THE MAGIC OF ROTARY

Spinoff

This meeting was hybrid In person at New Desi Zaiqa restaurant, Carlingwood Mall **Program Ginette Thomas**- *Hearts of Freedom*: Researching the Migration of SE Asian refugees to Canada in/after the 1970s

In-person: 37 members 3 guests Online: 17 members, no guests

Opening The 42nd meeting of this 121st Rotary Year was called to order by **President Marcia Armstrong.** The meeting was held on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people. **President Marcia**. Recognized guest:Diane Maxwell and welcomed the infrequent presence in person of **Don Butler** and **Tom Belton.** And the return of **Bea Osome** from Africa**O Canada** video – Long time singer Lyndon Slewidge before Leaf- Sens game #3**Recent Board meeting : President Marcia** shared updates A donation of $3500 from the Club, plus $650 in individual donations, will be sent to the Rotary Club of Kyiv Balzac.A $1000 donation was made to the Multi Faith Housing Initiative for the Odenak project, supporting housing for Indigenous families. A thank-you note was received, Committee chairs are asked to use the documents tab in Club Runner to store minutes and relevant documents.The Club is obtaining a quote for a 10x10 tent for use at events like the Ironman competition and other potential opportunities.The Membership Committee will contact non-attending members to determine their plans for continued membership next year.Recommendations for this year's award recipients were approved by the Board. Awards will be presented on June 17th.A $35 charge will be added to annual dues in hopes of achieving 100% member donation to the Rotary Foundation. Members can opt out. Next year's approved dues are $295, or $330 including the optional $35. Members will decide when they receive their invoice.See https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-ccuXlt1vTkyorN78IbeHYO_6sne_4GT/view?usp=sharing**New Member Induction: Hugh Williams,** Membership Committee Co-Chair, told inductee **Peter Chabursky** of the opportunities for lifelong friendships and fulfilling service of Rotary membership. **Peter's** connection to Rotary was initially through member of the Kyiv Balzac Rotary Club. **Peter** brings over 30 years of experience in business development, account management, and project management across various sectors and global locations. He has already been actively involved, attending numerous meetings, the District Conference, and planning to attend the International Convention. **Peter** is also a new grandfather. **President Marcia** welcomed **Peter,** noting the club's rich history and commitment to the community since 1957. **Peter** has been assigned to the International Service and Fundraising and Events committees. **Speaker: Ginette Thomas - Hearts of Freedom Project President-Elect, Ginette Thomas**, was introduced by **DGE Graeme Fraser** as an active

Club member for some 10 years, before retirement worked on public policies for indigenous health, and after retirement researched the high rates of tuberculosis in indigenous communities. Since 2018, she's been part of a a key member of the Canadian Southeast Asian Refugee Historical Research Project. It is now calle "Hearts of Freedom" project**Ginette** started by explaining that her timing for the presentation was based on the April 30th, 2025,50th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. This event was a major catalyst for a significant humanitarian crisis in Southeast Asia, with an estimated 3 million people fleeing Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The escapes were perilous, often by sea in dangerous boats or overland, facing gunfire and treacherous conditions. Many refugees spent months or even years in overcrowded, primitive camps.The crisis prompted a global response, with Western nations accepting hundreds of thousands of refugees. Canada played a notable role, ultimately settling over 200,000 people from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.**Ginette** highlighted why Canada's response was so significant, leading to the people of Canada being awarded the Nansen Medal by the UNHCR in 1986 – the first time this honor was given to an entire country. This recognition stemmed from two main actions: the Canadian government amending the Immigration Act to create a designated class for Southeast Asian refugees, allowing officers to process applications directly in refugee camps; and the creation of a unique private sponsorship program that empowered individuals and community groups to financially and otherwise support refugees. **Ginette** shared the inspiring example of Ottawa's "Operation 4000," spearheaded by then-Mayor Marion Dewar, which aimed to bring in 4000 refugees through community sponsorship and saw tremendous public support.The "Hearts of Freedom" project, initiated in 2015 by the Vietnamese Community Association and later supported by federal funding, aims to document and preserve the stories of these refugees and highlight Canada's response as a crucial chapter in its history. The project conducted 173 video interviews with individuals who experienced the escape and settlement, including former refugees and Canadian officials.Several powerful themes emerged from the interviews. "Freedom" was a paramount motivation for leaving, representing peace, freedom from harassment, and the opportunity for education and success. Many also expressed gratitude for living in a country that accommodates people with disabilities and where they felt welcome. The sense of "loss" was palpable – loss of home, jobs, money, and family connections. Hardships endured during the escape and in camps were widely recounted, including starvation, torture, and witnessing death. "Family" was a strong theme, with stories of reconnecting with relatives and building new lives in Canada, often involving sending money back home to support those still in Southeast Asia. Adjusting to a new country brought challenges like the cold climate, language barriers, and unfamiliar food, though many adapted remarkably well. The concept of "dual identity" also arose, as refugees initially saw themselves by their country of origin first, but over time came to identify as Canadian alongside their heritage.In terms of settlement, many refugees, despite prior qualifications, initially took on manual labor roles. **Ginette** shared examples of medical doctors working as orderlies before requalifying, and others who adapted their skills to new careers, demonstrating an incredible work ethic. Racism was also mentioned, often stemming from Canadians' lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity, though many adults felt it was manageable compared to their past experiences. Youth who arrived often faced bullying related to their visible minority status despite speaking English without an accent.**Ginette** concluded by emphasizing the significant contributions of these refugees to Canada's economic and social fabric, becoming an integral part of the cultural mosaic. The "Hearts of Freedom" project's findings are available through their website, a documentary film, a history book, and upcoming teacher guidelines.**President**

Marcia invited those with questions to stay on and ask after meeting end**Ginette's** slides https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-ak_8CpC-nn9P4rEvsYEBt0yPjUi-hgb/view?usp=sharing **Past Presidents Draw:** winner was PDG Fay Canpbell, RC Orleans**Celebration of Life Doug Heyland May 3President Marcia** told us **Brett Brooking** would be sending out a Zoom link for those not attending **Doug Heyland's** celebration of life in person. She also told us that John McCalla had passed away. John had been involved in the establishment of the Rotary Home and was a member of the Rotary Club of Ottawa. She added a few words on the May 6 speaker and adjourned. **Next Meeting - HybridTuesday, May 6 2025**In person New Desi Zaiqa restaurant, Carlingwood MallLuncheon at noon. **Program starts 12:30 Program** Dr Allen Middlebro- Liberation of the Netherlanda, 1945Intro and Thanks **Larry Chop**Spinoff**: Don Butler** Cash Calendar draw https://rcwo.org/Stories/latest-calendar-draw-winnersFor log on info for Zoom meeting see invitation