

Skaneateles Rotary Club's 4th Annual International Women's Day Celebration

Press Release, by Lori Ruhlma



While International Women's Day was being celebrated around the globe, more than 100 people gathered at the Lodge to celebrate with the Skaneateles Rotary Club.

"Tonight we are going to see firsthand how individual people make a difference, and become a force through joining together," said Rotary Club President Mary Giroux while welcoming guests.

It is fitting for Rotary, as Rotary International's hallmark is about making change ... making the world a better place, organizers said.

They heard from women who lead programs to inspire young women, and they heard from two CNY students who are part of the Girl Ambassadors for Human Rights program in Fayetteville (as a part of the Matilda Joselyn Gage Foundation).

Keynote speaker Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner, founder and director of the Matilda Joselyn Gage Foundation, has spent her career working to preserve the stories and accomplishments of Gage, a major force for women's rights, human rights/liberty in the 1800s. She led the effort to renovate the Matilda Gage home in Fayetteville into a center for social justice.

Gage has been called "the woman who was ahead of the women who were ahead of their time." She was right there with Susan B. Anthony in founding the woman's suffrage movement. And she was doing more: She was fighting for liberty for all people.

Vanessa Johnson, director of the Girls Ambassadors for Human Rights program, told how the program works "to bring people together of very different ideas." She said it is "not to change minds, but to learn to listen and to allow discussion to happen" through dialog training.

Two young women involved in the program gave moving speeches about what they have learned and how their lives have been changed as a result of the program.

Drawing on the life and legacy of Matilda Joslyn Gage, the **Girl Ambassadors for Human Rights** program empowers and inspires young women with a nationally-recognized model developed with funding from the State Department through the American Alliance of Museums.

The Matilda Joslyn Gage home is known as a "gutsy museum," and "a center for social justice," Wagner said. "In these times, we need to sit down and respectfully listen to each other. We don't have to agree." Each room is devoted to an idea – with focus on women's rights, Native American rights, the Underground Railroad, religious freedom and Oz. (Yes, Oz. Gage is credited with inspiring her son-in-law Frank Baum to write the Wizard of Oz).

Rotarian Amy Tormey said this year's fourth annual event was created with the idea of "inspiring and empowering future generations, specifically high school girls, with very strong well-based programs that will benefit everybody. We're really focusing on a brighter future."

Rotary club members and community members bought extra tickets to allow attendance of young people. About a dozen high school girls were in attendance.

A portion of the money will also go to First Amendment, First Vote which focuses on getting high schools girls civically engaged. The event was kicked off with comments from former Auburn Mayor Melia Carnicelli, founder of First Amendment-First Vote and lead organizer of Women March in Seneca Falls. She talked briefly about her non-partisan program for teenage girls.

Music was provided by Loren Barrigar.