

Introduction to President Marva Bailey-Wisdom's Inaugural Address

By Dianne Dance - Friday, July 11, 2025

Today I have the incredible honour of introducing our 2025-26 Rotary of Guelph President, Marva Bailey-Wisdom.

Many of us know Marva both from Rotary and as a recognized leader in our local community and a true friend to many.

She became a Rotary member of this club in 2006, sponsored by Bruce Hunter. It is fitting that she will be our President during the year that she marks her 20-year anniversary of membership.

Marva was born in Red Ground, St Catherine, Jamaica which is 45 minutes northwest of the capital city of Kingston. She moved with her family to Canada early in her life and this country has been the reaping benefits ever since. She grew up in Stratford, moved to Toronto post-grad, and settled down in Guelph about 40 years ago.

Marva's priority is always her family. She is the caring daughter of Eva and Edward Bailey, mom of three children, Justin, Marcel and Kristel, and grandma to three amazing granddaughters. She is also blessed with successful and supportive siblings and their partners.

Marva is known as a leader in Canada for **Facilitating, Moderating, and Speaking on equity and inclusion**. Her career is centered on her passion of empowering social change and standing up for social justice.

Marva's professional career is filled with many successes.

In 2010, she co-led the well-received and ground-breaking seven year study - The Black Experience Project. This project is still referenced today when the question is asked, "What does it mean to be Black in the GTA?"

Here in Guelph she was a Lead Advisor for the City of Guelph's International Award Winning Community Plan.

Her business card includes being:

- Co-director, Arts Everywhere Festival – A festival that brings together artist and talents from around the world.
- Vice Chair - Canadian Centre for Diversity, and
- Co-founding President and Advisor to Operation Black Vote Canada

Marva was the first civilian to sit on the Guelph Police's hiring panel.

She also spent time in politics locally and nationally being appointed to Nationals Committees for two years by the Right Honourable Paul Martin.

Marva's meaningful work has been rewarded with many honours over the years. Being very humble, Marva probably is uncomfortable with me naming all the awards so I won't (😬) mention that she was:

- Appointed Senior Fellow, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, or
- Appointed Fellow, Environics Institute of Survey Research as Outreach Director, The Black Experience Project, or
- Recipient of YWCA's Woman of Distinction, for Exemplary Community Leadership 2004
- Received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee 2013
- Was appointed in 2022 to the Order of Ontario – the highest honour a civilian can receive in Ontario
- Received the Lang School of Business' Alumni Impact Award at the University of Guelph, where she had earned her Master of Arts in Leadership.
- And of course, we recently all beamed with pride as she was honoured with the very prestigious **Honourary Doctor of Laws** Degree at this year's University of Guelph Convocation.

Interestingly while researching (I stopped at 30 Google pages!) I also saw:

- “Hero of the Week by CKCO – CTV Ontario” (Marva I want to hear more about that!)

In Marva's life she has always led with her heart, acted with integrity, professionalism and, importantly, showed incredible strength and empathy when the difficult tasks or conversations needed to be had.

Leadership is not just her business – it is the essence of Marva.

Given this all this and truthfully much more, we have no doubt, Marva will continue the long line this Rotary Club has of incredible and thoughtful Club Presidents.

Friends and fellow Rotarians, may I introduce President Marva ...