Don Whitehouse was born and raised in the Yakima Valley, and graduated from Washington State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering. He began his career with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) in Spokane in 1977, and obtained his Professional Engineer’s License in 1982.

Don has held various positions within WSDOT, including design, construction, and maintenance, and in various locations including Yakima, Tri-Cities, Ellensburg, Spokane, and Olympia.

In 2001, Don returned to Yakima to accept the position of Regional Administrator for the South Central Region. The South Central Region encompasses portions of 10 counties from North Bend to Clarkston. His responsibilities include planning, design, construction, maintenance, environmental, real-estate, and communications for the state highway system. Don has been a member of the Yakima Rotary since 2003.

Don’s presentation to us will explain the many challenges in keeping I-90 Snoqualmie Pass open during the winter and what it takes to open Chinook Pass every year. I-90 is a major east-west transportation corridor from the Port of Seattle to Boston Massachusetts. I-90 Snoqualmie Pass carries 35 million tons of freight each year. Studies have shown the economic impact to the state can exceed $10 million per day when Snoqualmie Pass is closed. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has an aggressive snow and ice program for Snoqualmie Pass. WSDOT utilizes several different methods for avalanche control with our nationally recognized Avalanche Forecasting and Control team.
Registration has begun for the 2012 Yakima Rotary Charities Auction. This year you have the option of registering three different ways:

1. Rotary Auction Registration Form – If you have an e-mail on file with the Rotary office, you will have already received a copy of the form that can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed.

2. Rotary Auction Invitation – You can wait until you receive a formal invitation in the mail. It will include a reply card with payment information.

3. On-Line – You can pay for your tickets online at www.yourtickethere.com. This option allows you to pay via Paypal. There will be a convenience charge of $4.85 per ticket.

The cost to attend is $135 a person – if you register by Friday, October 26th, you will receive an early RSVP discount of $25 a person – that’s a savings of $50 a couple. Sign-up today! Pass on the message to your friends! And don’t forget to like the Auction Facebook page.

We had a packed house to hear Republican Gubernatorial Candidate Rob McKenna share his vision for our state. The meeting started with a room full of marvelous voices singing our National Anthem followed by Doug Corpron with our invocation and the welcoming of our guests by President Dave.

The Rotary Auction was the focus of two announcements. Jennifer Bliesser shared that reservations are now being accepted. There are three RSVP options; use the registration form which has been e-mailed to everyone; use the reply card in the auction invitation when it arrives; or register on-line. If you register by October you will save $25 per ticket. Nancy Leahy and Mike Latimer provided an update on procurement of silent auction items. After introducing their team captains they shared that they have secured 50 items worth $12,000; the goal is 320 items. If every member donated or solicited just one item, the goal would be surpassed. The due date for all items to guarantee inclusion in the catalog is October 4th.

Matt Martinus scored a Rotary hat trick. He invited everyone to partici-pate in the Rotary hike next Friday, September 14th; encouraged everyone to volunteer for Operation Harvest; and took care of the sergeant-at-arms duties. Sunrise Rotary President Sheri Brockway came to the podium to say thank you to Downtown Rotary for their $2,500 donation towards their Rotary pavilion project. Thanks to a matching grant from the Yakima Rotary Trust our donation was doubled. The pavilion is being ordered this fall to take advantage of price breaks. Groundbreaking will take place in the spring.

Darlene Picatti made the final announcement with a new fun "make-up" opportunity; the Rotary Second Chance Social Hour. Every second Wednesday of the month at Second Street Grill from 5pm-6pm, members are invited to gather for a no-host social hour. If you miss our meeting and can't make it to Southwest or Sunrise Rotary, you can come to the Second Street Grill, get a make-up, and enjoy the company of your fellow Rotarians in a fun informal atmosphere.

Maureen Adkison introduced Rob McKenna noting that from the front of the room there was “a lot of people.” Rob began by sharing that as a Rotarian for 20 years, he loves speaking to other Rotary clubs. As Attorney General, Rob has visited our community many times as an advocate against drugs and gangs. Public safety is a key issue for him. Many individuals at the estate level view it as a local issue; that is wrong. A safe community and feeling safe and secure are important to quality of life. Community based partnerships work.

In the race for governor, Rob has three priorities; jobs and the economy, education, and the reform of state government. He began with jobs, by sharing four reforms that he would implement based upon his round table talks with 400 business owners: 1) Unemployment insurance reform. Washington has the 7th highest rate in the nation, it would be great to strive to be “average”. 2) B & O tax reform especially for new businesses. 3) Workers compensation reform. Workers in Washington spend an average of 260 days off of work; that is too long. 4) Regulatory reform; it is time to clean the junk out of the garage. How would he accomplish this? His help wanted sign for government heads would read “must have private sector experience.” As department heads they would be required to meet with stakeholders.

Education is crucial to our children's future. After 20 years where are we now with education? We are under court order. The amount of money for K-12 education keeps shrinking. He wants to see innovation, increased focus on early childhood education, pay for teachers based upon performance and evaluations on whether children are actually learning. Every principal should be an instructional leader not an administrator. They should be able to hire their own staff. We need to get rid of last one hired is the first one out. When Rob was the student body president at the University of Washington 16% of the state budget was devoted to higher education. When his daughter held the same office it had decreased to 8%. This is the very time we need workers with high skills. Education needs to be a priority. Revenue is projected to go up; we need to capnon-education spending. It is not just about money; it is about reform. Reform of state government will make it easier to create jobs. It is all about a new direction for Washington State.

With plenty of time for questions and answers Rob addressed the issues of death tax, charter schools, collective bargaining, and health care. Washington has the highest death tax in the nation. It was put into law by the voters; at the least it is worth looking at whether it costs more than it brings in. Washington is only one out of nine states nationwide that does not allow charter schools. Rob supports public charter schools. When it comes to collective bargaining, he does not see that as the problem. It is the people doing the bargaining. Innovation needs to be part of the process. The two largest pension funds in the state are currently unfunded. We need to honor those that are already vested in the system and make changes in the rules for new hires with defined contribution plans. Health care was isolated to the issue of state employees. Premiums for state employees are eating the budget alive. There has to be incentives to move people to other consumer directed savings accounts. Over the past two weeks we have heard from Jay Inslee and we have heard from Rob McKenna. As Americans, the choice is yours. Don't forget to vote.