



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2025 YAKIMA CONVENTION & EVENT CENTER

*The Magic
Of Rotary*

ANDREA HOCHLEUTNER & FOTINOS PANAGAKOS CLASSIFICATION TALKS

This week's program will feature classification talks by Andrea (Andi) Hochleutner and Fotinos (Foti) Panagakos. Storytelling is an artform that transcends cultures and eras. We all have stories; they are what lives are made of. Rotary understands the importance of stories. Classification talks help members share their personal and professional journeys which not only foster connections but highlight the diverse skills and experiences within a club. When an individual joins Rotary they are assigned a classification that reflects their principal activity of their current employment, past occupation, and/or service to the community. The number of members in any given classification is limited. The reason is to bring people together from different fields, industries, and experiences.



Andi Hochleutner moved to Yakima in July 2022 to become the Government Affairs Director for the Central Washington Home Builders Association. Born in Dallas, Texas, she studied architectural design at the University of Texas, Arlington before shifting her focus to Legal and Legislative Affairs. She went on to attend George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management in Legislative Affairs. She has been a member of Yakima Rotary since August 2023.



Dr. Panagakos joined Rotary in February 2024. He received his DMD from UMDNJ-New Jersey Dental School (now Rutgers' University School of Dental Medicine) and a Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from their Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. In 1999, he completed a Master's in Education from Seton Hall University and in 2007, received a Master's in Business Administration from Lehigh University. He has been the Founding Dean of the School of Dental Medicine at Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences since May 2022.

Come join us this Thursday. It will be fun, educational and insightful.

FOR THURSDAY'S MEETING

Greeters – Tammy Hanlon, Alex Ditto
Inspiration – Celisa Hopkins
Sergeant-at-Arms – Steven Gustafson
Program – Brad Hanson
Attendance – Jennifer Bliesner

FUTURE PROGRAMS

February 27th – Darcie Roberts, Local Fine Art
March 6th – Vicki Baker, Yakima City Update
March 13th – TBD
March 20th – Msgr. John Ecker

SECOND CHANCE SOCIAL

Need a break from the hustle and bustle? Come unwind at this month's Second Chance Social on Wednesday, February 26 at WaterFire Restaurant & Bar from 5pm to 6pm.

Hors d'oeuvres and great company provided by Rotary. The drinks are on you. Spouses and guests are invited.

JOIN A BOOK CLUB ADVENTURE!



Whether you're an avid reader or just looking to get back into the habit, the Rotary Book Club would love to have you join them for their March meeting on Tuesday, March 11th from 5pm to 6pm at MAK Daddy Coffee Rosters located at 4106 Summitview.

They will be discussing *Martyr!* written by Kaveh Akbar.

Electrifying, funny, and wholly original, *Martyr!* is the story of a newly sober, orphaned son of Iranian immigrants, guided by the voices of artists, poets, and kings, who embarks on a search for a family secret that leads him to a terminally ill painter living out her final days in the Brooklyn Museum. It is one of the New York Times Bestseller, and one of their review's 10 Best Books of the Year. Get your copy today, start ready, save the date, and see you there!

REVIEW

Last Thursday we celebrated Black History Month with our members, students, and community in a tradition that goes back 17 years. We have had some extraordinary speakers this year with no exception as we welcomed retired NFL player and former Seahawk Shaquem Griffin. Born minutes after his twin brother, Shaquem experienced a rare condition called amniotic band syndrome that resulted in the amputation of his hand at the age of 4. Despite the challenges he faced, he and his twin brother went on to become remarkable athletes and play in the NFL with Shaquem making history as the NFL's first ever one-handed player. Today, he inspires others with his story. That was exactly what he did for us and the over 100 students from Davis, Eisenhower, East Valley, and West Valley high schools who joined us to hear him talk. Moderated by Eric Silvers, he talked about his childhood, support system, the NFL draft, prejudice, how to be a better person and athlete, and branding.

Growing up, he didn't know he was disabled or handicapped. A tribute to his parents, they never allowed him to think he couldn't do anything. The word "can't" was not in his vocabulary; it allowed him to be courageous. Growing up he and his brother competed at everything. Walking to school was a speed race to see who would get there first; every sport was based upon who was first. They played the same sports, went to the same college, and studied for the same degree. Being a twin and having his brother by his side was lit! If someone was going to talk trash, they better be able to do it that day.

When his brother got drafted, he cried. When he got drafted, his brother cried even more. He was one of the top players in the country invited to the NFL draft. His agent told him he could go high, low, or not at all. He wasn't chosen in the first round – he didn't go in the second round. He couldn't help but ask himself, "did he do enough, did he prove that he was deserving?" The next day he received a phone call from Pete Carroll telling him he was drafted by the Seattle Seahawks. It was a beautiful moment with his nieces and nephews watching him on the stage and Seahawk fans going crazy. It was surreal.

Prejudice was part of his life; he was a minority twice. Not only was he African American, but he was also disabled. His dad taught him and his brothers to come home. If they were pulled over, put your hands on the dashboard, ask permission to get your license and registration. After buying his first nice car in his rookie season, he was driving home in his neighborhood. He was pulled over, asked for his license and registration, taken out of the car and on the ground. His mom came out of the house – all he could think about was – come home. Moving to Seattle helped him grow up; it was a time of social justice. Pete Carroll brought his players together to talk and ask how they as a group could do to help.

To be a better athlete and person you have to have faith in who you are and your craft. Working hard is one thing, being disciplined is another. Don't let anyone else navigate your path. He credited his parents with having a Plan A and a Plan B to prepare himself for life outside of football. He got straight A's in middle school and high school. He finished high school early and completed his first degree in 3 years. He wanted to be a motivational speaker someday. His older brother told him it was okay to be a cool nerd – he dresses good, talks well, and is smart. He shared the importance of doing the right thing on and off the field. Your brand is everything now. In a society that is obsessed with cancel culture how you present yourself, how you care for yourself, how you speak about yourself, what you speak about, what you tweet, and what you post is a direct representation of you. If you burn your brand now you limit yourself. Your effort is controlled by you. What about kids who come from single parent households or no parent at all? Identify people that care for you. Sometimes kids identify the wrong people. Peers can lead in the direction of failure as opposed to a mentor, coaches, aunts, uncles, grandparents that truly love them and remind them who they are and where they come from.

College sports have changed drastically with the NIL. Young athletes chase the dollar signs and are no longer interested in the culture. If you transport yourself to 4 teams in 4 years, you will never have a home to come back to. There is no alma mater; there is no legacy in place. Student athletes need to educate themselves and start doing so in high school. What happens when the money is secured, all spent, and you don't make it in the NFL, and can't pay the IRS. It is not good! The grass is not always greener on the other side.

It was an amazing program! Shaquem's advice was remarkable, his words resonated with all of us, offering inspiration and wisdom. It takes all of us to create a welcoming community. Change is happening – as a young student, an adult, or a minority don't be the reason for things to go backwards – be the reason we go forward. Handle it with grace and beauty.





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