



THURSDAY, JUNE 27, 2024 YAKIMA CONVENTION & EVENT CENTER

Create Hope
in the World

A CELEBRATION OF PRESIDENT ERIN BLACK ENGAGE, ADAPT, IMPACT & REACH



Erin Black’s presidency began on July 6, 2023, with confetti flying through the air and bobbleheads. At that first meeting, four words were used to describe her year: Engage, Adapt, Impact and Reach. Those words were weaved into everything we did and accomplished.

ENGAGEMENT meant all sorts of social activities. The annual Rotary picnic took us to Cowiche Creek Brewing with great food, a live band, and space for kids to run. We joined together with Sunrise and Southwest Rotary to march in the SunFair Parade, handing out Rotary bubbles to kids along the way. Second Chance Socials made a return happening on the last Wednesday of every month as Rotarians and guests gathered for great conversation, hors d’oeuvres, and drinks. The last two had a fun twist with Wacky Wednesday and a hosting at the home of David & Amanda McKinney. The holidays featured an adult only meeting with a full house to play BINGO with Past President Scott Wagner serving as our bingo caller. The kids were not forgotten with an outdoor ice-skating night just for them that included the gift of a book. Spring included Rotary Ski Day

with pizza afterwards at Bron Yr Aur and our annual Scholarship Dinners where twenty-three Rotarians and their spouses hosted over 110 fellow members and their guests for dinner.

We **ADAPTED** to changes in how meetings were run. Sometimes we had music and invocation, sometimes we didn’t. We incorporated a service project into our weekly meeting as we stuffed 550 backpacks with pencils, crayons, markers, glue sticks, scissors, dry erase markers, and a special note from Rotary that were delivered to every student at MLK Jr. Elementary – it was amazingly fun! We went offsite to PNWU, the Capitol Theatre for a night of hypnosis, and to Bale Breakers that included an impromptu talk by the owners and the drawing for the winning ticket for our marble draw fundraiser. We turned a meeting with Rosalinda Mendoza about the story of Moxel Mezcal into a tasting at the Larson Gallery and the newest Rotarians took over a meeting in February running it from start to finish. Adapting also meant looking at putting together groups to look at different membership models, consolidating committees, and a rewriting of the bylaws for the Yakima Rotary Club.

IMPACT and **REACH** were all about making a difference in our community, sharing what we do with others, and working with partners. We partnered with Southwest and Sunrise Rotary to address childhood obesity with Healthy Futures. Twice a month, working as a team we provided families with nutritious recipes, the ingredients needed to make the recipes, and reuseable Rotary shopping bags. Northwest Harvest served as our staging area. Families were chosen by community partners ESD 105, Yakima Valley Farmworkers, MultiCares Act Program, La Casa Hogar, and the Ttáwaxt Birth Justice Center. Rotary Operation Harvest resulted in the collection of 20 tons of food, not including what was dropped off at Wray’s Thriftway, and over \$57,000 in cash to support nine food banks in our community. We awarded 19 Academic Scholarships to local graduating high school seniors. The timeline for Vocational Scholarships was changed to the fall to better serve those students. Rotarians at Work Day saw Rotarians and their families spread out at the Welcome to Yakima Sign, Sarg Hubbard Park, and Rotary Lake picking up garbage, trimming bushes, pulling weeds, and spreading bark. Allocation and Review awarded grants totaling \$27,770 supporting Yakima Rotaract, a lending library at Marcus Whitman Cowiche Elementary, the Yakima Valley Museum, Canyon Blooms Petals for Patients, Lewis & Clark Middle School, Triumph Treatment Services Genesis Mental Health Rooms, and the Rotary Outdoor Therapy Center in Honduras. The Yakima Valley Veteran Honor Guard, Tom Olivia, and the WAY Program were recognized as Rotary Unsung Heroes. Our Program Committee did an outstanding job of bringing our community and the world to us. A few highlights included Tom Heller from the Holocaust Center for Humanity, Secretary of State Steve Hobbs, Raymond Santana who celebrated Black History Month that included outreach to students at Davis and Ike, a community-wide event, and a program at CWU. Local programs included Tammy Buyok with MultiCare of Yakima, Senator Curtis King, innovations in glass recycling, YVFWC, the story of the new local crime lab, and Celisa Hopkins and Russ & Nancy Leahy sharing their experiences walking the Camino de Santiago.

It was an exceptional year with President Erin at the helm. She possesses the gift of leadership and the ability to bring people together to look toward the future. This week is a celebration of Yakima Rotary and Erin – please join us in recognizing her for a job well done.

“Leaders in Heels are Extraordinary Women.”



FOR THURSDAY'S MEETING

Greeters – All Past Presidents
Music – Doug Rich
Invocation – Kurt Labberton
Sergeant-at-Arms – Kellie Connaughton
Program – Past President Rick Fairbrook
Attendance – Matt Crow

FUTURE PROGRAMS

July 4th – No Meeting, Happy Fourth of July
July 11th – President Jim DeGrasse
July 18th – Asher Niles, MasterChef Junior
July 23rd – Yakima Rotary Trust All Club Celebration
July 25th – No Meeting

REVIEW

Rotary was the perfect place on Thursday. It was Summer Solstice, President Erin's last chance to be in charge at the podium (the Past Presidents will be running the show this week), we had the reintroduction of a new member; and we celebrated Juneteenth with the help of two exceptional individuals.

We also had a great team of Rotarians who helped make the meeting a success. Bob Gerst and Tim Carlson served as our greeters. David Rogers set the tone for our celebration with *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. Sheri Bissell shared a poem, *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou. President Erin welcomed our guests; presented blue badges to Foti Panagakos and Andi Hochleutner; celebrated Brad Kessinger as a new grandpa; reminded everyone about next week's Second Chance Social; and shared the sad news of Jim Smith's passing with a moment of silence. Soni Alexander asked for donations of live auction item for our auction in November. Examples given included dinners, a timeshare or vacation home at a fun destination, and a wine collection. Tim Carlson raised funds for Rotary Charities with a farewell sergeant-at-arms as he moves to Colorado to be close to his grandkids.

Dr. Ray Merrell was reintroduced as our newest member by Craig Mendenhall. Ray was born and raised in Pennsylvania, graduated from Penn State, and earned his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. His next stop was New York for residency training at St. Vincent's Hospital. It was there he met his wife, Eileen. Ray's favorite lunch growing up was grilled cheese and tomato soup. As a young child, Eileen was on the can of Campbell soup – it was meant to be! He went on to complete his general urological surgery at Geisinger Clinic followed by one year of pediatric urologic surgery in Toronto. Upon completion, he was recruited to Yakima where he spent 40 years in Urology; twenty-five as president of Yakima Urology. He was president of the Yakima Medical Society, president of the Yakima Surgical Society, and served as Chief of Surgery at Virginia Mason Memorial. He currently serves as a member of the Board for the Memorial Foundation. When he wasn't busy being a doctor, he and Eileen raised 3 active boys who swam, bicycled, skied, hiked, and played sports. Ray coached soccer, AAU, and Little League; Eileen coached tennis and soccer. Today his time is spent enjoying travel, snow skiing, golf and spending time with his three sons and their families. We are so glad to have him back as part of Rotary!

Eric Silvers had the honor of introducing Wally Webster and Ester Huey as our program speakers in recognition of Juneteenth. Each of them shared incredible personal stories about their upbringing in the South and individual journeys to Eastern Washington. Wally was born and raised in the Bayou of Alabama in a small town west of Mobile, Alabama. Segregation based upon the color of your skin was a way of life. It was deeply rooted in Jim Crow laws enforced by sworn police officers in the day and the KKK at night. Wally was 9 years old when Emmett Till was accused of flirting with a white woman, tortured, lynched and found dead floating in the river. As news of what happened spread, Wally's dad sat him and his three brothers down on the floor, pacing back and forth, teaching them never to look at white person in the face; if you see a white person coming you go off the sidewalk and you go on your way. Upon graduation from high school, Wally embarked on a 2,500-mile journey to Pasco, Washington. He was 17 years old. He found the same segregated America in Pasco.

When the Atomic Energy Commission took the properties of Hanford they went to Texas, Oklahoma, and other southern states to bring black laborers to build. They were not going to social reengineer; they kept the segregation that black folks were accustomed to in the South. When the work was completed, people started to move out. Richland was a town for government management. Kennewick was a sundown town (Birmingham of the NW) Pasco was an agriculture town. 95% of the Black people lived in East Pasco with children attending de facto segregated schools.

His uncle took him to Columbia Basin College to enroll in college. After a 5 minutes interview, he was told he wasn't college material. It was the first time he had ever sat and looked at a white person in the face. As he was leaving another man put his arm around him; he was a white man. The man asked if he wanted to go to college. The answer was yes. He said he'd get him into college, but that Wally would have to major in accounting. Wally earned 2 AA degrees, obtained his graduate and undergraduate degrees at CWU, and spent 32 years

in financial services industries working for one of the largest banks in the world.

When he arrived in Pasco, he made a conscious decision to become a civil rights activist. He spoke out at city council meetings, town hall meetings, and organized marches and demonstrations. He was fueled not by anger, but by disappointment that he had come that far to face the same things he experienced in the South. He organized the first voter rights registration in the history of Pasco and got 350 residents registered to vote for the first time in one day. His mentor Henry Beauchamp helped secure federal funding for the MLK Center in East Pasco.

Ester was born and raised in a little town in Arkansas. She came to Washington in 1946 as part of the great migration to the North. Her mother was recruited to work at Hanford. She had been a sharecropper working from sunup to sundown. The first time Ester saw her mom cry was when they settled up with the plantation owner at the end of the harvest and no money exchanged hands. The second time she saw her cry was when Ester asked why she couldn't swim in the pool like the white children. She was Ester's hero; she wouldn't let them believe there wasn't anything that they couldn't do no matter what the world was telling them. Ester started picking cotton at 5 years old. It was a horrible job that left her hands bloodied – they had to go out the next day and do it again. It was a lesson in perseverance.

When the war was over, her mom came back to Arkansas to bring Ester and her siblings to Washington. It was a terrifying transition from South to the North. They had been taught to fear white people. They found themselves walking to school with white kids; they were so terrified that her stepfather had to walk with them. She'd never seen a white teacher in the South and never seen a black teacher in Washington until she was out of school. Her mother was not able to get any employment except housework. She always took summers off so they all could work in the orchards together. If they met their goals they would get ice cream. If they didn't, they would plan what needed to be done to make it work the next day. Her mother was educating them without them knowing. It was another lesson; this time in planning and organizing. Attending school was also terrifying; she was terrified to speak to her teacher. She gained a mentor in Bernice Lyle who worked at the Yakima Valley Library. She helped Ester learn how to talk to white people by charting books for her to read and asking questions about each one. Ester was never bitter, but there were disappointments. When they arrived in Yakima, the first thing they saw was a sign across the street at a restaurant that said No Colored Allowed. Their mother told them they would never see it again. She couldn't find a job after graduation from school. She had taken a secretary course in high school and was the best in shorthand. She was fired from her first job after her husband brought her forgotten lunch to work. Her employer said she lied; he could not have a black person work for him. When she started having her own family, they chose a house on 43rd Avenue to purchase. The realtor refused to sell them the house. They had to threaten the mortgage company and were eventually able to buy the house. Ollie Nelson hired her for a secretary position at the YMCA. Not everyone was happy to see Ester there. Mr. Nelson told the person they had the choice to work with Ester or leave; the person left. It gave Ester confidence in what was happening in Yakima. Ester had students in every school district in Yakima and had taken some out of schools because of discriminatory practices. She has seen children of color disappointed and not live up to their potential. She has always advocated for her children and for equal educational opportunities. Her passion has been eliminating discrimination. She first began coming to Rotary as a guest of Henry Beauchamp. It was not easy to be the only one that looked like her. Under Past President Eric Silvers, Rotary spearheaded improvements to MLK Jr. Park and East Yakima. There is still much to do. Ester never gets angry, she gets busy. She spent 20 years advocating for an aquatic center on the east side that is now becoming a reality. She is proud to be among community members, including Rotary that have contributed to making it happen.

It was a wonderful program that ended with a standing ovation and beautiful quotes. Wally shared wisdom of his father, "If you can leave this world in a better place than you found it then your living will not be in vain." Ester shared a quote was from Frederick Douglass, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."



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