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

NOVEMBER IS ROTARY FOUNDATION MONTH

Happy Birthday						Happy Anniversary
Nov 17	Wendy Whitter	Nov 22	Laurie Anderson	Nov 23	Lynda Lawrence	

Upcoming Speakers:

Nov 17 Michelle Taschereau Atlas Brain Health	Nov 24 Monica Watson Leadership, Teamwork and Communications	Dec 1 Nikita Sharma - How to become an Influential, Respected, Magnetic Leader

LAST WEEK'S MEETING

This week's meeting was held at the Canadian Legion Hall in Maple Ridge, in honour of Remembrance Day.

President **Eric Molema** presided.

Guests included:

Ana Castillo (2006 Rotary Exchange student)
Linda Vospser (wife of Mark)
Fraser MacRae (husband of Debbie)
Dr. Ruth Vilayail (attending for a cheque presentation)
Matt Williams, guest speaker and British Army veteran

Invocation

Alex Pope delivered a Remembrance Day invocation honouring those who served Canada in times of war, conflict and peacekeeping, including those who made the ultimate sacrifice. He also acknowledged the families and veterans who continue to carry the physical and emotional consequences of military service. Members were encouraged to reflect on Rotary's motto, Service Above Self, and the Four-Way Test, and to honour the legacy of those who served by promoting goodwill, understanding and peace throughout the world.

Cheque Presentation



Dr. Ruth Vilayil received a cheque in the sum of $1,000 in support of a Maternal Health Project in Nigeria.

Dr. Ruth had previously spoken to our Club about this initiative on August 15, (as reported in our August 25, 2026 bulletin). She explained that the funds would be used to purchase training equipment and simulation tools to help educate midwives. Importantly, the program uses a "train-the-trainer" approach, allowing trained midwives to pass their knowledge and skills to others after the visiting instructors have departed.

This approach will extend the benefits of the project well beyond the initial training sessions, and help improve outcomes for mothers and newborn babies. Dr. Ruth emphasized that there remains considerable work to be done to reduce preventable maternal and infant deaths worldwide.

Guest Speaker –
Matt Williams: Reflections on War, Peace and Remembrance



Matt Williams was introduced by Rotarian Mark Vosper, a fellow British Army veteran and friend who had also served in the British armed forces, although in a different regiment.

Matt served in the British Army from 1988 to 2006, completing 18 years of military service that included operational deployments to Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. Following his military career, Matt immigrated to Canada in 2006. The two veterans subsequently met through their involvement in search and rescue. His presentation combined humour, personal anecdotes, historical observations and a tribute to fallen comrades.

Early Inspiration and Joining the British Army

Matt began by explaining how an unlikely influence inspired his military career: the writings of British comedian and entertainer Spike Milligan, whose autobiographical books described his experiences during the Second World War, including service in North Africa, Sicily and Italy.

Matt particularly enjoyed the humour Milligan brought to military life. Despite the hardships of war, Milligan described the camaraderie, shared experiences and lighter moments that helped soldiers endure difficult circumstances. Inspired by these stories, Matt joined the Army Cadets and discovered that he enjoyed military activities, discipline and teamwork; and at just 15 years of age, accompanied by his mother, he visited an Army recruiting office.

Army Apprentices College and Military Training

Matt entered the Army Apprentices College at Chepstow, Wales in 1988, completing the equivalent of his final two years of secondary education while receiving military and technical training. Beyond technical skills, the college provided an extensive education in British government, constitutional principles and the role of the military within a democratic society. He emphasized that his military education helped him understand leadership, responsibility, democratic institutions and the importance of the rule of law. Upon graduating in 1990, he was both a trained soldier and a qualified technician.

Matt shared an interesting historical observation about the red lines running along each side of the floor of the chamber in the House of Commons separating the two political parties. MPs are not allowed to speak while standing in the space between two red lines. It has been claimed the lines are two swords' length apart to keeping opposing party members sufficiently separated to prevent physical confrontation during heated debates (although there is apparently no evidence to support this traditional claim).



Bosnia – Witnessing the Consequences of Civil War

Matt's first operational deployment came in late 1995, when he was serving in Germany. He was deployed to Bosnia as part of the NATO-led force established following the Dayton Peace Agreement. The breakup of Yugoslavia had resulted in devastating ethnic conflict, particularly in Bosnia, where communities that had previously lived together became divided by violence. Earlier United Nations peacekeeping efforts had struggled to prevent the fighting. NATO subsequently entered with a more robust mandate to enforce the peace settlement. He described witnessing widespread destruction, damaged communities and the terrible consequences of ethnic conflict. One of the most disturbing legacies was the extensive presence of landmines. Large areas of farmland could no longer be safely cultivated, and civilians continued to suffer injuries long after the fighting had stopped. In many cases, there were inadequate records identifying where mines had been laid. Matt reflected on the dramatic transformation of Sarajevo, which had hosted the 1984 Winter Olympics, only to experience devastating warfare less than a decade later. (Following this deployment, Matt visited his uncle in Maple Ridge during a period of military leave. The visit planted the idea that Canada might eventually become his permanent home.)

Kosovo – Peacekeeping, Diplomacy and Reconstruction

In 1999, he deployed to Kosovo as tensions escalated between ethnic Albanians and Serbian authorities. Matt was personally involved in an unusual diplomatic assignment concerning a disputed section of the boundary between Kosovo and Serbia. Because of his engineering, surveying and mapping expertise, he accompanied three officers into Serbian-controlled territory to help resolve disagreements over the location of the boundary. The four-person team travelled through military lines in a Toyota Land Cruiser, met with the opposing representatives and successfully negotiated an agreed boundary alignment. He described this as one of the most fascinating experiences of his military career.

Matt subsequently returned to Kosovo approximately two-and-a-half years later. He was involved to some extent in work associated with restoring a power station and reconnecting electrical infrastructure to the wider regional grid. He explained that restoring essential services such as electricity was fundamental to allowing communities to return to normal life. This experience reinforced his belief that rebuilding infrastructure and institutions is as important as achieving a military victory.

Royal Marines, Life at Sea

Matt's career eventually took him to Plymouth, where he served with the Royal Marines. He enjoyed shipboard life, particularly compared with sleeping in trenches during field exercises. In 2001, he embarked aboard HMS Fearless, an ageing steam-powered amphibious assault ship, for an extended deployment and training exercise in Oman.

September 11 and Deployment to Afghanistan

While Matt's ship was operating near Turkey in September 2001, the terrorist attacks of September 11 dramatically changed the international security environment. In April 2002, Matt deployed to Afghanistan, where his unit operated from Bagram Air Base, a former Soviet military installation. Looking back, Matt expressed disappointment that the international community had not invested sufficiently in rebuilding Afghanistan's institutions and systems of government. He believed that the failure to establish durable structures for governance, security and the rule of law contributed to the country's eventual return to Taliban control. He stressed that military intervention alone cannot create a successful and stable society.

Iraq – Winning the War but Losing the Peace

By mid-2002, attention was shifting toward Iraq. Matt returned to Britain and subsequently deployed to Kuwait in January 2003 in preparation for the invasion. Coalition forces rapidly defeated the Iraqi military and removed Saddam Hussein's regime. However, Matt believes that the international coalition failed to devote sufficient attention and resources to the period following the invasion. He summarized his assessment with a particularly powerful observation: "We won the war and lost the peace." Matt emphasized that the ultimate measure of success should not simply be whether an opposing military force is defeated, but whether the affected population can subsequently live in peace, security and dignity.

Retirement, Education and the Importance of the Rule of Law

Matt concluded his military career in 2006 after 18 years of service. His final assignment was as an instructor, a role he particularly enjoyed because it allowed him to share his knowledge and experience with younger soldiers. He subsequently completed a law degree through the United Kingdom's Open University and moved to Canada. Reflecting on his military service, Matt explained that his experiences in different conflict zones had revealed a recurring problem: the absence or breakdown of the rule of law. Where legal institutions fail, powerful groups can dominate weaker populations, and

ethnic, religious or political divisions can escalate into violence. He described the rule of law as a great equalizer that helps protect individuals and communities from arbitrary power. His experiences ultimately motivated him to pursue legal studies. Matt also emphasized the importance of reconciliation and rehabilitation following armed conflict. He cited Germany and Japan after the Second World War as examples of nations that successfully rebuilt their institutions and economies following military defeat. Although he acknowledged that the circumstances in Afghanistan and Iraq were substantially different, he believed the underlying lesson remained the same. Peace requires more than ending a war. It requires rebuilding institutions, restoring justice, reconciling former enemies and creating conditions in which people can build successful lives.

A Moving Tribute to Fallen Comrades

In recognition of Remembrance Day, Matt read the names of 10 soldiers and Royal Marines with whom he had served and who subsequently died as a result of, or following, their military service. Rather than simply reading their names, Matt shared personal memories of their personalities, friendships, leadership and contributions. He wanted members to remember these individuals as people, not merely as military casualties. Matt's final tribute was to Major General Matt Holmes, with whom he had served in Afghanistan. He described Holmes as an exceptionally capable and thoughtful leader, possessing an extraordinary ability to understand complex situations and make sound decisions under pressure. Holmes eventually rose to become Commandant General of the Royal Marines, the professional head of that organization. Despite his distinguished military career and exceptional professional achievements, Holmes struggled with serious personal difficulties and died by suicide in 2021. Matt used this example to remind members that the consequences of military service are not always visible. Even individuals who appear successful, confident and highly accomplished may carry profound emotional and psychological burdens. His tribute highlighted the importance of understanding and supporting veterans long after their active service has ended.

Closing Message

Matt concluded by reflecting on the tremendous opportunities military service had given him. He valued the education, friendships, experiences and personal development he gained during his 18-year career. However, his experiences also taught him the devastating human cost of war and the importance of establishing lasting peace. His presentation offered three particularly meaningful lessons:

- Military victories must be followed by effective reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation.
- The rule of law and strong democratic institutions are essential to protecting communities and preventing conflict.
- The sacrifices of military personnel must never be forgotten, including those whose suffering continues long after their service has ended.

Rotary Foundation Dinner Report – Saturday November 7, 2026

Alex Pope reported on the District 50-50 Rotary Foundation dinner in white Rock, attended by himself, Barbara, Ineke and Laurie. The event included guest speakers, including a representative associated with the World Health Organization. Recognition was given to clubs with outstanding per-capita contributions to the Rotary Foundation. The highest-ranked club had contributed more than $2,000 per member, while two other leading clubs had contributed approximately $600 per member. He had reviewed Meadow Ridge Rotary's current position and reported that our per-capita giving was $147, and our District ranking was 27th out of 62 clubs. Alex noted the importance of continued Foundation support and the opportunity for the club to improve its giving position within the District.

Ecuador Fundraising Event Report – Friday, November 6, 2026

Ineke reported on the Club fundraising evening. The event was described as a great success, with excellent food, service and fellowship. 71 tickets were sold, and $3,300 was raised (exceeding the target of $2,000). Particular appreciation was expressed for the strong participation of club members. The funds will help support club members participating in the Rotary service trip to Ecuador scheduled to begin on February 22, 2027. Participants are expected to arrive in Quito around February 17–18 before travelling to Baños. Members were encouraged to consider joining the team, even if they had not previously participated in an international Rotary project. It will be an opportunity to experience Rotary's international service work firsthand and to make a meaningful contribution to communities in Ecuador. Some financial assistance from the recent fundraiser will be available to help participating members with travel costs.

Upcoming Meetings and Club Events

Date	**Event**
Thu. Nov 12, 5:00 pm	Executive meeting t Centra Law
Thu. Nov 12, 6:00 pm	Ecuador team planning meeting (online)
Fri. Nov. 20	Wine and charcuterie evening at Mark Forster's home
Wed. Dec. 9	Annual General Meeting and nominations
Sat. Dec. 12	Club Christmas party at Clint's home
Tue. Dec. 22	Club Christmas gift exchange

President's Closing Quote



Submitted by Laurie Anderson