



ROTARY SPOKES

Rotary Club of Ventura

Est. May 1, 1919

"The Friendliest Club in Rotary"

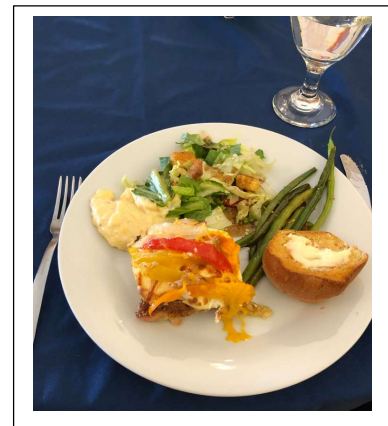
February 18, 2023

MEETING FEBRUARY 15, 2023

Attendance—I counted 32 members and guests, with 0 via Zoom. It was great to see Roger Case in person!

Lunch—Perhaps in honor of Mardi Gras (Feb. 21), Food Affairs by Stacey served a delicious Cajun chicken, with cheesy grits, green beans, cuscus green salad, and toasted rolls. Angel food cake with strawberries and whipped cream for dessert. Laissez les bons temps rouler!

Flag salute, inspirational message, and introductions—**Joslynn Skelton**. "A meaningful life is not about being rich (but that would help), being popular, being highly educated, or being perfect. It's about being real, being humble, being strong, being able to share ourselves and touch the lives of others. It is only then that we could have a full, happy, and contended life."



Songleaders—**Jessica Brandon and Joslynn Skelton**—The chorus from "The Yankee Doodle Boy" aka "(I'm a) Yankee Doodle Dandy."

Announcements:

Rob van Nieuwburg: There being no additional volunteers to serve as President 2024-2025, we voted that **Neal Lassila** will be President 2023-2024 and 2024-2025. **Joslynn Skelton** will be President Elect, and serve as President 2025-2026. (It seems so far in the future...by then we will all have jet packs, a colony on Mars, and construction will have almost begun on California's High Speed Rail system!)

Madhu Bajaj: The **Club Survey** received 61 responses. Our February 22 meeting will include an interactive discussion of the results. Madhu emailed the results to members Feb. 16.

Lynda Girtsman: **(1) The Walk for Kids** on March 19 will raise funds for the Ronald McDonald Family Room to build a shower, increase staffing so that it can be kept open more hours, and build a quiet room. Sign up online to walk, or donate even if you don't plan to walk. See our website for sponsorship packages to put your name on something big!

(2) Painting with a Twist hosts Paint and Sip Night on February 23, 2023, 6-8 p.m., with proceeds to benefit the Ronald McDonald Family Room. For details, go to www.paintingwithatwist.com/studio/camarillo/event/3293600

Connie Young: The Julius Gius Memorial Rotary Foundation is accepting grant applications through Feb. 28. Five have been received so far. The application is in the Club Doc's section of our website.

Margi Wray: The Ventura Fire Foundation wants to submit a JGMRF grant application and is seeking a member to sponsor them.

Abiel Acosta: Fireside Chat will be March 16, 2023 at the Portside Community Center. Potluck dinner for new members of two years or less; all members welcome. Details to follow.

Happy Dollars.

Jim Deardorff: The third **Eye Clinic** received equipment today and will be up and running next month. (It's the third clinic, not a clinic for people with a third eye.)

Anne King: The cakes from last week's **Interact auction** were given to the YMCA and to the workers who support our fireworks event.

Brenda Allison-Hutchinson did not sound happy as she shared her close encounters with deadly snakes, poisonous jellyfish, venomous spiders, aggressive birds, and other dangerous animals during her trip to Australia. Dingoes ate my baby!

Fining—Judy Moore quizzed us about pets of the U.S. Presidents—dogs, specifically—not Presidents who had horses, goats, mice, raccoons, etc.

UPCOMING EVENTS

(For up-to-date and more complete information, check the ClubRunner app on your phone, or our web site, VenturaRotary.org)

February 19—"Four-Way Test" essays due.

February 22 lunch meeting—Madhu Bajaj will lead a discussion of the **club survey** results.

February 23—Board Meeting at the **Ventura Housing Authority**, 12:00-1:30 p.m.

March 1 lunch meeting—Phil Ranger, Rick Conrad, and Tanner Shelton will discuss the proposed renovation of the **Ventura County Fairgrounds**.

March 8 lunch meeting—Dr. Joe Cahill, botanist and Executive Director of the **Ventura Botanical Gardens**.

March 15 lunch meeting—Cecilia Cid from **strwEATS**

March 16—Fireside Chat at Portside Community Center. Potluck dinner for new members less than 2 years; all members welcome.

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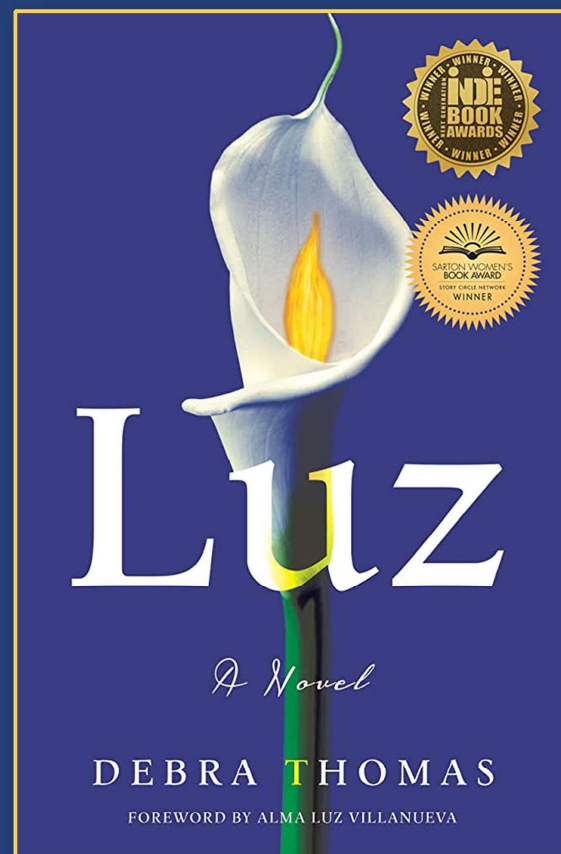


Guest Speaker

Debra Thomas

Award-winning Author

Debra Thomas is a Sarton Award winner for her debut novel, *Luz*. Her second novel, *Josie and Vic*, will be published April 2023. It is a story of love, loss, and forgiveness and conveys hope—even in the darkest of times. Originally from Binghamton, New York, she has lived in Southern California most of her adult life. After working a decade as a registered nurse, Debra returned to college to pursue her passion for literature and writing. She is a former English teacher at a Los Angeles public high school, as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor to adults from all over the world. Her experiences as an immigrant rights advocate influence much of her writing. She currently lives with her husband and little dog in Simi Valley, California, just minutes away from her two horses.



PROGRAM—DEBRA THOMAS

Award-winning author and Simi Valley resident Debra Thomas addressed the Rotary Club of Ventura on February 15, 2023.

Debra always wanted to be a novelist but life got in the way—at least she thought it did. While working as a nurse at UCLA Medical Center, she took her first writing course through the Extension program. After the birth of her second child, she returned to college and earned bachelor's and master's degrees. While teaching English as a Second Language, she had an inspiration: if her students could leave everything and start a new life, so could she.

Through Amnesty International, Debra learned about the many dehydration deaths suffered by those crossing the desert seeking to enter the United States. She visited the Terminal Island Detention Center, which was like a prison for immigration cases. She also participated in the Desert Links program where she spoke to people on both sides of the border including INS agents, immigrants, and relief workers. She visited Terrace Park Cemetery in Holtville, California, which includes graves of undocumented (and sometimes unidentified) migrants. She met Father Richard Estrada who established water stations (now the Border Angels program) with water placed in boxes marked with blue flags for those crossing the desert.

These experiences were seeds planted in her heart, her soul, and her soil. She began writing a novel from the viewpoint of a white woman. But after she began novel writing courses from author Gayle Brandeis, she decided the story needed to be told from the viewpoint of a young Mexican immigrant, Alma, and her daughter, Luz, which means “light.” After many attempts to get *Luz* published, She Writes Press published the book in 2020. It has received many positive reviews and was read by the Rotary Club of Ventura book club. *Luz* won the Sarton Award for Contemporary Fiction, named for Mary Sarton, author of a favorite book of Debra's, *Journal of a Solitude*.

Debra's second novel, *Josie and Vic*, tells the story of a man who loses his wife and children in a tragic accident, and is joined by his sister. Together they struggle to rebuild their lives. It will be published April 2023. Debra is now working on her third novel, which follows the life of Ellie, the rebellious daughter in *Josie and Vic* who is now an adult.

Debra's philosophy is “It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” There is always a light if you are brave enough to see it.

You can contact Debra through her website, debrathomasauthor.com, or by email at debrathomasauthor@gmail.com

