

Palo Alto Rotary Pinion

February 10, 2025

Writer: Eric Jensen



Celebrating 103 years of Service

THE MAGIC OF ROTARY 2024-2025

President **REBECCA GERALDI** called the Monday meeting to order with an enthusiastic "Welcome!"

First on the agenda is **BRUCE GEE** announcing guests and visiting Rotarians. **BRUCE** introduced his neighbor Tim Misner and **JUDY KLEINBERG** introduced Judge Jim joining on zoom.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY



JUDY KLEINBERG recognized both Valentine's day and President's Day; one celebrates the bonds of love and the power of connection and the other celebrates the enduring spirit of

our nation and the strength and vision of leadership. "It is really perfect that they happen so closely in time", **JUDY** said, "because at the heart of both Patriotism and love lies a deep and abiding commitment; a commitment to something larger than ourselves." Quoting Martin Luther King Jr., **Judy** repeats, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." This love, this belief in the inherent worth of every human being, reflects the essence of King's message.

JUDY closed her thought with "We should lead with love and love with leadership. **Happy Valentine's Day and happy President's Day!**"

PRESIDENTS CLUB

ROB LANCEFIELD joined with a story. His family had recently moved from Oregon to Alabama. New to the city of Troy, **ROB's** seventh birthday was coming up and he shares the day with President Lincoln's birthday, who he admired and celebrated at his birthday party. Turns out the residents in the heart of Dixie did not share that affinity for the President.

LIZ KNISS is back and called out the angels (or "shrinking violets") that gave her support while she was recovering from a temporary health setback. She is grateful for her Rotary community.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Monthly milestones: Rotary anniversaries and birthdays. The baby boys of Rotary:

RICHARD KELLER, ROB LANCEFIELD, DUANE KALAR, and JOHN STOUMEN and the baby girls of Rotary **STANS KLEINJEN** and **JACKIE WHEELER**. Everyone enjoyed the pictures! President **REBECCA** remarked, **RICHARD KELLER** looks the same.

Next week's meeting: We are dark for President's Day so go put up or take down US flags on University Avenue. The 8am meeting place is the Cowper/Webster garage and 5pm meeting place is at the Starbucks at High and University. Wear your Rotary shirt. If you need one, you can pick it up at **BEN THRELKELD's**

Cambridge Optometry on the corner of Birch and Cambridge.

SAVE MARCH 15! ANNUAL FUNDRAISER

This year's Annual Charities Fundraising Dinner, previously known as the Crabfeed, is scheduled for **Saturday, March 15**. This celebration event benefiting local and international charities will be held at the **Mitchell Park Community Center, starting at 5:30 pm**.



Tickets for the crab and pasta dinner are \$125 per person, through the website or the emails you have received this week. It's a fun event!

BRUCE needs to know by Friday, February 14 if you are interested in the April cruise to the Mediterranean.

The fantastic cruise around New Zealand will be a live auction item at our event!

BRUCE and SALLY detailed the need for your support through attendance, bringing friends, sponsorships and active participation.



Contact SALLY if you can provide items for the silent or live auctions. Both are always popular and exciting! Many thanks to our sponsors who have contributed \$30,000 to the event so far!

TODAY'S PROGRAM

SALLY (with no shortage of duties today) began the speaker introduction by thanking **JOY OCHE** for making the connection for today.

For more than 30 years, **Dr. Ayodele Thomas**, Stanford University Associate Vice Provost, [IDEAL Advancement](#), has been dedicated to developing and implementing strategic, effective diversity. Dr. Thomas



earned her MS and PhD in Electrical Engineering from Stanford University in 2000 and 2005. After completing her doctorate, she dedicated herself to diversifying the graduate school pipeline and

supporting the retention of diversity within the student body, alongside aiding the broader graduate student population. She has served in leadership roles in the School of Humanities and Sciences, School of Medicine, University Human Resources and now the IDEAL Team (inclusion, diversity, equity and access in a learning environment). She also serves as the Executive Director of the non-profit [Greene Scholars Program](#), where their motto is "Curiosity is our superpower".

Dr. Ayodele Thomas came to the podium with a contagious energy and engaging story. "I'm the proud descendant of enslaved people taken from Africa. For years, I've introduced myself this way to my students because I want them to know that there's no shame in that designation." Dr. Thomas continued, "It is a statement of **honor** for those who died while in bondage.

It is a statement of **resilience**. For those who fought to overcome that which should have broken and destroyed us.

It is a statement of **remembrance** that we should never forget what was done to my ancestors. And the impacts it continues to have even to this day.

It is a statement of **acknowledgement** that I

stand here in a place of privilege. Because of the work, blood, and tears. Of countless others who came before me.

It is a statement of **responsibility**. Because I have been blessed to pave the way for future generations. And to speak up to empower those who can't speak up for themselves.

It's a statement of **hope** that I have for my children and for future generations.

That one day our culture will treat them with **equity**..."

Dr. Thomas chronicled her growing up in the south and how she wanted to be an engineer since she was eight years old. She shares the electrical engineering track with her four brothers. While engineering was her education, her passion and career has been in leadership for diversity and access. Her engineering of systems has helped her in engineering access for others. From an early age she loved math, science, creating, and building. She overcame obstacles along the way by looking at the problem from a different lens. For example, as a teenager, her high school was labeled the worst in the city. Even the students came to believe they were less intelligent even though she knew they were not. She saw the community, her community, as more than grades. That is when she began leading others.

Dr. Thomas goes on to say "My family has been in this country for more than 200 years. But not by choice. There are those who would say 'Love America or leave it', however, I claim America as my own because my family has worked, fought, struggled, and died for this country. As Black Americans, our relationship with this country is complicated. We don't have the luxury of simplifying it to 'love it or leave it'. After all, when my ancestors wanted to leave, they weren't allowed to by the threat of death. But to love a place that has allowed legal enslavement, allowed us to be beaten for no cause, prevented my ancestors from learning to read or write, allowed the rape of my grandmothers, even state-sanctioned murder, that love is hard." She came from generations of civil rights activists, on both sides of her

family, and they passed that legacy to her as she passes it on to others.

She goes on to say, "My grandfather became a civil rights activist in Tennessee. Leading the NAACP or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in that state for many years. And following the lawsuit that desegregated the Chattanooga, Tennessee schools, his home was bombed in the 1960s... And my mother, his daughter, was the one who actually desegregated those schools while bottles were thrown at her. A child. And yet she decided to become an educator who believes that all children, no matter their backgrounds, deserve to learn."

"My father's mother organized for civil rights and became a nurse to fight the injustice that led to the childhood death of her daughter, my aunt, because racism would not allow her little girl to be treated in the white hospital that was closest to them. My father continues to fight for civil rights and food justice, as he lives on the farmland of our ancestors, and addresses issues of environmental racism, food justice and sustainability. That is my legacy."

When Dr. Thomas arrived at Stanford in the 1990's, she was one of 900 graduate students in the electrical engineering department. There were only three black women and 20 black men and the entire population only had 20% women. Following her PhD, she transitioned from electrical engineering to a career of helping others break down barriers and gain access.

Today, along with her roles at the university, Dr. Thomas, serves the Greene Scholars Program which is named after an African American Silicon Valley pioneer, Dr. Frank Greene Jr. The program invites youth of African ancestry in grades three through twelve to join a community that will help them to successfully pursue higher education in STEM and serve as positive role models and contributors to their communities.

She left us with the following challenge: "No matter our position. I challenge you to think about your own sphere of influence. In your work, in your home, in your community. And how your action or inaction impacts those around you. All of us are responsible for what we say, how we say it and how we choose to speak up or not. And if you're a leader, you're

also responsible for taking a look at your own organization and identifying and removing any structural barriers found in policies, processes, and systems that prevent the progress for all current and future members of your community.”

To hear more inspiring conversations with Dr. Thomas, you can listen to a podcast [here](https://soundcloud.com/stanfordmed/portraits-of-stanford-medicine-ayodele-thomas?in=stanfordmed/sets/portraits-of-stanford-medicine).
(<https://soundcloud.com/stanfordmed/portraits-of-stanford-medicine-ayodele-thomas?in=stanfordmed/sets/portraits-of-stanford-medicine>)

CLOSING REMARKS

President **REBECCA**, with thanks to our speaker, closed our meeting

TODAY'S VOLUNTEERS

Greeters: **Jackie Wheeler, Sally Tomlinson**

Welcome Desk: **Katie Seedman**

A/V: **Dana Tom**

Microphone: **Richard Keller**

Pinion Writer: **Eric Jensen**

Pinion Editor: **Ginny Lear**

February 17 DARK: NO MEETING	President's Day. Rotarians Post American Flags on University Avenue
February 24 12:15-1:30pm Club Meeting	Ed Lauing, Mayor of Palo Alto Palo Alto 2025: What's ahead
March 3 12:15-1:30pm Club Meeting	Dannagai Young, Univ. Of Delaware Professor of International Relations How our Tolerance for Ambiguity Shapes our Engagement with the World
March 10 12:15-1:30pm Club Meeting	Long time Member Talks: Jack Woodson, Bruce Swenson, Dave Van Atta
March 15 5:30-8:00 pm Annual Dinner & Fundraiser Mitchell Park	Join Us for the annual crab and pasta fundraising dinner and auction at Mitchell Park. Tickets are \$125 per person Tables of 8 are available