They suffer from low self esteem and have a history of negative school experiences. Many are unable to make the 3rd to 4th grade hurdle when learning becomes dependent on being able to read. They continue to fall further and further behind. The illiteracy rate among prison populations is 40% and more like 60-70% at San Quentin Prison.

Women inmates are 10-20% of the population. They have few job skills and a high instance of drug charges and are ill-informed about available services in the community. They often choose selling drugs over flipping burgers.

Karen typically tutors an inmate for up to 9 months. This is often enough time to bring skill levels from 4th to 8th grade learning levels. Inmates are motivated to learn to read by getting days off their sentence by learning to read.

Karen told stories about several of her students..

Billy is a 35 year old non-reader. He couldn't read a grocery list and had to ask for help at the store. He learned sight words while doing sit ups. She received a note from his mother when she heard him read for the first time. He is still in the literacy program.

Armando violated probation by holding a gun. He left the family without a major wage earner. He was put in lock-down for not following directions about having his name tag.

Miguel stabbed his girl friend 17 times because "she wasn't listening". He spent 10 years at San Quentin. He is motivated to learn to read to help pass the time.

Rosalie was a "frequent flyer" in the program. She graduated from High School but never learned to read. She has gone from 4th grade to eighth grade level.

Sergio played hooky from the first grade and became a gang member. He became a father at age 14 and the mother went to Mexico leaving him the sole caregiver for an infant. He learned to read "Dances with Wolves" and was incredulous when the movie shown was different from the book. He had never seen the ocean and didn't know what a library was all about. He wrote a letter nominating **Karen** for Tutor of the Year. He stated that he learned to use his heart and brain and not his fists.

One group of **Karen's** student/inmates would chant "long and straight" for her when she would be at a golf tournament.

Karen also taught a banking class. Many inmates had not the ability to use an ATM machine. When asked when it is NOT safe to use an ATM they replied: "when on drugs, when drunk, when it's not your card, when police are chasing you, when the boyfriend is trying to remove the machine."

Karen's best survival tip is to not wonder what they've done to get there. She feels safest when she is there. Everyone's been searched and can't be holding a weapon. She is on first name basis only, does no favors, holds no personal opinion on the facilities or employees, takes no contraband, and makes no promises she can't keep, does not give her home phone number and is not allowed to use black ink only blue ink. And she has "a captive audience." She spoke of how difficult it must be to live in this society when you can't read or write.

Anyone interested in becoming a tutor can receive training from the adult literacy league, must be fingerprinted and fill out an 8 page security clearance and have four letters of recommendation.

Main Jail receives donations of books and magazines.

Your Bulletin Reporter:
Anne Abrams



Your Bulletin Editor:
Jim Valinoti

