



THURSDAY, JUNE 26, 2025 YAKIMA CONVENTION & EVENT CENTER

*The Magic
 Of Rotary*

A CELEBRATION OF PRESIDENT JIM DEGRASSE



On July 1, 2024, Jim DeGrasse became the 106th president of the Yakima Rotary. At his first meeting, he talked about being a third generation Rotarian behind his grandfather Merch and dad, John. He encouraged us to attend Rotary, leave judgement and the craziness of the world outside, and come in with curiosity to learn, have fun, and engage. That is exactly what happened.

The programs under the leadership of Kelly Gasseling, Brad Hansen and Jordan Matson were outstanding with something for everyone. They included recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month with Cheech Marin, Native American Heritage Month with Adam Beach, and Black History Month with Shaquem Griffin; all of which included partnerships and outreach to community members and students. Our own members were featured: Rob Phillips, Vicki Baker, Shawn Boyle, John Ecker, Jon DeVaney, and Classification talks from Andi Hochleutner, Foti Panagakos, Alyssa Ford, and Rodrigo Renteria Valencia. We had the honor of hosting Ret. General Jim Mattis and best-selling author Robert Dugoni. Brett Lovins shared about Sobriety in the Workplace, Chelsea Severn talked about the White Pass Foundation, Adam Ratliff spoke about the Snake River Dams, Mick Hoffman talked about the WIAA, and Yakima's very own Masterchef Junior Asher Niles and his dad Shawn not only shared their competitive experiences but catered for us as well.

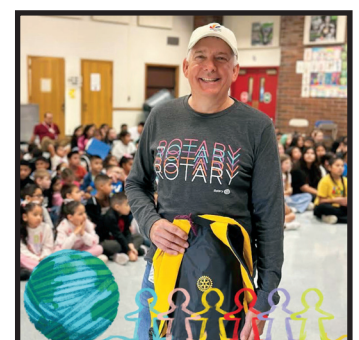
Every week brought its own fun with a Good Afternoon by President Jim that rivaled Robin Williams in the movie Good Morning Vietnam. November 16th became the social highlight of the year with our Rotary Auction. Thanks to the exceptional vision of Quinn Dalan, Mike Hummel, and Mike Norton, Yakima Rotary had the most successful auction raising over \$400,000 net for Yakima Rotary Charities. The atmosphere was stunning from the welcoming entrance to the silent auction room, and the dining room decorated as a circus tent. Under the Big Top was the theme; it included three amazing acts that included an ariel performance. It was truly a night to remember! The Social and Sports Committee were busy all year round. The Rotary picnic was held at Cowiche Creek Brewery. We traveled to new locations every month for our Second Chance Socials, skied at White Pass with pizza afterwards at Bron Yr Aur, and hosted a hike at Cowiche Canyon Uplands Trail. Rotary Bridge was resurrected; we marched in the Sunfair Parade handing out bubbles along the way; and played BINGO for our annual holiday party.

With service as a cornerstone of Rotary, we incorporated a project into a weekly meeting by stuffing 614 backpacks for every student at Hoover Elementary with pencils, markers, crayons, binders, glue, rulers, paper and much more. Teachers were included with their own special kits. Operation Harvest resulted in the collection of 65,100 pounds of food and \$75,000 in cash donations to support nine local food banks. Rotarians showed up for Rotarians at Work Day to pick up garbage around Rotary Lake; pull weeds and spread bark at Sarg Hubbard Park Flower Garden; and trim bushes, pull weeds, and spread bark at the Welcome to Yakima Sign. The holidays brought Bell Ringing with The Salvation Army. Spring brought with it a project to fund and spread new soft-fall wood chips at Chesterley and MLK Jr. Park playgrounds. We awarded 19 Academic Scholarships to 19 amazing graduating high school seniors. Allocation & Review awarded grants for a computer upgrade at the Harmon Center; a teen room at the Henry Beauchamp Community Center; funding for the Capitol Theatre's Aunties Storytelling Workshop; upgrades for the Yakima Area Arboretum; funding of Kids Bereavement Bags through Heartlinks, a shade project at Garfield Elementary, and funding to support Yakima Recovery events, Police Engagement Activities, and the YSO Student Fiesta Concert. Donations were also made to the Davis and Eisenhower high school pantries; Yakima Rotaract; and to support the Jobs for Youth Summer Program.

Twenty new members were introduced with five coming in as part of a new membership category for Under 35 that includes reduced costs. The mix of new and long-time Rotarians is remarkable. The future of Yakima Rotary is in good hands. The number of guests at our meetings was at an all-time high. Time after time, members and guests commented on the positive energy and vibe in the room. How could anyone forget the weekly this day in Music history and this day in Automotive History.

It has been a remarkable year! President Jim possesses a wonderful ability to share his Rotary story, what Rotary means to him, and making each of us feel like his best friend. Throughout the year he has shared his gratefulness for his family, Yakima, and Rotary—we are in turn, eternally GRATEFUL to him. Please join us this week as we celebrate Jim and a job well done!

"There is a great deal of pleasure in life by being able to make someone else's life better."



FOR THURSDAY'S MEETING

Greeters – Past Presidents
Inspiration – Charlie Eglin
Sergeant-at-Arms – Kellie Connaughton
Program – Past President Erin Black
Music – Doug Rich

FUTURE PROGRAMS

July 3rd – No Meeting, Happy 4th of July
July 10th – President Sheri Bissell
July 17th – Michael Connelly, Westwood Golf Club
July 22nd – Trust All Yakima Rotary Celebration at
Rotary Marketplace
July 24 – No Meeting

YOU'RE INVITED TO THIS MONTH'S SECOND CHANCE SOCIAL

Take a well-earned midweek break and join fellow Rotarians this Wednesday, June 25th from 5pm – 6pm at El Porton on Tieton Drive.



Enjoy lively conversation and great company. We will provide the appetizers – you pick up the tab for your favorite drink (margarita or cerveza anyone?) Come celebrate the first full week of summer and unwind with us!

REVIEW

We traveled to the Fourth Street Theatre for our meeting. Thank you to everyone who helped make the meeting a success. Sharon Mircle and Clark Permann served as our greeters. Sheri Lou Creson provided an inspirational message regarding the recognition of Juneteenth which fell on our meeting date. Bob Romero continued the recognition with a This Day in History that included a salute to Juneteenth for sergeant-at-arms. President Jim was in charge of announcements with invitations for the Second Chance Social next Wednesday and the Trust All- Rotary Celebration on July 22nd and celebrating the 1-year Rotary anniversaries for Alex Ditto and Ray Merrell.

We had two new member introductions. Kathy Miller Parrish introduced Toni Benetti-Flabetich. Toni was born and raised in Reno, Nevada. Forty years ago, Toni met her husband Dennis when she came to Yakima to visit her mother. They have been married for 35 years and have one son and daughter-in-law; their first grandchild was born just 6 weeks ago. When she moved to Yakima, Toni was hired by Cellular One that would become AT&T. She was the first person in Washington to sell 50 phones in 1 month. She moved to training which she did for 2 years before opening her own business 2 Busy 2 Cook. Her clients started requesting catering services and she moved to full-time catering with Catering Creations. She has been in business for 25 years. She is not new to Rotary having transferred from Southwest Rotary where she was a member for 7 years. John Baule followed with the introduction of Sam McClung. Sam is a clarinetist and the new director at the Yakima Symphony Orchestra. He holds degrees in Music Performance from CWU and the University of New Mexico. He has performed for the Santa Fe Pro Musica Orchestra, New Mexico Philharmonic, Albuquerque Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Spokane Symphony. His roles have included everything from bookkeeping to music librarian, manager, press relations, marketing, and human resources. He is a long-distance runner, has 2 cats, and is single and taking applications. We are so happy to have both of them as part of our club!

Charlie Robin presented a grant check on behalf of the Literacy Committee to United Way for the Dolly Parton Imagine Library. Imagine Library is a free-to-families program to increase kindergarten readiness by providing books to children 0 to 5 years mailed directly to their homes every month. Since its inception it has served 9,120 children in Yakima County.

Jordan Matson had the honor of introducing Kjersten Braaten as our program speaker. As the National Accounts Manager for Tree Top, Inc, Kjersten shared what it means to represent an agricultural cooperative and how companies like Tree Top adapt to meet shifting consumer expectations and retail trends. A cooperative is a business owned by members who pool their resources to achieve a common goal. Tree Top has 700 growers in their cooperative comprised of apple and pear growers across the PNW and California. Not all fruit grown in this area meets fresh market standards. In Washington state about 20% of apples are downgraded for imperfections like color, blemishes, and size; they are often referred to as culls. In the 1930s and 40s the percentage was much higher resulting in losses for growers who paid to have their fruit dumped in fields, valleys and rivers. Tree Top was founded in 1960 to take the excess, unattractive fruit from their growers' orchards and turn it into healthful fruit products for the marketplace. They introduced the first frozen apple juice concentrate in 1963 and in the first 20 years, generated over \$85 million back to their members. In the

1980s, their two drying facilities established them as the largest dried apple supplier in the Western Hemisphere. Between 1999 and 2008 they acquired three additional companies that increased their offerings beyond just apples and pears. Today they have six production facilities along the west coast that process over 1 billion pounds a year of fruit that include apples, pears, raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, peaches, apricots, plums, and cherries – and are recognized as one of the top 100 agricultural cooperatives in the U.S.

Tree Top has three business units that sell their products: retail, food service, and ingredients. The retail business is the most familiar and comprised of premium apple juice and sauces sold through popular retailers. The food service channel is where they sell applesauce, juice and dried apple chips. They sell to companies such as Starbucks, Chipotle, and Panda Express, giving their consumers healthy drink and side options. During Covid, the food service business grew their market share with K-12 schools. With kids at home, schools continued to offer free meals for pickup. Vending machines are another new venue, having recently launched a 1oz apple chip bag. Tree Top is a global leader in the fruit ingredient manufacturing. The ingredients unit sells bulk ingredients like dried apples, purées, and fruit juice concentrates to top food and beverage manufacturers within North America. They also sell to smaller specialty food and beverage makers. In today's landscape consumers are looking for natural ingredients and no added sugar; manufacturers are looking for ways to enhance their markets and realize cost savings; and suppliers like Tree Top are competing against imported products made with cheaper labor and manufacturing costs.

As a supplier of agricultural commodities, the landscape changes every season based upon fruit availability, weather, and labor resources that impact crop viability. In order to be successful navigating the market, Tree Top focuses on offering fruit-based solutions to their customers. In 2013 Tree Top introduced applesauce pouches; they quickly became the number one seller for applesauce on grocery store shelves. Why? They became a solution to consumer needs with busy parents looking for easy healthy snacks for their kids. In 2017, consumers were asking for transparency in food products. In 2018 they became the first company to unveil a clear pouch so consumers could see what was inside their pouch. Partnerships in innovation are key; they leverage their experts in food science, product development, engineering, food safety, and packaging at the front end of the customer's innovation pipeline.

Tree Top is passionate about what they do and believes that everyone deserves good food. They make it happen with a commitment and embrace of five values: trust, customer driven, excellence, teams and communities, and fun.



Literacy Grant Presentation to United Way for the Dolly Parton Imagine Library)



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