

Babineaux Encourages Winners for Life to Claim their Dream

Totem Report March 21, 2018

By Mike Colbrese

President Mark Wright gavelled the meeting open and provided some insight on his presidency. He then welcomed **David Brenner** and **Don Murphy** to the podium.

In David's invocation, he spoke to the youth in the room recounting the world that they were born into--a time when America was starting to go through significant change starting with the turn of the century, 9/11, the first African-American president and an economy that took a dive in 2007-08. He encouraged all to work together under the guidance of our supreme being. Don Murphy then led the audience in the National Anthem.



President Mark invited visiting Rotarians Alex Hopkins, Bill McElroy, and Vijya Patel to the podium who spoke to District Rotarian issues. Alex spoke to the significant efforts that have been made to eradicate polio worldwide and encouraged the club to attend [the District Conference April 27 through the 29th at the Tulalip Resort and Casino](#).

Bill outlined the work that is being done regarding professional development including foundation fellowship, community service, and networking. He invited the group to the [March 20 event at the glassblowing studio from 6 to 8 PM](#).

John Hrabar, the leader of the club's *Winners for Life* program, reminded the attendees of the value of that program and commended all of the winners on their outstanding accomplishments.

Former club president **Bill Center** introduced past *Winners for Life* awardee Jeanette Mukawizeye and told us of her amazing story. Jeanette lost her parents at age six and came to this country to flee the genocide in Rwanda and a Kenyan orphanage. At the age of 16 she enrolled in Seattle's Garfield High School unable to speak English. After high school graduation, she enrolled in the University of Washington's STEM program. She suffered an unbelievable tragedy when she was repeatedly beaten with a hammer about the head but survived. During her several months of recovery, UW President Mark Emmert visited her



and assured her that she would not lose her spot at UW and that the university would help arrange scholarships to cover the cost of her education. She eventually returned to school and earned her degree in math in 2012. Jeanette thanked the club for their support of her endeavors. Bill mentioned that Jeanette has a degree in accounting and is looking for a position.

Seattle school district superintendent Dr. Larry Nyland congratulated the participants and remarked on the incredible day that is happening nationwide, with student walkouts in support of gun control measures. He went on to remark that Seattle schools are the best kept secret, seeing as the Seattle School District is the third highest performing school district of similar districts in the country in closing the opportunity gap. He reported that the district has closed the gap by about one third, with 23 of its schools receiving Washington achievement awards and 11 schools of distinction. He closed by thanking Seattle #4 for its work and for recognizing the accomplishments of Seattle's students.

President Wright then brought Jordan Babineaux to the stage. The former Seahawk was an undrafted free agent in the 2004 draft who later had a successful career in the NFL. Upon retirement, he became a television NFL analyst and now serves as an ambassador for the Seahawks.

Jordan started by reading Langston Hughes' poem *Mother to Son* and remarked about the words of that poem reflect the lives of the *Winners for Life*. He provided a brief background describing his life from playing youth football in Port Arthur, Texas, to playing football at Southern Arkansas University and then joining the Seahawks. "I knew failure was not an option-- that showing up early, learning, and applying those lessons would get me where I wanted to go." It helped him understand all of the moving pieces, and he explained. "I didn't understand what it meant to have doubt." He encouraged the audience to think of the Langston Hughes poem as a way to bolster their commitment and encouraged them to stay focused on the process and the prize, not the price. He complemented the Seahawks on their core values of passion, character, and excellence.



Club members **Jann Curley** and **Cindy Runger** provided the mics for the audience to ask questions of Mr. Babineaux. During that part of the program, he spoke of his efforts to give back to the community. "Thirst and a quest for constant growth," he said. "Study happiness and you'll be happy; study rich and be rich." He encouraged the attendees to read *Think and Grow Rich* and *The Richest Man in Babylon*. He is proud of the Seahawks' commitment to keeping its alumni involved and he uses many of his former teammates and other Seahawks as his mentors. In closing he encouraged the students to..." keep living; claim your dream. Instead of apprehension, choose opportunity and start with the end in mind."

President Wight closed by asking all *Winners for Life* to come on stage. The club gave a rousing standing ovation to the students. Wright thanked all the program participants and attendees and asked a member of the *Winners for Life* to ring the closing bell.