

Police Reforms Paying Dividends, Chief O'Toole Reports

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By Gary T. Smith

If jam-packed, wide-ranging programs are your cup of tea, the Columbus Day program of 2016 might stand out for you. Rotarians were treated to the Governor, the Police Chief, and a rising literary figure from Ghana – and completed a service project – all in one hour.



Writer's Retreat on Whidbey Island

Impressive, you say, but Ghana? The answer lies in a jewel of an idea hatched in 1988 by Nancy Nordhoff. She decided a farm she purchased near Useless Bay on Whidbey Island, should become a refuge for writers – women writers – who need a quiet, creative space to compose. Through Nordhoff's founding generosity and new donors, there are no financial barriers to residency at Hedgebrook. More than 2,000 female writers, poets, and playwrights from 38 countries, of

whom more than two-thirds are women of color, have blossomed in Hedgebrook's cottages, producing thousands of works reaching millions of readers. Club member **Catherine Willis Cleveland**, the new Director of External Relations for Hedgebrook, introduced Nordhoff.

Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah of Ghana is one of Hedgebrook's most recent writers-in-residence. Sekyiamah curates a highly acclaimed blog on African women and sexuality, '[Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women](#).' She's a Rotarian, too, and presented Seattle 4 with her club's flag.

At Hedgebrook, Sekyiamah said, she completed as much work in 25 days as would take five years in the routine of her normal life. "What's the value of supporting women writers?" she asked. Consider, she said, that my grandfather wrote his autobiography. It was a valuable work, full of national history. But her grand aunt's story went untold (that is, until Sekyiamah told it) about the experiences of women who attempted to be traders in Ghanaian markets.

Her current work, nine chapters of which she wrote at Hedgebrook, will document the stories of African and African descendant women from all over the globe – which is to say, of the challenges they faced. **"Stories move the needle on social justice when they get before the right audience** – in front of policy makers and funding influencers. Hedgebrook is investing in women who capture stories of change, and I am proud to now be part of a network

of women writers who seek to make a difference through the stories we share with the world,” Sekyiamah said.

Club Completes In-Meeting Service Project

Laura Mathers, now President & CEO of Seattle Police Foundation, led an instant service project. Members put pens to paper and expressed their thoughts and appreciation to our police. The chief promised to read each one and share them with officers at the upcoming annual Seattle Police Awards Banquet.

Seattle Fire Chief **Harold Scoggins** introduced Kathleen O’Toole, Seattle’s Chief of Police. O’Toole addressed both the progress in police reform and today’s challenges police face in Seattle.

Seattle Leading on Police Reform

Seattle got a ‘head start’ on the rest of the nation in police reform, before the high profile incidents elsewhere around the country, O’Toole noted. Seattle police take five times more training now than just a few years ago, ranging from evaluating mental health crises to understanding one’s own implicit biases. Now other police organizations around the country are coming to Seattle to see what progress looks like.



While the frontline officers were initially concerned about “reform,” O’Toole said, the vast majority bought in fully. What is particularly exciting, she said, is seeing the new recruits at the academy. Unlike other cities, which are having difficulty recruiting, candidates are coming to Seattle from around the country to compete for positions because of the SPD’s new reputation. They are idealistic, thoughtful, progressive, and articulate, and this bodes well for the future, she said.

O’Toole said Seattle’s biggest law enforcement challenges are homelessness, addiction, mental health crises, and the resulting property crimes. The police are now on the front lines of complex social issues, she said, where enforcement is a very small piece of policing. 95% of their effort, she said, is service to people in need.

Officers Dealing with Mental Health Crises 10,000 Times a Year

The new training and policies are paying off. The department just began tracking how often officers deal with people on the streets in mental health crises: it’s over 10,000 times a year, often significant interventions. The police must take a multidisciplinary approach, she said. They must find out if the person is receptive to getting services and must balance the subject’s interest with the interests of others in the community. All this is a relatively new problem, O’Toole said, and more complicated than what she experienced in Boston.

True community policing is prevention, intervention, and enforcement, O'Toole said. If we can get there beforehand, she said, in most cases we can prevent tragedies and create safer communities. This also underscores how police work has shifted to service. Now only 1.6% of mental health cases require force, and in three-fourths of those the force is minimal, such as handcuffing. This all has a very positive impact on the street.

Yes, Seattleites want their police to be accountable, O'Toole said, but they want us to succeed. The majority of Seattleites are overwhelmingly supportive of the police, she said.



Governor Inslee Updates Seattle 4

The club also shoe-horned in a brief “state of the state” update by Governor Jay Inslee. He cited improvements in the economy, progress in education and transportation, and discussed challenges in the state’s mental health program.



Don Murphy, led the Star Spangled Banner, accompanied by **Marli Iverson**. **Todd Summerfelt** provided the invocation. **President Cathy** exchanged flags with Nikola Nitic, President of the Rotary Club of Belgrade Metropolitan.

