

Palo Alto Rotary Pinion

Date: February 27, 2017

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Editor: LYLE CONNELL

President BRIAN STEEN called us to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance to start the meeting promptly at 12:30 P.M.

VISTING ROTARIANS

Sara Tierno from the Mountain View Rotary Club and Ron Linnares from the San Mateo Rotary Club were present.

GUESTS

TONY CARRASCO introduced his guest Terry Beaubois, an architect who teaches at Stanford. MIKE BAIRD introduced his guest Claude Ezran of world music day and California Democratic Party fame. LIZ KNISS introduced her guest, our speaker Palo Alto mayor Greg Scharff. KHASH ALEE introduced his guest Chelsey Souza, who advises and guides nonprofits in fund raising development. Prudence Minnihan and Matt Dolan were guests of CHARLIE WEIDANZ.

OPENING REMARKS

Opening remarks were presented by NICK GRANOSKI, who joined



our club five months ago. He spoke about the truth. He said that it can be a moving target these days, although it is the first element of our four-way Rotary test. He noted that at the Oscar presentation it was the truth for a moment that La La Land won the Best Picture, but then it became the truth that Moonlight won. Playwrite Tony Kushner said we should ask ourselves if something is true or it is just expedient or just

comfortable, or worse, just profitable. A Polish journalist said, we should start doing things that we think should be done. You believe something, then you should act that way, this is putting truth into action. Finally, NICK reminded us of the quote from President James Garfield that there are people making the world better just by being who they are, who teach the truth by living it.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BRIAN STEEN announced that the San Jose Rotary Club has organized a flood relief fund. The board of Palo Alto Rotary Club has approved a \$1,000 contribution. The San Jose Rotary Club is also accepting individual contributions to its flood relief fund.



DENNIS MCGINN Joined the Presidents Club. He had a really great day because his granddaughter turned two and he also had a birthday with a two in it.

ELIZABETH SANTANA was recognized for becoming the new managing director of the Palo Alto Players.



BRUCE GEE spoke to us about the April 8, 2017 Rotary Crab Feed. Tickets



are \$75. Tickets go on sale next Monday. Platinum sponsor Alta Mesa Cemetery was thanked for their \$5,000 contribution, as were gold sponsors Presidio Bank, E.J. HONG, Channing House, The Webster Companies, TIM WATSON's law firm and Cornish & Carey. Silver sponsors include MIKE COUCH and SHERRI SAGER. Media sponsors include the Palo Alto Daily and Palo Alto Weekly as well as the

Chamber of Commerce. Auction items are still being accepted. The cruise to be auctioned is a September 19 through 28 trip to Malta and Sicily offered through Criterion Travel.

On April 20, 2017, there is a dinner honoring WALT HAYS and his wife Kay. It is a fundraiser for Acterra. Contact JUDITH STEINER for details on a Rotary table she is organizing.

INTRODUCTION OF OUR SPEAKER

Vice Mayor LIZ KNISS introduced our speaker Gregory Scharff. He has been the mayor of Palo Alto since January and has dived into



the role and is doing an exemplary job. He was previously a Rotarian for ten years in Cupertino and a Paul Harris Fellow. Greg was first elected to the City Council in 2009 and served as the mayor in 2013. He serves several committees and commissions including those related to Utilities and the NorCal Power Authority and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission. He graduated

Summa Cum Laude with a degree in Economics from Bowdoin College and has a law degree from Columbia University. He was born in South Africa and is an immigrant

Mayor Scharff was our main speaker. He spoke to us of the five current City Council priorities.



The first priority is housing. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) has assigned Palo Alto a quota of 2,800 new units of housing over the next seven years. Mountain View will be trying to develop 15,000 units and Sunnyvale 10,000 units. The audience was polled as to whether Palo Alto should attempt to build all these units. Mayor Scharff said he would be pleased if

two market rate projects were approved this year and one affordable housing project. There have been no affordable housing projects since at least 2010 in Palo Alto.

The second City Council priority is the budget and finance. Pension costs are rising. In addition, employees want raises in the current environment. The city cannot fall too far behind what other cities are paying. Mayor Scharff noted that Palo Alto offers more services, including libraries and Baylands and Foothill Park. The city has always had a good revenue stream. Mayor Scharff noted that Stanford Research Park provides as much sales tax revenue as the entire downtown.

The third priority is transportation. Apparently everyone wants to drive, but they don't want other people to cause traffic. The city will be building a new garage downtown and another in the California Avenue area. In addition, the Transportation Management Association is being set up to help downtown business get their employees to work without driving. The major transit to Palo Alto is CalTrain. Unfortunately, CalTrain just lost \$700 million in Federal funding for electrification due to a decision by the Trump administration.

The fourth City Council priority is infrastructure. A blue ribbon committee met and came up with a \$150 million funding plan. Among other things a Public Safety building will finally be constructed as well as renovation of fire stations. The bike bridge over 101 will also be completed. Avenidas will be spending \$13 million to renovate its building downtown. The golf course renovation will result in a much better golf course, and ten extra acres of open space, which can be used for athletic fields or other purposes.

The fifth City Council priority is healthy cities. Tobacco is virtually illegal in Palo Alto except in one's own home. The Council also hopes to address airplane noise, human rights and civil rights. Mayor Scharff has always opposed City Council action on national issues, but in light of the recent developments in Washington he has changed his mind completely. As an immigrant, he feels strongly that the city should be heard.

In response to audience questions, read out by HAL MICKELSON, Mayor Scharff stated that the city has an unfunded pension liability of approximately \$300 million. It is setting up a sinking fund as a baby step in addressing it. He did not believe there were any unfunded issues re infrastructure as the task force has looked into those. He explained the workings of ABAG, which is currently merging with Metropolitan Transportation Commission. Asked about the Chaucer Street bridge, Mayor Scharff stated he is totally oppose to flooding. The Joint Powers Authority hopes to replace that bridge although it is difficult to get projects approved on San Francisco Creek. Asked about federal funding, he stated that Palo Alto does not receive a lot of federal funding. There is a CDBG grant of perhaps \$100,000. He said there is no low hanging fruit on traffic improvements. The ultimate answer may be self-driving automated cars. In response to question about becoming a Sanctuary City, Mayor Scharff stated that Palo Alto already is one for all practical purposes, although it has not designated itself as such. He is in favor of mixed use development, particularly where there is ground floor retail. In response to question about Palantir and Amazon, both have employees working downtown and have been model corporate citizens in having only 20% of their employees commuting in single occupancy cars. The other large employer downtown, the City of Palo Alto, is the worst of the three in terms of density of employees and usage of cars.

The Mayor opined that high-speed rail was not coming to Palo Alto any time soon due to the change of the administrations. Finally he made a pitch for the storm drain tax proposal which will be on the ballot for property owners.

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

March 6, Mary Ellen Hannibal, Writer and Environmentalist:
"Grassroots Meets Big Data as Citizen Scientists Help Tackle Environmental Problems"

March 13, New Member Talks

March 20, Bill Liberatore and the Gunn Choir: Musical Program