

ROTARY CLUB OF HONOLULU
ZOOM MEETING MINUTES
DATE: December 1, 2020
PRESIDING: PRESIDENT RICH PROCTOR

President Rich Proctor called to order the December 1, 2020, ZOOM meeting of the Rotary Club of Honolulu to order at 12:00 PM with the ringing of his bell.

Brian Dunkel is the Virtual Meeting Maestro and placed the group on mute to begin our meeting.

President Rich: “Welcome one! Welcome all to the December 1st meeting of the Rotary Club of Honolulu. We have a wonderful program today. Our guest speaker today is **Col. Speros Koumparakis**. He is the commanding officer at Marine Corps Base Hawaii. He will discuss *Leadership and Lessons Learned During Covid-19*.”

Those assisting today were announced.

INSPIRATION, PLEDGE, AND SONG

Jessica Rich presented the Inspiration:

President Rich, Rotarians, and Guests, “Friends are like precious gifts. They are the family that we choose.”

During this Holiday season, picture in your mind a beautiful Christmas tree, and underneath that tree are gifts. They are all wrapped differently, just like friends who are special and unique. Not one is exactly the same.

We can count on our friends during good times and also in bad times. They give us the emotional support that we need. Time can go by and it doesn't even matter, because we still have that special connection with good friends.

Friends give us a sense of belonging, and especially during Covid-19, along with family, friends are even more important. Friends listen with empathy and respond with honesty. In our Rotary Club we also make friends. You can think in your mind who these precious friends in Rotary are to you.

The famous philosopher, Kahlil Gibran in his book *The Prophet* said, “You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.”

We have friends because we are friends, and we give back as friends the same encouragement and support that we receive. And for this we are truly grateful that friends are precious gifts.

Robyn McCreary led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. *God Bless America* was led and sung a *cappella* by **Kent Reinker**.

VISITORS

President Rich welcomes **Hideo Yamanaka** (from Kyoto Japan), **Madeleine Gardner** (a prospective Rotarian and former Rotary exchange student), and **Emily Hauck** (assistant for **Col. Koumparakis**).

President Rich: Welcome all and thank you for joining!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Birthdays: None this week.

Club Anniversaries:

Kerri Van Duyne - 7 years, sponsored by **Don Anderson**

Bub Wo - 35 years, sponsored by **Phil Norris**

Jeff Martin - 2 years, sponsored by **Nancy Pace** and **Bob Robinson**

Jack Roney - 2 years, sponsored by **Bub Wo** and **Steve Nikkola**

Ludwig Seidl - 14 years, sponsored by **Max Besenbruch**

Jack Dwyer - 35 years, sponsored by **Ron Schmid**

Walt Flood - 4 years, sponsored by **David Benson**

Edwina Lee - 7 years, sponsored by **Eileen Hilton**

Erik Soderholm - 37 years, sponsored by **Don Dawson**

Pres. Rich: Shared that today is an auspicious day for RC of Hilo. They are celebrating their 100th anniversary! Everyone was invited to Zoom in today at 5:30 pm. In May, if all is open, **President Rich** announced many are planning a trip to celebrate with Hilo.

Peacemakers committee meeting: immediately after our Club meeting.

ROTARIAN OF THE MONTH OF THE MONTH AWARD November Award - Lee LaBrash

President Rich: "I wanted to bring out again, something that I reenergized last month, and that is the *Rotarian of the Month Award*. I have a pin here that says, "Rotarian of the Month Award." This month, the month of November, I would like to honor **Lee LaBrash**. Now this may come as a surprise to **Lee**, but I've got to tell you, **Lee** is just the most wonderful contributor and participant in our meetings. She's sort of under the radar, and in a lot of ways; she does a lot of the scribing, which she is doing today. She is part of the Sunshine group and she is there to call and find out how are members are doing and find out what their needs might be. She also sponsored a member this last month, Lucci Pinoliad. I would just like to award and congratulate Lee for being a terrific member! Here you go, Lee - you get *Rotarian of the Month!*

Lee: "Thanks, Rich. Sorry, I'm crying. I didn't expect that! THANK YOU SO MUCH!"

Rich: "It is much deserved, Lee. Your enthusiasm is infectious and I just love having you in the room and as a member of this club. Thank you very much."

Lee: "I love all of you! Thank you!"

Rich: Without further ado, and this may take some time; we have some extra time for our breakout session today. The challenge: with whomever you have in your room, try and find out what you all have in common; something meaningful. (Not that you all are in Rotary, but something different).

BREAKOUT ROOMS SOCIAL TIME

President **Rich**, along with **Martha**, broke us up into groups of 4-6 per room. This section of our meetings allows us to engage more personally with other group members. Today's Breakout topic: "What do we have in common? Where are we from? Born? Raised?"

After a very productive session, a few groups shared their experiences of what they had in common!

Bob Sigall's group: All are college graduates, transplants to Hawaii, have been to Europe, have siblings, plan to get vaccinated, everyone voted, and each at one time was on a non-profit board.

Robyn McCreary's group: Everyone wears glasses, has been to Japan, has waterskied, played racquetball, been on a submarine, collect coins, have passports, been on cruises, "rode a motorcycle like Dolly Parton", and went to college and high school.

Judy Lind: All female, none have been on an airplane since March, all have been to Canada, and all of us went to college for at least four years

Brian Dunkel's group: Everyone agreed they like the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, all have been teachers before, and they all find Zoom difficult at times.

Scotty Anderson had the **Col.** in his group. They love Greek food and **Scotty** shared a restaurant he likes.

Rich: With that, let's introduce our speaker!

GUEST SPEAKER – COL. SPEROS KOUMPARAKIS

"Leadership and Lessons Learned during COVID-19"

Commanding Officer at Marine Corps Base Hawaii since June 2020

Eileen Hilton introduced our guest speaker.

It is my great pleasure to introduce to you **Colonel Speros Koumparakis**, who is originally from Martinsville, Virginia and graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1997.

In 2003, he attended the Expeditionary Warfare School in Quantico.

In 2006, he was selected as a Marine Corps Legislative Fellow and served in the Office of Legislative Affairs as a liaison officer and the Deputy Director of the Marine Corps' House Liaison Office.

The Col. then attended the **Argentine Naval War College**.

His next posting was at 9th Communication Battalion Camp Pendleton as Alpha Company Commander, Battalion Detachment Commander, and Battalion Executive Officer.

In 2013, he served as the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff for Communications. He took command of the Communications School in Quantico, VA, moved the school from Quantico to Twentynine Palms, CA, activated the Communication Training

Battalion and helped merge officer and enlisted communication training into one unit.

In 2017, he graduated from the **Naval War College** and transferred to the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity to complete **Attaché Training**. In July of 2018, he transferred to the U.S. Embassy in Bogota, Colombia where he served as the **Marine Attaché** until moving to Hawaii to assume Command of MCB Hawaii in June of 2020. A tough year to assume anything during this time!

The Col. has numerous military awards and decorations.

Meetings with the Col. have left me impressed with his intellect, integrity and personal charm.

He will be speaking with us today about ***Leadership and Lessons Learned in the Time of COVID-19: Learning to operate during the pandemic and how it created new challenges for leadership, communities and partnerships.***

Guest Speaker Col. Koumparakis:

Dr. Hilton, thank you so much for that introduction, and once again, thank you for what has taken a long time but becoming a great friendship. A few months ago I was able to meet with **Dr. Hilton** during one of the engagements with community, and in that discussion, I realized the caliber of people that make this community so great. I appreciate the friendship we are starting to have.

Second, I want to congratulate **Lee** on being *Rotarian of the Month*. I think that is awesome! It is amazing what the Rotarians are able to do. In my hometown, the Rotary Club was very active and so I always appreciated what they would do in the little town of Martinsville, Virginia. I have heard from so many other Military personnel here in Hawaii about the power of community and collaboration that the Rotarians bring, specifically the Rotarians of Honolulu, so thank you for what you do every single day. I think this year matters even more.

I had a great conversation with **Scotty** a few minutes ago! I appreciated him bringing up our similarities. Greek food is one of my favorite things being a young Greek lad from Martinsville, VA, which if you know what NASCAR is then you know Martinsville, it's a paperclip racetrack, the smallest one on the NASCAR circuit. So how does a Greek redneck make it to Hawaii to be the Col. of the Marine Corps Base Hawaii? I don't know. But I owe a lot of it to mentors and definitely my family who instilled in me the things I see here in Hawaii, which is a connection to the land; growing up on a Southern farm in Virginia, I see a connection to the land here. It is hard not to see the connection to the land every single day.

What I want to talk about today, and what Eileen and I discussed was a little bit about the leadership and those lessons learned coming out of Covid from my perspective as a military leader and how I think they connect to you and the community. I don't think I can explain what is going on in Hawaii, because you know this place better than I, so I wanted to start this discussion with what I saw at the beginning of the pandemic and what I learned from that.

As Eileen stated, I was a Marine attaché in the US Embassy, Bogota, Colombia. In March of 2020, coming off what I thought was a great year of 2019, us expanding our efforts to help the people of Venezuela to put more pressure onto the Maduro Regime and then trying to get after NARCO trafficking as cocaine was flowing out of South America into the Mexican cartels and then up into the United States, over into Australia, and then into Europe. A lot of my focus was on that. At the beginning of March, I was on a trip traveling to the specific locations of where the Columbians have Marines and Navy and Coast Guard. I was working closely with them to build awareness to go after NARCO traffickers.

In the background, we were hearing conversations about the pandemic; what was going on in China, going on in Asia, and really about that point in early February-March, the effect it was having on Europe. So having been in Colombia for a while, there was this expectation that because of the close tie to Latin America and to, as they called it, La Patria and Spain, having direct flights to Avianca, they were worried as to what the flow was going to look like with the Covid into Latin America specifically and into Colombia at the time.

What I found fascinating, we had a very close tie at the US Embassy with the Government of Colombia. Things came out of this tie that were unexpected. That's what I appreciate when working with people is the unexpected. We expected a flow of Covid from Spain into Colombia and the Colombians wanted to mitigate it. What they decided to do was go to a different ally. Because of Colombia's involvement in the Korean War, as the only Latin America country to send both ships and Marine Infantry Battalions, they have an incredible tie with the South Korean Republic, so they and their leadership turned to South Korea as opposed to Spain and Italy, which would be the traditional, what we would consider a close tie, and they got their lessons learned from a country that was doing it right.

Colombia, along with the other Latin American countries, has multi-generational homes with lots of folks living in small spaces, so they knew they needed to lock things down early. So as soon as I was done with my last trip to the Pacific, where I visited four or five locations, I came back into Bogota where the entire Embassy and all of the City of Bogota and of Nicaragua were tightly quarantined and it was very, very tough. For about six weeks I didn't leave my home. The only reasons you could leave your home during those first six weeks was to get medicine or see a doctor.

They had essential workers and it redefined what Colombia considered essential workers, who were the delivery people. They have a great industry of delivery to the home, and so those essential workers were given carte blanche to conduct deliveries; and the amount of disinfectant and the amount of practices that were being put into place for safety were extremely high. During those six weeks I wondered if this was going to defeat Covid or was it going to mitigate Covid. In talking to our liaisons with the country, the interesting nuance, they knew that they didn't have the ICU beds or ventilators in March for the pandemic to hit like it was

happening in Italy and Spain. They also knew the nature of their people were of a close-knit society that was living with each other and on top of each other, and it would be very difficult, especially in the lower class homes that are built on top of each other, to stop a pandemic if it came in. So while this lock down was fierce, it wasn't to defeat Covid; it wasn't to keep Covid from coming; it was to buy the Government time so they could get more ICU beds and more ventilators. Over the course of those six weeks, they kept the numbers extremely low. So while the rest of Europe and the initial numbers were coming into the United States, Colombia was able to combat, at least for a set amount of time, to give themselves space to think and to operate and to provide more support to their people.

The lesson I learned from watching that was that sometimes we do things because we want the second and third order effects of those things knowing that human nature was not going to stop Covid from coming in and it was going to be impossible to block off the country because it's not an island; it has borders with multiple countries and lots of traffic coming in, but the time they bought absolutely saved lives.

So as I was finishing my time in Colombia, and coming to the Marine Corps here, I really thought about that lesson a lot. What are the most important things we need to do – while we may order people not to do things, we know human nature may actually take over – but what capacity do we have and what mitigations do we put into place so we can operate in the age of Covid, as opposed to trying to defeat it. We say in the Marine Corps, a Unit has a mission and you have to give the Unit the weapons to accomplish that mission. So early on in the days of Covid I kept hearing Marine leaders saying, “We’re going to defeat Covid. We’re going to defeat Covid!” but I was never issued a weapon to actually defeat Covid. So that’s why we’ve reshaped our thinking, “How do you operate in an environment with Covid?” The same way we would ask a Captain of a ship to understand seascapes or the weather so that they’re operating the ship in the best possible scenario while they may have large waves or heavy rains, things like that – that’s the way we look as Marine Base Hawaii and how we operate in the age of Covid.

While speaking with **Scotty** [during the breakout session] he asked how long I’ve been a Colonel and I said not very long. I was supposed to be a Colonel on 1 May of 2020. I was eventually promoted on 5 June 2020 because of Covid, because everything just gets delayed in the age of Covid. The promotion, which this is probably my last promotion, to Colonel, is an amazing feat and I’m super happy to be a Colonel, was supposed to be this great event where I was going to have family come down to Colombia where my Mother was to pin one on and my wife to pin on the other, and that didn’t happen. But we were able to do something different; similar to what we are doing today. It was a live feed with multiple folks to include my family, being able to watch my promotion from the US Embassy. Even though it wasn’t the way I thought it would be, it ended up being a better event in which more people were able to attend because of the way we did the event. This was the second big lesson I learned as I was leaving Colombia; is that there are silver linings

from Covid we need to truly accept, not to return to February 2020, but to be a better community, hopefully, in 2021.

The second theme is about conducting a move during a pandemic. My wife and I have moved 8 times in the last 10 years. That is a lot of moves from one place to another and I'd like to say we've gotten pretty good at it. We can pack our bags and pack our boxes up pretty well before the movers come in and we get a lot of great support from the companies that move us around. But I have never been through a more difficult move than this year. It wasn't difficult because of anything except the time it takes to make things happen. We were supposed to depart Colombia in April. We ended up not leaving until mid-June, and I was supposed to take command of the base on June 5th. I ended up not taking command until June 30th. My last shipment of one crate was lost and the last crate arrived two weeks ago at the house with my Christmas tree that you can see in the background. If that is happening to a Colonel, you can only imagine what is happening to a Lance Corporal, a PFC, or a young Lieutenant. I can only imagine what it's like in the civilian world for the folks who are making the move and paying for it out of pocket, especially in a place so far away from home.

We are trying to have that empathy and we want to make sure we understand what is going on with our Junior Marines, our Senior Marines, and our Sailors, to make sure their move is as smooth as possible coming to Hawaii. I have been told in the past that moving to Hawaii can be difficult because it is so far from home – add Covid on top of that, and it is definitely a more difficult process; and we are trying to take that on. In doing so, we have a sponsorship for folks on base. We are also trying to take time to figure out how to do the "Welcome Aboards". We used to do this in person, and now we do it much like this, on Zoom or a prerecorded message, which just isn't the same. So we ask for those leaders at the lowest level to really take ownership of the new people coming in and try to show them the best practices while also understanding that the way they arrived a year or even two years ago, is not the same way someone new is coming in and arriving. This has absolutely been a challenge but I also see it as an opportunity for junior leadership to take hold of new folks and show them best practices in the age of Covid.

As I came into the base, with those lessons learned from Colombia, I had to take and assume a leadership role. So here's a person who has never been assigned to work in Hawaii and has only been a tourist a few times to Hawaii, was asked to come in and made decisions right away to ensure the base is operating. What I found very quickly is it's a balance and I truly appreciate the balance of both leading and learning.

One of the reasons I am here today is because I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Hilton and I learned from her. I hope to create a relationship with many other folks who are on this call because it can't be done alone. No decisions are ever made in a bubble, and if they are, they shouldn't be. It's how you take the information - best advice, worst advice - try to decipher which is good advice and which isn't and

then try to make a decision. On top of making a decision, how do you message the decision to get to folks now in a way that works so it not only gets to the chain of command, but to everyone? I've struggled just like so many others about decisions about Covid on what decisions we make and how they affect the Base, but also, more importantly, the community. For me the community isn't just the people who live on the Base, but the people who live in and around the Base.

As I struggle with some of those decisions, we try to learn from every decision we make. Early on when I first got here, in the June/July time frame specifically, our numbers were looking okay. There was a second wave about to the continental United States, we were trying to open things up here in Hawaii and we were originally somewhat unrestrictive and then more restrictive. So it's this constant ebb and flow of trying to protect the people of the Base, protect the operational forces. I'll tell you the things we focus on every day here is protecting the people, but also preparing forces for their deployments. The last thing we want to do is send Marines or Sailors forward to another country with Covid because that would wreck a relationship with countries we're already in good stead with and the last thing we should be doing is providing a force that is actually hurting our allies as opposed to helping our allies. So when making decisions, we are thinking about that.

The second thing we are making our decisions on today that I've learned over the last few months is that Covid is going to affect people differently. As long as we can identify it early, get folks in for testing, and then get them isolated, it's amazing how quickly you can get it under control. And the contact tracing, much like out in town, is critical to that success. The testing only tells you who has it now; the contact tracing tells us who's going to get it. So we focus on good information gathering for contact tracing to know which direction it's going. If there is something I have concerns about in the future it's that we always seem to be 6-8 weeks behind the continental United States. As I watched the wave through the continental United States, we would look very closely to see what that effect is going to be on us in a few weeks to months. The other thing I'm very proud of is the relationship we've had with the government officials here and the communication. I'm really impressed with the Hawaii Safe Travelers Program. We have started allowing guests who live on bases to use the program as long as they don't come into our operations spaces and where our Marines are conducting operations, and are staying in the home. We ask them to be aware to look for symptoms, and if they don't feel well, they don't come to work. We ask people to be vigilant.

Just over the last few months between Halloween and allowing trick-or-treating, our Marine Corps Ball celebration, which was very non-traditional, but still a celebration of sorts, and Thanksgiving, we've seen a considerable uptick in morale at the Base. So we're looking forward to Marines taking some time off and then getting ready for 2021, while absolutely keeping our finger on the pulse to see what happens with our vaccination programs coming up in the near future. Like you all, we're looking at the open source and whatever the Department of Defense is going to do to support

that. Until we have an FDA approved vaccine it won't be required by folks under the emergency use, it'll be volunteer, but we are hoping folks will volunteer to keep others safe.

I'd like to finish with the following comments. I really appreciate you allowing me to speak for a few minutes about what I've seen, specifically prior to coming here. The lessons learned in Colombia have really helped shape some of my decision-making. As part of the Base, I truly want this Base to be considered part of the community, not separate. Just because there is a fence doesn't mean we are separate. Every single day people float in and out of the gate. My wife just started a new job – it took several months to find it, but she goes off Base to work. We have multiple people from off Base who come on Base to work, so to me it's just one part of the community and we want to be very supportive of that community as we continue to move into, what I call the second half of Covid, and as we hopefully come out of Covid, I would love to expand the relationship, even greater than it is today, with the community at large. That includes here and Mokapu, meaning Camp Smith and Pu'uloa Range with Ewa Beach and all those other places where we have small bits and pieces of Marine Corp Base Hawaii. We want to be part of the community because it is part of the community. Those who think it's not please come and talk to me, as I want to break down those barriers.

We just had a change of command - one of our Navy Units changed Commanders. For the beauty of Marine Corps Base Hawaii that unit is Navy Helicopters and they fly some pretty incredible missions. Last week their helicopters were flying in Honduras aboard a ship conducting humanitarian assistance. I love seeing that units from Marine Corps Base Hawaii are not only focused on facing threats and warfare, but at the same time on the other side of the earth in Honduras during a very, very tumultuous time with Iota and a second hurricane coming through devastating a lot of Honduras and several islands off the coast, we have Marine Corps Base Hawaii personnel in the form of Sailors providing disaster relief. Just an amazing story of what this community and this part of Hawaii is doing for the rest of the world, not just against facing threats in the Far East, but also in support of great allies in the region I just came from.

I will close by sharing with you what Commander Martin said, "I truly appreciate the Mentor who taught me to underreact to everything." So if the one thing I take out of the age of Covid, is be careful what you say and I truly appreciate the Mentor who also taught me to underreact to everything because if I overreact, everyone will overreact even more.

COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, AND ANSWERS WITH COL. KOUMPARAKIS

Sally Mist: Thank you very much! It's nice to have you here in Hawaii and it's nice to know you guys can be of so much service. There are several members of our Club members who are part of the Armed Services YMCA, and are happy to help.

A half dozen of our members are on the Board of Directors of the Armed Services YMCA. If we can be of help, please let us now. If there is anything we can do with our base there on your Base, we are there on base to serve you.

Col: I have met with the leadership of Armed Forces YMCA. I grew up as part of the YMCA and was even a lifeguard. I am really excited about the things we can do. I know coming February/March, I am looking to expand what we do with the Armed Forces YMCA. I appreciate you bringing that up and thank you for being a part of more than one group.

Pres. Rich: Thank you, Colonel! I know there is some secrecy around the number of cases that might happen on all the bases. I'm not sure if the cases you may be experiencing on base are being counted and if not, can you say how you are doing overall and with the containment of the virus?

Col: We've been asked to keep our operational unit numbers outside the public realm for purposes of our basic threats if it affects our readiness. I think that's a wise decision on our part. What I can share is that I've been impressed with our numbers over this summer. I can also share the struggle I've had with how I account for numbers on Base. The Marine Corps accounts for them one way, but I account for them differently. The Marine Corps will account for Marine Corps Units, personnel, and readiness. I account for everyone on this Base. I care if a worker at Subway has Covid. I care if a Marine who is part of an infantry has Covid. I care if a lifeguard has Covid. The Marine Corps technically doesn't care about those numbers as an organization because they are not reporting it, but to me every single one is a vector of Covid. The one thing we work very hard to do, and it's also very *hard* to do, is making sure who is testing, when they're testing, and how they're getting tested so that when we provide those numbers we don't double count people. I track every person who works or lives on Base whether they have taken a test and are getting a positive Covid response. Then, if the test is done in town, it is reported directly to the Department of Health, and I am going to track it, but not report it to my health network through the Department of Defense. Then for military members, we track those through the Department of Defense Health Agency and they in turn report those numbers directly to the Department of Health on a regular basis. Our numbers are being reported, but through a filter, so as to not show the readiness of Units. I don't know how the calculator exactly works, but I know my numbers to go to DHA and they parse them out to the individual states to make sure they are tracking our numbers within the state for appropriate purposes.

Alice Tucker: Thank you very much for coming and for an excellent presentation. You said you went to college in Argentina; where the classes in Spanish?

Col: [He answered in Spanish. Said he speaks a little.] Yes, Ma'am! I speak okay but very little. That year in Argentina, going to their equivalent of a Master's level course, although they didn't offer it to the foreign students, was *extremely* difficult. I was so tired at the end of every single day! And the most difficult piece was that I would be in class, I would have one laptop with a translator and the lesson, and I would also have the lesson from the US Naval War College I would look up, and then I would have break time, which was more tiring, because during break you get coffee and get a snack with all the Argentines who wanted to speak Spanish to me, so it was more difficult. There was never a break so

around 2:30-3:00 in the afternoon I would be dead tired having spoken Spanish all day long and read, then have to go home and do homework all in Spanish.

Alice: I know, I majored in Spanish, but mine was so long ago. I can tell you about 16th century Argentinian poetry and 19th century Cuban novel, but what good does it do in life? None!

Col: Alice, I will tell you, anytime you want to practice Spanish, my wife has better grammar than I do, but I have a better accent.

Alice: One other thing, you'll find that there are Greek restaurants here, but there is a Greek community here and a Greek Orthodox Church here. They do great things and have great food! Better than the restaurants!

Col: I look forward to making my way there. But everything just takes a little longer this year!

CLOSING

President Rich announced that next week is going to be our annual meeting where everyone will vote on the next board and the next President Elect. Next week's guest will be Daniel Martinez, Historian for Pearl Harbor. **Brian** takes us out with *Hawaii Aloha* music video. **President Rich** jingled his bell at 1:00pm to adjourn our meeting.

Mahalos,

Lee LaBrash, Your Humble Scribe