Imagine
Rotary

YAKIMA CONVENTION & EVENT CENTER

MARK & KYM HILINSKI
HILINSKI’S HOPE

The Hilinski’s Hope Foundation was founded in 2018 by Mark and Kym Hilinski to honor the life of their son Tyler, who died by suicide yet never showed any signs of depression or struggle.

Mark Hilinski was an aquatics manager at a high school in Uplands, California for more than 30 years when he interviewed a college student on her way to law school for a lifeguard position. Kym Haun got the job and eventually her law degree. Mark went on to start a software company. They married in 1991, raising three football-loving boys in Orange County. The oldest, Kelly, played quarterback at Columbia and Weber State. The youngest, Ryan transferred from South Carolina to Northwestern where he split duties this past season. Tyler, the middle child, was a backup at Washington State University, then a spot starter. He was poised to be named QB1; instead, he died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound at his off-campus apartment.

From the moment Tyler died, Mark and Kym have followed their hearts, traveling across the country to tell his story and prevent another. Within months they formed the Hilinski’s Hope Foundation with the mission to educate, advocate, and eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness and to fund programs that provide student athletes with the tools and resources that support their mental health and wellness.

Together they have raised over $2 million to expand the accessibility and quality of mental health programs for student athletes and spoken at 150+ universities and mental health conferences. In 2020, Hilinski’s Hope Foundation was awarded the Stuart Scott ENSPIRE ESPY Award and an Emmy for the Short Sports Documentary category. In 2021 they were recognized as the National Charity Recipient for the NCAA Final Four, and in 2022 named one of the biggest power brokers in college football by ESPN.

FOR THURSDAY’S MEETING
Greeters – Ken Marble, Kurt Labberton
Music – Eric Silvers
Invocation – Patti Powers
Sergeant-at-Arms – Bob Romero
Program – Jennifer Bliesner

FUTURE PROGRAMS
June 22nd – Addy Logsdon, Travel
June 29th – President Rick’s Recognition
July 6th – President Erin Black
July 13th – Bree Black Horse, Legal Impediments of MMIW
A special thank you to those that made our meeting a great way to spend a Thursday. Kaylene Stiles with some help from President Rick served as our greeter. Charlie Robin along with Eric Silvers and Bob Hamilton on the piano sang “I Am What I Am” from the Broadway musical La Cage aux Folles – it was fabulous! Kurt Labberton shared a message and prayer of thankfulness and celebration of the wonderful place we call home. President Rick welcomed our guests and took care of announcements. Our next Historical Perspective is scheduled for Thursday, June 15th at 5:30pm at the YVC Conference Center featuring Rev. Robert Trimble and Eisenhower High School senior Joshua Jaiyeola talking about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Juneteenth. Also coming up is the Mollie Davis Scholarship Awards presentation being held on Tuesday, June 20th at 5pm at the YVC Conference Center. Everyone is invited to participate. John Cooper wrapped it all up with a June 8th themed sergeant-at-arms.

Last week, we heard from fellow Rotarians Pete Bansomer, Sunny Cameron and Mary McFadden who shared their classification talks. This week, our program featured one of our own members again as David Lynx introduced Kyle Curtis. Kyle shared his personal journey of discovery, learning, and challenges faced in coming out as gay.

His story is one of many stories. Being gay was never a choice for Kyle. It wasn’t like he woke up one morning with two switches, one to be gay and one to be straight. A lot of his discovery took place in middle school. He knew that something was a little bit different than the rest of his classmates. He was never able to put a name on it. He grew up in White Swan on the Yakama Indian Reservation and didn’t hang out or stay over at many friends’ houses. He turned to social media to fill that gap. Through Facebook, he stumbled across a marriage equality page and was able to piece together what he was feeling. He also met his first boyfriend and ended up in a long-distance relationship; it was hard to explain meeting someone just like you, identifies as you, and has felt alone those words meant everything. A few years would go by before he faced another challenging moment. While he had come out to his parents, he had not told any of his close friends or siblings. His brother was a few years younger and interested in everything he wasn’t – his brother was the typical school jock; Kyle was the typical school nerd. One day his brother came out from football practice upset and with a bloodied nose. Kyle was waiting for him. The guys in the locker room were making fun of Kyle saying he was gay and had a boyfriend. Kyle had never felt so sick to his stomach. He told him he was gay, that he was sorry he hadn’t told him sooner, and that he didn’t want him to fight for him. It was Kyle’s battle to fight.

After graduation from high school, Kyle attended the University of Washington and continued to learn more about who he was. He joined Delta Lambda Phi, the first fraternity founded by openly queer men with values of justice, service, and fellowship. Through that fellowship, he met many unique, vibrant individuals that challenged him in many ways. He had imagined all gay looked, felt and thought like he did. That was not the case. While at UW he didn’t fit into a singular box. He represented the conservative student voice through his involvement with the college Republican group. UW didn’t know what to do with him – he was a gay college Republican. During that time Washington State had marriage equality on the ballot. He advocated for the measure and when passed, it was a monumental moment for him. Coming home to Yakima six years ago, he looked for ways to further serve his community. He became involved in a new local group, Yakima Pride. It’s been amazing to be a part of helping it grow. Last year, he decided to run for Yakima County Commissioner. Today he is the first openly gay county commissioner in Eastern Washington. Coming out is a deeply personal and often life altering process. There is no right or wrong way to come out. Some people may choose to come out in a public way; others don’t feel safe to do so, and some will never officially come out and simply live their lives. His story has been a journey with an acceptance of who he is and never being ashamed.

If you didn’t already know by now, June is Pride Month. At its core it represents a journey - a journey of self-discovery, self-acceptance, self-love – and a celebration of diverse identities, experiences, and strength within to embrace who we are. The individual stories of Kyle and many others weave together to create a vibrant tapestry of human existence that deserves recognition and celebration. It is about a world that embraces everyone regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. It is creating a society that values love over hate, understanding over prejudice, and compassion over discrimination. It is a call to action to foster inclusivity in all aspects of life. Over 30% of homeless youth in Yakima County identify as LBTG and 54% of LBTG in our state have no access to mental health. There is still much to do.

When he began his talk, Kyle shared that he hoped that we would walk away with something of value, something to reconsider, something to cherish, or a better understanding and comfort level about a part of our community. When finished, he was greeted with a standing ovation.