

# Rotary Celebrates Entrepreneurs of Service and Business

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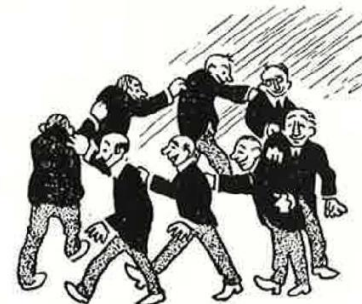
Seattle 4's meeting on May 23 reflected on the unique contributions of Seattle citizens to the Rotary model of *Service Above Self* and the unique contributions of today's business entrepreneurs.

**Trish Bostrom** provided the invocation, and **Todd Summerfelt** and **Freeman Fong** led the club in singing *Getting to Know You* with lyrics adapted for Rotary.

**Don Kraft** delivered another of his lively insights into Seattle 4's history and its influence on Rotary as we know it today. Kraft told how Rotary evolved into the world's first – and still leading – service club.

As first conceived, Rotary was a club for business (men), fellowship, and reciprocity. When the world's fourth Rotary club was formed – in Seattle 109 years ago this week – the Seattle P-I cast the fledgling group as self-serving:

From this inauspicious start, two young founding members, Ernst Skeel and Jim Pinkham, changed the course of history.



Skeel, a lawyer, and Pinkham, a lumber broker, were already good friends, with shared ideals about community service. Before Pinkham agreed to become the club's second president, he and Skeel formulated a set of principles about service that came to be known as the Seattle Platform. Seattle 4 embraced them.

That same year, in Chicago, the first convention of Rotary clubs was held. Seattle 4's first president, Roy Denny, was elected vice president and Skeel was selected to help draft a constitution. The next year, Rotary held its convention in Portland. Denny chaired several plenary sessions. Skeel chaired the civic committee. Batting cleanup, so to speak, Pinkham chaired the resolutions committee, with the goal of adopting the Seattle Platform.

When the report of the prior year's convention was read to the delegates, it concluded with the phrase, "He profits most who serves best." Pinkham seized the moment, leaping to his feet and shouting, "Here is what we've been looking for – a positive affirmation packaged in six words! It should be put into the platform!"

The delegates responded, related Kraft, with "a thunderous, standing ovation," and proceeded to adopt the Seattle Platform by acclamation.

## **The 'Seattle Platform' Becomes Service Above Self**

In that moment, the ideals of Pinkham and Skeel became the principles of the world's first service club. Over time, those six words became three: *Service Above Self*.

Rotary's founder, Paul Harris, later wrote, "I can't tell you how large Pinkham, Skeel, and Denny loomed up in those formative days, and Denny gives all the credit to Ernie and Jim."



Kraft is the living link from Rotary's birth to the present. Skeel was still active in the club when Kraft joined Seattle 4 in 1949. Skeel built a highly successful law practice and civic career – leading the Seattle Chamber of Commerce and a committee to keep Boeing's headquarters in Seattle. In 1948 he was named Seattle's First Citizen.

Pinkham, the soul of the service ethic that fed Rotary's growth to what today is 1.2 million people in more than 200 countries working in service to their fellow human beings (including the imminent eradication of polio), died at age 39 – from polio. Surely, he looks on now with satisfaction.

And, surely it is fitting that today's Seattle 4 recognizes its members who give at least \$1,000 to the Seattle Rotary Service Foundation as the Pinkham and Skeel Circle of Service. This year's recognition event is June 14.

## **Regional Entrepreneurs of the Year Interviewed**

While Pinkham and Skeel were entrepreneurs of the service club genre, the main program recognized entrepreneurs of the business kind. Sue Borgman, principal of Ernst & Young's Seattle office, described the firm's Entrepreneur of the Year program and invited Rotarians to attend this year's regional gala, June 15 at the Westin.



Borgman said the Entrepreneur of the Year is the most prestigious award of its kind. Founded in 1986, the program now includes 145 cities in 60 countries. Past nominees from the Pacific Northwest include Craig McCaw, Howard Schultz, and Jeff Bezos.

GeekWire's Todd Bishop then led a panel discussion with past regional finalists Chad Robins of Adaptive Biotechnologies, Jill Nelson of Ruby Receptionists, and John Oppenheimer of Columbia Hospitality.



Robins' company, Adaptive Biotechnologies, is sequencing the immune system as a way to revolutionize the discovery, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases. They are also partnering with Microsoft to bring machine learning and artificial intelligence to speed the process and to map the human immune system.

Nelson started Ruby Receptionists in Portland in 2003 to help small businesses grow by providing them with exceptional customer experiences through personalized live, virtual receptionist services.

Oppenheimer started Columbia Hospitality in 1995 to manage hospitality services. The company now manages properties in Washington, Idaho, Montana, California, Arizona, and Hawaii and has consulted on over 100 hospitality projects worldwide.

Following discussion of their biggest challenges in starting their companies and their best stories about surprising people with humanity, Bishop asked the entrepreneurs what they find to be the biggest political challenges to their businesses.





Nelson said in Portland, “the big issue for our workforce is housing affordability. We led the city three years ago with a \$15 an hour starting wage, but it keeps getting tougher for our full-time employees to afford housing without having to work extra jobs. We’re now looking to build new centers in communities that are more affordable, or in the Portland area we’re looking at going out further, going near transit hubs, and so on.”

The two Seattle entrepreneurs focused on the head tax and political change.

Oppenheimer said Columbia Hospitality “is right at the cusp [of the number of employees to trigger the tax] so if the tax happens, we will not do any more Seattle projects. We’re in 24 cities and there are just so many cities that welcome us with open arms instead of sending the message, ‘we’re going to penalize you for creating jobs.’ It’s less about the money and more about the spirit.”

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***“If the (head) tax happens, we will not do any more Seattle projects.”***

*—John Oppenheimer*

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And, said Oppenheimer, we need to be involved. “We need to get more people to run for office, we need to get behind the organizations on the homelessness issue, and we need to get behind the (head tax) repeal effort,” he said, to applause.

Robins said, “I’m not known for being politically correct, but the head tax is idiotic. Absolutely idiotic. We get at least two inquiries a week about moving our business, with all kinds of incentives. Conversely, by being in Seattle we get penalized for creating jobs. Every entrepreneur I see in the city is up in arms, saying ‘what is going on here?’”