Rotary Club of Meadow Ridge

The Four Way Flasher

ROTARY CLUB MEADOW-RIDGE BRITISH COLUMBIA CANADA

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Website: MeadowRidgeRotary.ca

Meetings: Tuesday 12 Noon

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CREATE LASTING IMPACT

SEPTEMBER IS BASIC EDUCATION AND LITERACY MONTH

Happy Birthday	Happy Anniversary
Sep 13 Kris Harrison	

Upcoming Speakers:

Sep 8	Sep 15 Brenda Jenkins My Grandfather's Story	Sep 22 No Speaker Duck Race Cheque Presentations

LAST WEEK'S MEETING

President **Eric Mollema** Presided.

Cheque Presentation

Inek Boekhorst presented a cheque from our club in the amount of **$1,000** to **Celise Verge**, the Events & Marketing Manager of the **Maple Ridge Business Improvement Association**, to help defray the costs of the BIA purchasing a new event tent. The BIA has in the past provided a tent to us for use at special events (including the recent Rotary Duck Race), which we very much have appreciated.

Program – Unlocking the Gates Services Society (UTG)

Speakers: Mo Korchinski _ Cheri McBride-Vautour

Mo Korchinski

Mo is the Executive Director of Unlocking the Gates Services Society **(UTG)** and oversees the Maple Ridge Community Hub, which provides a welcoming, low-barrier place for more than 100 people each day to access food, basic necessities, support, and connections to services. Mo is passionate about Maple Ridge and believes strong communities are built when residents, businesses, service organizations, and community leaders work together to ensure no one is left behind. Mo has had a long history with substance abuse and incarceration. Her own lived history and experiences have shaped the program into what it is today. Mo has a Bachelor of Social Work from Nicola Valley Institution of Technology and was one of UTG's first ever Peer-Mentors. After overcoming many of the same challenges faced by the people she supports today, Mo returned to school, became a social worker, and has dedicated her life to ensuring people have someone in their corner when they need it most. Her life's work is now dedicated to helping others break the cycle of incarceration. She is an advocate for people involved in the criminal justice system and continues to push for change at a policy-level and increased supports for her community of Maple Ridge. Mo feels strongly about the need to address trauma and support healing for people who experience incarceration.

Cheri McBride-Vautour

Cheri has been an important part of Unlocking the Gates since 2017, and currently serves as Program Lead. With herself having lived the experience of incarceration and substance use, Cheri brings compassion, understanding, and a strong commitment to supporting people who often face significant barriers when accessing community services. She plays a key leadership role in UTG's three Community Hubs, which are located in Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows and the Surrey / Tri-Cities region. She is passionate about creating welcoming, low-barrier spaces where people experiencing homelessness, poverty, substance use, mental health challenges, or involvement with the justice system can

feel safe, respected, and supported. In Maple Ridge, Cheri has built strong relationships with local organizations, service providers, outreach teams, and community partners, which allow her to connect individuals with housing, health care, mental health and substance use services, food, clothing, identification, income assistance, probation and court support, and other essential resources. Cheri believes that sometimes the first step toward change is simply having a safe place to go and someone who will listen without judgment.

Their Presentation

The speakers provided an informative overview of their work supporting vulnerable individuals in Maple Ridge and surrounding communities, with particular emphasis on homelessness, poverty, addiction, mental-health challenges, incarceration and the transition from correctional facilities back into the community. Unlocking the Gates Services Society (UTG) operates a community hub designed to provide a welcoming, low-barrier environment where individuals can access multiple services in one location. The hub currently operates an income-assistance and community-services office five days a week. Individuals can meet with peer support workers and access necessities such as:

- Food and meals, and clothing
- Hygiene supplies
- Showers and washroom facilities
- Community and social services
- Mental-health and addiction services
- Income-assistance support
- Probation and related services
- Recovery resources

The intent is to bring services to people rather than requiring vulnerable individuals to navigate multiple agencies and locations.

The speakers described a significant increase in demand for services. When the Salvation Army shelter situation changed, the organization responded quickly to ensure that people experiencing homelessness had somewhere to go and access to basic necessities. The organization operated extended hours, with staff providing support from approximately 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. During the emergency response, hundreds of meals were provided, along with showers, clothing and other essential services.

The speakers emphasized that food is often the starting point for building relationships. Providing someone with a meal, coffee, oatmeal, toast or another basic necessity creates an opportunity to establish trust and then connect that person with other services. The organization has increasingly found itself providing breakfast services, including coffee, oatmeal and bagels, because people leaving emergency shelter early in the morning otherwise have nowhere to go. This additional service has increased pressure on staffing, food supplies, volunteers and operating costs.

A major theme of the presentation was that the community hub should not be viewed solely as a service for people experiencing homelessness or addiction. A significant portion of those using the hub are seniors and other community members struggling to afford food. Some seniors regularly attend the hub for meals and groceries. The speakers also noted that the Salvation Army had discontinued its previous evening supper program. This has increased demand for meals at the community hub, particularly among seniors and others who had depended on those meals, and is now providing meals and food support throughout the day wherever possible.

The speakers expressed appreciation for Rotary's previous support. Rotary had helped purchase the original tents for the outdoor area, and more recently Rotary assistance helped provide lighting for the facility. The new lighting was particularly appreciated because the hub begins operating early in the morning, when it is still dark during much of the year. Seemingly small improvements can make a significant difference to people using the facility. Having adequate lighting, a place to charge a cellphone, access to television and a safe place to sit can provide dignity and comfort that many people take for granted.

The organization outlined several challenges associated with operating the hub:

Food - Food requirements have increased significantly because the hub is providing more meals and serving more people.

Volunteers - There is an ongoing need for volunteers to assist with food service, cleaning, organization and general operations.

Cleaning and Maintenance - With high daily usage, maintaining the facility and surrounding property requires significant effort. Even outdoor maintenance and yard cleanup are important because the organization wants the property to remain presentable and respectful to the surrounding neighbourhood.

Propane and Heating - The outdoor tent area is heated with propane. Two heaters may be required, particularly during colder weather. The propane expense can reach several hundred dollars per week. As colder weather approaches, heating costs are expected to become an increasingly significant operating expense.

Clothing - There is also a substantial need for men's clothing, particularly as winter approaches. The organization receives considerable women's clothing donations but has a much greater shortage of clean, usable men's clothing, including:

- Men's pants
- Jackets
- Shirts
- Sweaters
- Warm winter clothing
- General clothing suitable for outdoor conditions.

An important part of the organization's work is maintaining a positive relationship with neighbouring residents and businesses. The speakers emphasized that providing services does not mean allowing unacceptable behaviour. The organization works actively with clients to reinforce appropriate behaviour and address problems when they arise, and stressed that compassion and accountability must go together. The goal is not simply to provide food and services but also to help individuals become responsible members of the community.

The speakers explained that the hub also helps reduce pressure on downtown businesses and emergency services. Police, Community Safety Officers and other service providers have somewhere to direct people who need assistance. Without a hub, vulnerable individuals may congregate around business entrances, schools, sidewalks and private properties because they have nowhere else to go. The hub provides an alternative location where people can receive food, services, support and referrals. The organization has also developed relationships with neighbourhood residents and is working to address concerns

before they escalate. This community-based approach benefits both the people receiving services and the broader neighbourhood.

The speakers emphasized that the hub is not solely focused on emergency needs. Recovery is also an important component of the organization's work. Representatives from recovery houses and other service organizations attend the hub and work with individuals to establish relationships and connect them with appropriate programs. The objective is to provide people with opportunities to move beyond crisis and toward recovery, housing, employment and greater stability. Bringing services together in one location makes it easier for individuals to access help when they are ready.

Unlocking the Gate Services Society works with provincial correctional centres and assists people with release planning. The organization has relationships with approximately 10 correctional centres and has assisted thousands of individuals with transition planning and transportation. Individuals are sometimes released from correctional facilities with very limited assistance and may have nowhere to go. Unlocking the Gate can assist with:

- Transportation
- Shelter arrangements
- Connections to community services
- Recovery programs
- Housing resources
- Identification of appropriate community supports
- Travel back to the individual's home community

The organization does not want to simply release or abandon people in Maple Ridge if they have no connection to the community. When appropriate, staff help individuals return to their home communities. For example, if someone is released in the evening and cannot catch a bus until the following morning, staff may arrange temporary shelter and transportation to ensure that the person can safely continue their journey.

The speakers identified communication as another significant barrier. Individuals inside correctional facilities can face considerable costs and restrictions when attempting to make telephone calls. Unlocking the Gate has established a system whereby its phone number can be accessed free of charge from correctional centres. The organization's phone service operates extensive hours, allowing individuals to make contact and begin arranging their transition into the community before release. This early contact can make a major difference in preventing homelessness and crisis immediately after release.

The community hub currently faces significant uncertainty regarding long-term funding. It previously received funding through a federal program. When the previous service provider was unsuccessful in obtaining another round of funding, the City became involved and approached Unlocking the Gate about operating the hub. Temporary funding was provided during the transition; however, long-term sustainable funding remains unresolved. They are actively advocating at the provincial and other levels of government for recognition of the hub as an essential community service. Operating a community hub of this size cannot realistically be supported indefinitely by a small nonprofit organization without stable funding. Grant applications have been submitted, with additional applications being pursued.

Happy & Sad:

Ineke: Debbie asked Ineke to let the Club know her Mom had a fall last week and broke her hip; she was operated on last Friday and in good spirits. Sadly, her Mom passed away over the weekend. We all send our thoughts and condolences to Debbie, Fraser and family!

Libby: Congratulations to Urma (attending today) for passing her doctorate in Business Admin....and receiving her official papers just this week!

Eric: Very happy for Urma – her 12 years of study being "finished" finally!

Lynda: Will be away for a short break, Sept. 11 – 16. (Ineke will take attendance for Lynda.)

Brenda: Thank you to our speakers Mo and Cheri for a wonderful presentation, and all the great work "Unlocking the Gates" is doing at the Hub!

Clint: Happy that all "lost ducks" were successfully recovered from the river in the end.

Club Business and Activities

September 7-13 – annual camping event at Fort Langley

September 10 – Public Hub at Fort Langley

October 20 – District Gov. club visit

Annual Thanksgiving Food Drive

This Drive collects food for our local Friends in Need Foodbank (see the "Volunteer Handout" attached which very clear explains how you can assist). All you need to do is sign up, pick a route from the list, pick up your empty brown bags, deliver one bag to every single front door on your route (..no need to talk to anybody.....just leave the bag by the front door), return to every single front door on Saturday morning Sept 19....and PU the filled bag and drop off at drop off point on 207th.....that's it!!!!! It works best if you go with at least one "partner", who can drive the car, while you're doing the drop off/PU.....

Ineke says: "Hope you can help with this very worthwhile cause.....and have fun doing it!"

President's Quote for the Day

Submitted by Laurie Anderson

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

2026 BC Thanksgiving Food Drive | Maple Ridge

The Need in Our Community

Our local Friends in Need Food Bank is facing historic demand, currently serving nearly 1,000 households every month—a staggering 85% increase over the last five years. At the same time, community food donations have dropped sharply. They need our help to restock the shelves for the autumn season.

We are seeking volunteers to adopt donation routes. Volunteering requires 2-3 hours, spread across the week. Here's how it works.

How the Food Drive Works

Step 1: Sign Up	Go online to select a donation collection route that fits your preference. Please claim multiple routes if desired.
Step 2: Bag Pick-Up	Select a convenient date to pick up your bundle of official food drive paper bags.
Step 3: Bag Drop-Off (Sept 14 – 17)	Anytime between Monday and Thursday, walk or drive your assigned route. Place one (1) bag on each doorstep. The bags contain clear, pre-printed printing instructions for homeowners.
Step 4: Collection (Saturday, Sept 19)	Return to your route between 9:15 AM and 12:00 PM to gather filled donation bags left out on doorsteps. Drop off all collected items at the central hub (11750 207th Street) by 1:00 PM.

READY TO SIGN-UP?

Go online to: https://fooddrivemapleridg.wixsite.com/2026

Questions & Support

Route Coordinator: Josh Penner 604-317-4487
Email: fooddrivemapleridgeward@gmail.com
Drop-Off Hub: 11750 207th Street, Maple Ridge

Or scan QR Code to Sign-up

Contact Central