

Winter
Weekly

Reader

Volume 9, Issue 22, January 19, 2012

The Plano Rotary Club
www.PlanoRotary.com



Memory Castles in the Air

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- 1/19 Mayor Dryer - State of the City
- 1/26 Plano ISD Teacher of the Year Award
- 2/2 House and Senate Candidates' Forum

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 1/1 ... David Hammel
- 1/5 Jo Via
- 1/8 ... James Anderson
- 1/12 Jerry Curtis
- 1/15 ... David McWhorter
- 1/17 Jerry Aris
- 1/17 ... L. B. Showalter
- 1/19 Sherman Millender
- 1/20 ... John Brodhead
- 1/21 ... Alan Feigenbaum

ALAN Feigenbaum sat at **Sainted Editor's** table with trepidation. **Sainted Editor** gets that a lot since he's in the habit of publishing foibles for fun and profit. But when HE is guilty of them, he *does* confess. So when Alan, in the course of conversation, commented, "...at least we're all of different races," **Sainted Editor's** instinctive political correctness kicked in and he blurted, "*But we're not,*" and instantly regretted it for two reasons. Alan turned white (only appropriate to the conversation) and begged **Sainted Editor** not to publish his "gaff," and **Sainted Editor** had to confirm that Alan was correct; we're all the same SPECIES but of *different* races. Humiliation all around.



Perennial Prince John called us to order at 12:14, enticing **LB** the Good to pray and **Sherman Millender** to Pledge. He credited Perennial Greeter, **Alice Hobbs**, and called **SERGEANT SKIP** to account.

SKIP had to confirm no Rotarians chose to visit us this day. We did have a few guests. **Kirk Bell** introduced City Councilman **Dan Harris**. **SKIP** bade us welcome State Representative Hopeful **John Cole** and offered him 60 seconds for a political ad, at the conclusion of which **SKIP** was mumbling, "*Five, four...ah, there we go.*" As he retired from the podium, someone asked whether the Sergeant-at-Arms would pay the advertisement fine if he hadn't charged it, and **SKIP** said, "*no, but he decides whether to fine or not.*"

Perfect Attendance Pins



went to **John Pittman** (2; accepting for John was the lovely **Rick Maucieri**), and **Olin Jaye** (17).

In response to **John's** call for announcements, **LB THE RADIANT** reminded the Club it had only a couple of more days to get him a card for his birthday next Tuesday. Since that didn't strike **John** as a valid announcement, he tried again, and this time **Ean** rose, eschewing the gravelly microphone to note that



on February 18th, the Saturday after *Valentine's Day*, 5810 would hold its **2ND ANNUAL ROTARY DISTRICT GALA** benefitting the *Rotary Foundation*. The event is to be held again at the *Anatole* (on Stemmons), and seats go for \$125, credited toward your *Paul Harris Fellowships*! (Indeed, last year, each \$125 earned participants over \$135 in credits due to a plethora of sponsorships.) Tables of 10 go for \$1,250 (no bulk discount there) said Ean, staring daggers at **Sainted Editor** (who sprung for one last year and was seated next to a delicious accidental companion; Ean, can you arrange that again this year? Who else wants to sit at **Sainted Editor's** table?). Rick Maucieri said that he too had purchased a table and was subletting seats for only \$100!

www.rotary5810.org/2011/12/humanity-in-motion-gala/



Prince John warned the membership that the Board is commencing a 5-year Strategic Plan that calls for responses from the members via a questionnaire. The survey will appear in everyone's email-box, and it calls for a serious discussion

of how Plano Rotary is or isn't meeting members' needs. The Board wants to know whether you are "*receiving what you need as a Rotarian.*"

Also discussed at the morning's Board Meeting was a set of amendments to 5810's bylaws proposed by **LB THE RADIANT** to ensure transparency in District governance. Those will appear before members in some form and be voted on whether to propose them as a Club.

John then turned the faulty microphone over



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Memory Castles in the Air *continued...*

to **Chuck Morgan** to introduce the speaker. **Jo Via** said, “*I thought that was just your voice, John,*” to which the Prince replied, “*No, it wasn’t my voice,*” in a gravelly voice. (Actually, it’s worse than it sounds; I’ll bet it’s not the microphone—which can be replaced—it’s the speakers embedded in the ceiling, at least one of which is at fault. Probably a torn cone from some overload, but what do I know?)

Chuck waxed eloquent about the records **Ron White** holds in memorization, records Ron later admitted were bested by some snot-nosed upstart.

Ron White is a two-time USA Memory Champion. He held the record for the fastest to memorize a deck of cards in the USA for two years. (I suppose I might memorize a deck of cards if I had two years to do it too.) He was featured on the History Channel’s show, “*Super Humans*,” and recently on the National Geographic show, “*Brain Games*.” He has been the guest of everyone from **Martha Stewart** to *Good Morning America*.



Unrepentant showman that he is, Ron barked, “*I don’t like to use a microphone anyhow. Now I have an excuse*” to wander through the audience. He explained that he was a below-average student 21 years ago when he was a *North Texas State University*. Indeed, he was booted out of there, possibly for failure to focus, but that all changed when he went to a Memory Enhancing lecture about that time. And he’s been telling people about how to improve their memory ever since.

He asked us, “*How many of you think you have a bad memory?*” He wasn’t surprised by the number of hands that went up in the Geriatric Club of Plano. But he told us flatly, “*No, you don’t.*” Instead, perhaps, our memories are untrained, undisciplined.

He bragged that he memorized a deck of cards in 1 minute 27 seconds, a feat that has been bested last March by “*a freak of Nature*” against whom he relishes the opportunity to go *mano a mano*.

He asked us to stand and place our hands over our badges. He had worked the room prior to the meeting, memorizing the names of all who hadn’t shown up late, and now he wanted to prove it by naming us. If he got it right, we were to sit down.



All went well at the first few tables until he came to the Rowdy Bunch, who had swapped nametags to confound him. But he was confident of his assignments and told the miscreants, “*OK, I was in 7th grade too!*”

When he had demonstrated knowing everyone’s first name, he began asking what our favorite topic might be. **Keith** admitted that it was food. Ron wanted to know, “*Cooking or eating.*” Keith confirmed, “*Eating not cooking.*” **Jerry** liked wine. Jo admitted shopping. **Camille** posited golf. **Doyle** bested us all by saying, “*My four grandkids!*” However, Ron moved on to **Dale Carnegie’s** 1936 blockbuster, “*How to Win Friends and Influence People*” without parroting back the favorites he had just memorized. He wanted us to recall the single most popular “favorite” that Carnegie had identified; it’s ourselves. And the sweetest sound anyone ever

hears is that of our own name. So, to be influential, one must memorize a contact’s name!



How many times, he wanted to know, have we shaken a person’s hand while forgetting their name just given us? Were we honest, we’d have said, “*I’m sorry; I wasn’t even listening to you!*” But we don’t. Instead, we weasel, “*how do you spell your name?*” Ron White answers wickedly, “*Just as it’s pronounced.*”

When he was 18 years old, Ron began booking memory presentations anywhere he could: Rotaries, Chambers of Commerce, etc. Indeed, he made 80 cold calls a day, and after 10 years, he had made 200,000 contacts! Indeed, he beat up the phone book so thoroughly that he now recognizes and is recognized by many people and institutions throughout DFW. And he’s on a first name basis with them all!

He had one last feat with which to impress us. He asked 25 of us (by name) for a two-digit number that we were all to write down. He was going to read us back that list of 50 digits, and he wanted us all to confirm their accuracy.

80% of the way through the recitation, Ron told us he “*forgot to ask,*” but he quickly altered that to “*failed to ask us to memorize these as we go.*” So, at the end, he gave us “*10 seconds to memorize these both forward and backward in the correct sequence.*” He surmised that we would find that a challenge, so he didn’t give us the whole 10 seconds. Traditionally, students write things down (as we did these numbers) to commit them to memory.

Then he gave us our first hint of a memory system. Ron pointed out that “*even my dog is good at remembering faces, but he’s terrible at names.*” What he was getting at (a bit too subtly, perhaps, for the Geriatric Club of Plano) is that we have a terrific VISUAL memory, and if we can tap into THAT, even if only by association, we can aid recall of virtually anything.

Aside: when natural selection was working its magic upon us, it gifted us with a visual approach-avoidance system, the hardware and software, to find a mate (the first order of business of any gene is to propagate itself; it’s Life’s purpose, after all: to make more Life) while avoid being eaten (at least until we can propagate ☺). With that kind of evolutionary pressure, it’s not surprising that we’ve developed a crackerjack visual memory. On the veldt, one can’t afford to make, or even see made, the same mistake twice. The lions are unforgiving. End of aside.



In an example of the efficacy of his system, he repeated, from memory, all 50 digits, both forward and (hesitatingly...he’s not a computer, after all) backward correctly.

Then Ron began to codify his methods. He told us that **focus is the key**. He noted his rather unsociable attitude as he first worked the room, gathering the names of the members. (He’d have made a terrific *Stasi* asset: “*kickin’ a** and takin’ names.*”) He said he could consume all the blueberries, spinach, and omega-3 fatty acids (brain food) on Earth, and he’d still need a system to be able to do what he does.

Member	#
Rutledge	99
Larry	17
Keith	17
Alex	45
Chris	20
Doyle	33
Jessica	31
Jo	55
John	26
Hugo	12
John 2	11
Hubert	42
Chuck	58
Jerry	42
Lenny	13
Bob	10
Gary	68
Tino	12
Rick	37
Jason	81
Rex	76
Ean	48
Bob 2	35
Alex redux	73
Kenny	21

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Memory Castles in the Air *continued...*

While approaching Camille, he's thinking, "What is her name? What is her name? What is her name? What is her name?" but not out loud, of course. And when he hears it, he makes an instantaneous **visual** association that sounds like her name. Probably in poor Camille's case, it's something a bit unflattering like "camel," but that's not a *judgmental* association, it's a **mnemonic** one! Besides, he's a cultured guy; he may very well choose "*Camille of the Roses*" instead, although she might rather be a healthy dromedary than a tubercular diva.

In news of other associations, **Steve** becomes "stove," **Jerry's** distinctive beard is visualized with "cherries" on it (that's a stretch, but, hey, whatever works), **Alan** becomes a "wrench," and **Tino** is associated with "**Tino Martinez**" (1st baseman for the Yankees and others), even though he recommends against associating people with other people. **Bob** becomes "bobber" (don't ask), and **Andy Sayer** has "*ants drinking tea.*"

Herb wanted to know how you make this work in your "mid-80s?" Ron conceded that it's easier in your 'teens, that being the best time, but the "*second best time is now.*" It's a style of mental exercise, and that's the way to keep a brain healthy at any age.

What he suggests is to build a mental house, a **Memory Castle**, with many rooms full of distinct, memorable items bearing numbered locations. Then, if you're trying to remember an ordered list, you fling each thing sequentially at your numbered locations. While such mental crutches won't prevent Alzheimer's, say, or other dementias, it may well postpone them "*a couple of years.*"

Sainted Editor thought the **Memory Castle** was an invention of the Middle Ages, but it has a history extending back to **Simonides** of Ceon (d. 468 BCE):

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Method_of_loci
It sounds like a cheat, but it's really using your best mental abilities from the hippocampus to the cortex to parlay unnatural things into a natural, memorable setting. For a fascinating talk on how our brains may work to gift

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The 4 Way Test:

Of the things we think, say, and do:

1. Is it the truth?
2. Is it fair to all concerned?
3. Will it build goodwill & better friendships?
4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

us with consciousness (let alone memory), watch

www.ted.com/talks/antonio_damasio_the_quest_to_understand_consciousness.html

Ron touted his April 9-10 workshop to which he invited us all and our grandkids (catch 'em early). Indeed, he said if we won't take our grandkids, they should be taken away and "*given to someone who loves them!*" He recommended that we ignore the \$399 fee printed on his handouts; he'll accept **\$299** and donate \$100 of that (why not \$99?) back to our Foundation. He'll also let our grandkids come free. Those tempted may visit

www.brainathlete.com



Prince John presented him with the Four-Way Test "*to memorize,*" and said we'd donate *Shoes to Orphan Souls* in his name. **FLASH** asked him whether or not he's blackballed in Las Vegas. Ron told him, "*Not yet.*" Then **FLASH** asked, "*Do you want to come with me?*"

Prince John wanted to know how Ron remembers "*a John,*" and was told, "*As a toilet.*" Of course.

Lynette reminded us that our 2 February meeting starts at 11:30 am to accommodate all the candidates who want to show and tell.

John said that the next meeting would feature **Mayor Dyer** and the *State of the City*. He then led us in the Four-Way Test and belled us out at 12:55.

Guests & Visiting Rotarians

GUEST:

Ben Harris
John Cole

GUEST OF:

Kirk Bell
Lynn Schwartz

VISITING ROTARIAN

HOME CLUB

Member NEWS

AWARDS:

Harold Sullivan Award
Randy Wright

Athena Award
Rebecca Caso

Fred Moses Award
Richard Butterfly

Business Executive of the Year
Gary Base

Kersey Can Holder:

Vance Bryson

Citizen of the Year:
Beth and Duncan Webb

Rotary Make Up Website:
www.rotaryclubone.org

New Member Proposals:

Jayson Killough
Classification: YMCA "Community"
Proposed by: Rick Maucieri

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