

Winners for Life Scholarship Recipients Recognized & Enthusiastic Seattle Fans Welcome NHL Hockey

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By Pete DeLaunay

President Mark Wright welcomed Past President **Todd Summerfelt** to the podium for the day's invocation followed by **Kim Moore** who led Rotarians in song accompanied by **Marli Iverson** on the piano. Rotarian and Winners for Life Chair, **Chris Otto**, shared his admiration as he introduced 14 Seattle high school students who were each awarded a \$2,500 scholarship thanks to the Seattle Rotary Service Foundation and private donors. Rotarians support the Winners for Life program as hosts, interviewers, and mentors for students who have overcome many obstacles to succeed. "It is amazing what these students have accomplished," Chris Otto said, "getting good grades while serving as student leaders, coaches, and volunteering their time."



Program VP, **Hamilton McCulloh**, introduced Tod Leiweke who recently returned to Seattle as the President/CEO of Seattle Hockey Partners (SHP), leading the effort to rebuild Key Arena at Seattle Center and bring a National Hockey League franchise to Seattle. SHP hopes to have an NHL team in Seattle by 2020.

Leiweke began by acknowledging the 14 Winners for Life scholarship recipients, encouraging them to "dream big, and never give up". He had previously been in Seattle leading the Seattle Seahawks and Seattle Sounders FC. He led many charitable efforts including serving as Chair of the United Way campaign. "Seattle is the most giving city in the U.S.," he said, "and conducts the nation's largest United Way campaign."

Seattle Hockey Partners plans to do more than provide a hockey game, his group hopes to bring an NBA team here in the future.

His plans call for a \$650M private enterprise investment in partnership with the city to expand Key Arena from 411,000 sq. ft. to 750,000 sq. ft., including an excavation project underneath that will add more amenities. His group plans 130 event days a year including music, Storm games, and college sports.



He described successful NHL franchises in Minnesota and Tampa Bay where teams have grown successful with fan support, coaching, and committed, talented players. Seattle Hockey Partners hopes to teach people about the game of hockey as the “ultimate team game” with championship spirit.

Some 620 athletes play on 31 NHL hockey franchises or clubs in North America, seven of which are in Canada, -- 14 NHL athletes are from Washington State.

During a spirited Q&A session that began with a question about traffic management in the congested Seattle Center area, Leiweke said the Seattle Center currently attracts about 12M visitors every year, and that all great cities face these issues. SHP plans to bring in world-class traffic planners to help get fans to and from the remodeled Key Arena. The venue will be second only to Madison Square Garden as a historic facility remodeled for the future.

In response to a questioner who said he “went to a boxing match and a hockey game broke out,” Leiweke responded, “the era when players would drop the gloves and fight it out is over. It is now a game of speed and artistry with passes around the goal shot by brilliant athletes who play with humility, pride, and gratitude.”

Another questioner asked about SHP and the Seattle City Council working together, commenting that “when you go to bed with dogs you wake up with fleas.” “The City has been remarkable as we’ve committed to privatize the arena,” Leiweke said in response, “as one of the largest transactions in the City’s history.”

SHP will have all details in hand before they go the NHL Board of Governors in June to secure an expansion team here. He concluded by assuring Rotarians that hockey is a game of beauty and finesse.