

ROTARY UNSUNG HERO & FIRST CITIZEN AWARDS

This past Thursday we honored two extraordinary individuals, one a Rotarian and one non-Rotarian. Bob Romero had the honor of presenting a Rotary Unsung Hero Award to Mark Smith while Rick Pinnell followed with a Rotary First Citizen Award to Jim Smith. The Rotary Unsung Hero Award honors outstanding community volunteers who embrace Rotary's motto of Service Above Self. All of us have seen the beauty of the new YMCA and Rotary Aquatic Center, but not many of us know of the work that took place behind the scenes. Mark Smith was instrumental in bringing the vision to reality. By the time the groundbreaking took place he had already worked for years without fanfare as the lead volunteer helping with negotiations, contracts, and donor presentations – he was all in, all the time. His intelligence, determination, and problem-solving skills were key factors in making it happen. He did it all while also focusing on his family, business, and faith. Described by people who know him as caring, compassionate, wise, committed, kind, selfless, brilliant, charitable, resilient, honest, a problem solver, highly skilled, a man with a true servant heart and above all, humble, he truly exemplifies Rotary's motto of Service Above Self.

The Rotary First Citizen Award honors a senior Rotarian who has dedicated their lifetime to our community. It was created to give our members an opportunity to see and meet role models and to say thank you. Jim Smith is a leader among leaders who has made many of our Valley organizations better. As our Rotary president in 1997, Jim was the one who worked with the Convention Center so that we could hold our meetings there; he came up with the idea for a clock at the podium to keep the program on time and on schedule; and he appointed Carolyn Flory as our Executive Director. He was the first Rotary auction chair and was one of six founding board members of the Yakima Rotary Trust where he was 100% involved in transforming the area of Yakima that is now home to the Yakima Gateway Sports Complex. He was chair of the Heritage University Board, president of United Way, and led the United Way Fund Drive. He is a role model for being a volunteer board member. He treats people with respect and holds them accountable. His first criteria to volunteer with an organization is passion for the mission, without passion why would you join. He's not afraid to make changes to improve an organization even when it can be painful; he always leaves it better than before he arrived. He lives every day 100% as if it is his last. If you are wondering if Jim and Mark are related; the answer is yes, they are father and son. Both were surprised that they were being honored – that made it all the more special!

- REVIEW -

Thanks to the wonders of technology our speaker, retired Seattle Police Chief Carmen Best was able to join us through Zoom. Introduced by Casey Corr, Chief Best began by sharing that, first and foremost, before thinking of herself as a police officer she thinks of herself as a mom to two amazing young women. Both her girls played basketball growing up and were really, good. When it comes to team sports it is not always the team with the best talent that wins the game, but the team that is able to make decisions with the same playbook and think about how they're going to work together. That some analogy works with leadership and in particular, situational leadership where you have principles and core values, but can't be so rigid that you can't adjust to the situation, the job, or the team you work with.

When she got the Chief's job, she was determined to put the lessons she had learned into practice. In January 2020, downtown Seattle had the worst mass shooting in history. That same day they also had an officer involved shooting. Her team performed admirably; they learned from the experience and developed a response plan to prevent more violence in the area. A month later Covid-19 hit. As first responders her team was working 18-hour days. They were the first major law enforcement agency to address issues surrounding the pandemic; things like PPE, sanitizing areas, and following CDC recommendations. They were the first responder test site in the nation and were settling into their response plan to handle the pandemic when the murder of George Floyd spurred protests around the country. Seattle was no exception. On May 29th there was a pop-up protest in which everyone involved was intent on destruction. The next day, over 2,000 people showed up; most were peaceful. There were people in the crowd intent on destruction and violence; they had never seen anything like it before and there was no training that could have prepared them for it. The Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone took over the Capitol Hill neighborhood and morphed into the Capitol Hill Organized Protest. Every day was being influenced by politics. As Chief she had made a commitment to enforcing the law and upholding the constitution; decisions could not be based on what would play well with the media. For weeks, her officers were being hit with rocks and bottles. No one else was standing up and saying "What is happening? Can people come in and take part of a neighborhood, destroy property and attack officers." As a leader and to keep her department going, she had to step up and say, "this isn't okay." She has marched in protests, her family has marched in protest – this was not that, it was something much different. She knew the difference between what was legal, moral, ethical and what was not. She had to be flexible and adapt; she had never led in so many different ways than in the last six months of her job.

We've all heard the buzz words defund, divest, reimagine, reinvent, abolish, and everyone has their own definition and understanding of what those words mean. As the conversation around those words move forward, she hopes that rational, thoughtful minds end up that there are new tools and options that the government needs to have available to meet the needs of communities. Police officers have always had some work in social work; it's not why they signed up and what most of their training is focused on. It has become their work because of societal issues and because other systems aren't able to show up. Our country hasn't properly addressed the need for social services. In the 70's we promised to build a comprehensive community-based mental health service to replace the horrible conditions of institutionalized care. The system was barely built if it was built at all. Her worry is that we are doing the same thing again. Major cities across the country have lost historic numbers of officers, gun violence and homicides are at recent historical levels, and it has become a challenge to some situations to have accountability for even the most violent offenders. We are on a path of deconstructing the criminal justice system without building its replacement first. By the time someone calls 911 the problem is already there. We need systems upstream that can do the work, so the calls don't have to be made and calls for service are limited or mitigated.

It is an incredibly exciting time to be involved in policing and you can bet policing will be back and she will be back working in policing. Right now, she is enjoying being part of the conversation. For Seattle specifically the idea of moving forward, reimagining, and doing things differently is important, being innovative in policing is important, and finding ways to eliminate some of the racist practices that we know have existed over time is important. We need a plan that is comprehensive and thoughtful, we need to have national standards, we need to stay true to the morals, ethics, and values that our society holds before us, and need a high level of accountability.

Before we heard from Chief Best, we had Rotary business and two special presentations. Our meeting started with a music video chosen by Rick Fairbrook featuring the National Anthem. It was followed by David Lynx's invocation which was a wonderful message about the magic of gratitude and a "Brand New Day" musical clip themed sergeant-at-arms in honor of President John presented by Sheri Bissell. The special presentation was to honor two exceptional individuals, Mark Smith and Jim Smith. See the article above to read more.