

Palo Alto Rotary Pinion

June 14, 2021

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Savoring every moment that remains in his term as our president, BEN THRELKELD called us to order on June 14 with an endorsement of the Four-Way Test. Keep it in mind when you participate in meetings at Rotary and elsewhere....



THRELKELD, calling attention to Juneteenth, the anniversary of the Union Army order that ended slavery in Texas.... DANA TOM, selected to serve on the Redistricting Advisory Commission for Santa Clara

JERRY UNDERDAL provided Opening Remarks, the “multiple perspectives” he picked up with a Montana background in the cosmopolitan environment of Silicon Valley. He learned, he said, that we need an entrepreneurial spirit in meeting global needs.... In the coming Rotary year, MIKE REYNOLDS will be stepping aside as coordinator of these Thoughts for

BRUCE SWENSON caught our attention by illustrating the \$50,000 contribution made by our Endowment Fund to support the club’s charitable work. With market gains, the Fund’s value has grown to \$1.1 million. The Fund’s goal this year is to match the \$50,000 that it expects to pay out with \$50,000 in new contributions. Most years, about 80 of us donate to the Fund, but so far there are only 55 to 60 donors for 2020-21.... BETSY BECHTEL will replace Bruce as chair of the Endowment. Ben thanked Bruce for his energetic leadership.



Blue Badges were announced for MIKE REYNOLDS, sponsored by TIM WATSON, and CHRISTIAN MARTINE, sponsored by JESSICA SUN....Joining the President’s Club: BEN



County... ELIZABETH SANTANA, making three years of service on our club’s board and honoring the 90th anniversary of Palo Alto Players... CHRISTIAN MARTINE, to celebrate his wife’s post-pandemic family reunion.

Our speaker, RENÉE DIRESTA is the Research Manager at the Stanford Internet Observatory, working with the Election Integrity Partnership (EIP), with ties to Graphika, the Atlantic Council and the University of Washington. She has been investigating the spread of malign narratives across social networks in the context of pseudoscience conspiracies, terrorism, and state-sponsored information warfare.... Ms. DiResta described recent research by EIP regarding

the way malign narratives are created. Do they spread from the top down or from the bottom up? Are there “repeat spreaders”? Are the origins domestic or the result of foreign action?

A misleading story may begin with ordinary people who document a personal experience and add explanations that may be mistaken or distorted. These bits of partly valid information are picked up and amplified by “influencers,” who might, for example, mark a story “Big If True!” and post it for hundreds of thousands of readers. As it is passed along, people add comments, and the resulting strings may be picked up by mainstream media.... An example: An Arizona voter complained online that she had been given a Sharpie to mark her ballot; she speculated that a ballot marked with a Sharpie might be deemed invalid and thrown away. Despite efforts by Maricopa County officials to say that no such thing was happening, the story of ballots being thrown away spread like wildfire. People had been persuaded to expect election fraud and the Sharpie story fit. The pattern: People who “sincerely and truly believed” there were problems with the election reported their perceptions; their reports were amplified and packaged in a way that greatly distorted them; segments of the social media audience had been conditioned to believe the distorted narratives. According to Ms DiResta, the challenge is to preserve freedom of expression – because free speech can mean the right to lie – but at the same time to manage the ways in which social media algorithms and feature sets process and present unreliable or deliberately misleading content.

Upcoming Programs: June 21: Suzanne Simard, Professor of Forest Ecology, University of British Columbia

June 28, Debunking of President BEN THRELKELD

July 5, Dark, for Independence Day Weekend.

July 12, A new Rotary year begins