



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2026
YAKIMA CONVENTION & EVENT CENTER

GERARDO RUELAS
WHAT’S HAPPENING AT COSTCO

Create
Lasting
Impact



Gerardo Ruelas is the Director of Enterprise Corporate Systems at Costco Wholesale headquarters, where he oversees technology strategy and system support for core corporate functions, including legal, tax, procurement, and facilities management. Throughout his tenure at Costco, Ruelas has spearheaded major global initiatives, most notably leading the implementation of IT systems for Costco's expansion into China. His career with the company began in Guadalajara, Mexico, where he worked for three years before transitioning to corporate headquarters.

Gerardo grew up in Sunnyside, Washington, and graduated from Sunnyside High School and earned his bachelor's degree from Heritage University in 2007. A proud advocate for higher education in the Yakima Valley, he has served on the Heritage University Board of Directors for eight years. He currently holds leadership positions as Chair of the Governance Committee and First Vice-Chair of the Board.

Gerardo is also instrumental in fostering educational opportunities for future leaders. Alongside five fellow Heritage alumni at Costco, he worked closely with Costco founder Jim Sinegal to establish the Sinegal Scholars Scholarship. For six consecutive years, the program has awarded four-year, full-ride scholarships to five incoming Heritage University students annually.

Gerardo’s career trajectory exemplifies the resilience and drive that Heritage University graduates bring to the workforce. As Paul Moulton, retired Executive Vice President of IT at Costco, observed: "I hired Heritage graduates because of their family work ethic, their personal work ethic, their cultural understanding, foreign language skills, and the hurdles they have overcome in their lives. Companies cannot teach those skills, and they are critical in the work environment."

FOR THURSDAY’S MEETING

Greeters – Ryan Griffee, Barrett Morrison
Inspiration – Josh Shockley
Sergeant-at-Arms – Kate Urwin
Program – Rick Pinnell
Attendance – Megan Bewley

FUTURE PROGRAMS

October 8th – Yakima Rotary Vocational Scholarship Awards
October 15th – J.R. Martinez, National Hispanic Heritage Month
October 22nd – Tom Davis, John I Haas Sensory Panel
October 29th – Elf the Musical

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED - OPERATION HARVEST



Rotary Operation Harvest is Saturday, October 10th. There is a **GREAT** need for volunteers to both distribute bags **BEFORE** the event between October 2nd and October 8th and **DAY OF THE EVENT** to collect food. If you would like to help, please contact the Rotary office or sign up with the QR code below. Yard signs are available and cash donations are always appreciated.



Sign Up to Volunteer Here!



Donate to Operation Harvest Here!



ROTARY LEARNING INSTITUTE

One of the most interactive learning opportunities that Rotary offers is RLI (Rotary Learning Institute). RLI is a one-day facilitated event for members to learn everything about Rotary from Rotary International, to The Rotary Foundation, how to create a positive membership experience, and to learn about service activities and projects outside your own club. Added this year is a presentation on Artificial Intelligence and how it can be used in a positive way as a volunteer organization.

There are two RLI offered this fall – one in Canada and one in the U.S. The U.S. event will take place on Saturday, October 17th from 8:30am to 3pm in Toppenish. If you are interested in participating, please contact the Rotary office or go to Rotary District 5060 to register.

Whether you're new to Rotary or have been a member for a number of years, there is always something new to learn.



REVIEW

The first fall meeting of the year was packed with information and countless opportunities for club members to get involved in activities and events. Greeters Honorable Rebecca Pennington and Heritage University President Chris Gilmer warmly welcomed attendees prior to President John Cooper starting the meeting. John recapped the success of the prior week's annual picnic at the Yakima Tennis Club, and he thanked members of the social committee and Jim DeGrasse for putting together such a fun and well attended event. John reminded and invited club members to walk as Rotarians in Saturday's Sun Fair Parade and hand out books to children along the route.

Past President Dr. Kurt Labberton provided a thoughtful moment of inspiration by acknowledging thankfulness long before Thanksgiving which he shared was just 63 days away. Kurt provided perspective and encouragement for remembering to always be thankful. Sergeant at Arms Amy Maib hosted a trivia game complete with video clips, images, and fun questions. Other announcements included Past President and past District Governor Darrell Blue describing the efforts of Rotary International (RI) and the campaign to increase charitable contributions and bequests to RI and the benefits those gifts provide to projects around the globe. President Cooper shared that RI also distributes funds back to the clubs and regions and reiterated encouragement to members to consider contributions. Brent Elkins, Co-chair of Operation Harvest described the upcoming Operation Harvest efforts and the help needed to distribute bags to porches and to collect the bags on October 10, which is the only day to pick up and receive badly needed food supplies for our community. Brent threw down a challenge to our club, indicating we are lagging behind the other clubs with signups and contributions. He asked everyone to understand how important the effort is and asked people who have the ability to write a check to go ahead and do so, but also those who don't have the ability to make significant monetary contributions to volunteer to distribute or pick up the bags – a truly essential part of the campaign to feed those less fortunate in our community.

Past President Erin Black had the pleasure of introducing new member Mary Abigail Dills. Mary Abigail serves as Vice President and Marketing Director for Baker Boyer, bringing more than 20 years of experience in marketing, branding, communications, digital strategy, public relations, strategic planning, and operations. She currently serves in volunteer roles as Board President of the Yakima Humane Society and on the Yakima Country Club Events Committee. Her previous community involvement includes the Citizens Police Academy, Leadership Yakima, work as a certified sexual assault victim advocate, and serving as President of New Leaders of Yakima County. Mary Abigail considers herself a Valley native, although she jokes that some people may challenge that title since she moved to Zillah in the fourth grade from the Pullman area. However, she was born on the Washington State University campus, making her, in her words, "born and bred a Cougar." In her spare time,

she enjoys using her creative talents to make shoes and restore vintage clothing. She and her husband Jason share their home with a cast of affectionately named pets: Itty Bitty and Geez Louise, their dogs, and Pitter and Patter, their two orange cats.

Sharon Miracle kicked off the program portion of the program by asking all of the Yakima Free Clinic board members, staff, PNWU medical students and other clinic volunteers in attendance to stand up and be recognized. Sharon then introduced Hannah Wilson, founding board member and now executive director of the Yakima Free Clinic/La Clinica

Gratuita de Yakima. Hannah grew up in Alabama and received her Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She's been a Physician Assistant for over a decade, spending her professional career caring for the underserved communities of the Yakima Valley. Hannah provided a presentation describing the mission of the free clinic which exists to provide free, holistic healthcare to the medically underserved of rural Central Washington while giving experience and training to students; and to do this work not-for-profit, but exclusively for humanitarian, educational, and public service purposes. With more than 36,000 uninsured people in Yakima County and one of the worst ratios of care providers to residents, the clinic serves an important purpose in serving those who are uninsured and medically underserved, anyone who cannot afford healthcare, those who prefer languages other than English, those who face barriers to access care such as months of wait lists or unaffordable copays. 90% of the clinic's patients are Hispanic. 20% of Yakima residents say they do not have a personal doctor or health care provider, and our only local Emergency Department is the busiest in the state with over 90,000 patient visits. The Yakima Free Clinic provides an essential role which is met thanks to more than 250 volunteers, including many community clinicians serve patients through the clinic. These volunteers are essential to providing services to patients and educational opportunities to students interested in or pursuing a medical profession. The clinic relies on donations of medical equipment, supplies and other resources and maintains collaborative partnerships with MultiCare Yakima Memorial Hospital, Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, Triumph Treatment Services, Community Health of Central Washington, Family Practice Residency, Yakima Valley Community Foundation, Legend's Casino, Heritage University, Yakima Valley Farmworkers Clinic, Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, and La Casa Hogar. An invitation was extended to schedule tours and visit the Clinic to witness their work first-hand.

Following the program, Rick Pinell took the stage to present the Unsung Heros Award. He asked for all staff, volunteers, medical students, board members and physicians who were present at the meeting and working at the Yakima Free Clinic to come forward and stand in front of the stage. He then asked people in the audience who had volunteered in our community or abroad to help people in need of services and medical care to stand. He

then presented the Unsung Heros Award to the Yakima Free Clinic team of volunteers and staff honoring the volunteer doctors, nurses and all the those who are truly the solutions for so many in our community in need of care.

John Cooper finished with his appreciation and reminders of the Sunfair Parade Saturday the 25 and of the upcoming Operation Harvest. He ended the meeting with a seasonal joke.



Rotary Unsung Heroes – Yakima Free Clinic Volunteers & Staff



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