



The Appleknocker

Sebastopol Rotary Club's Weekly Bulletin

James Alexander - Prison to Homeless to Zimbabwe



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"All the News that Fits We Print"

 **BEFORE THE BELL** 

At Russian River Vineyards, Friday was a beautiful warm spring day, the meeting was well attended, and all were in a good mood.

The Russian River Vineyards onsite Zoom production crew was sweating and ... mainly because fearless leader and tech guru John Blount was off catching some rays in Lake Tahoe. The crew mostly pulled it together and the meeting was ready! Next thing you know, set up will become routine – just in time to return to Memorial Hall.

Your humble scribe signed into Zoom just in time to enjoy the antics in the Zoom peanut gallery. Important conversations about random items were abound, including a serious conversation about birds by our own "Birdman of Alcatraz", **Keller McDonald**. Yes, the zoom conversation went to the birds! **President Dan Rasmus** and Zoom Meister **Tom Boag** clipped our Zoom wings, as a meeting was awaiting all of us!

 **AT THE BELL** 



Dan Rasmus brought the hammer down on the hearty Roto-bell at 12:15 pm sharp!

Pauline Pellini jumped in to lead the flock in the salute to Old Glory.

Past President and former Foghorn at the Point Bonita Lighthouse, **Rick Wilson**, gave us the quote for the day:

"The Quickest way to double your money is to fold it over and put it back in your pocket." Will Rogers



Future Programs

June 18

Diana Rich
The Three Basic Issues Facing
Sebastopol

June 25

No Regular Noon Meeting

June 25

Debunking
5:30 PM
Russian River Vineyards

July 2

Dark No Meeting

July 9

Noon Meeting
Program TBA
Location TBA

Miscellany

MAKEUP NOTIFICATIONS—scottbriggs50@yahoo.com

On-line Make-Ups:

www.RotaryEClubOne.org

Domestic Violence Hotline:

707-546-1234

sebastopolrotary.com

VISITING ROTARIANS & GUESTS



Joining us today was Past District Governor Barb Spangler.

Visitors included our speaker James Alexander, and his wife Constantia.

First lady Fran Rasmus was also in the crowd.

We also had a great crew from Brookhaven School, including Principal Sara Graham, Interact advisor Jeff Stucker, and two students from the Interact Club, Jamie and Peyton.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

President Dan reminded everyone about the 2021 Rotary Virtual Convention taking place from June 10th to June 16th. He also reminded everyone about the District 5130 Happy Hour that took place on Friday the 11th.

PAUL HARRIS AWARDS



Dan surrendered the Rotolectern to Past President and Past District 5130 Governor, Bob Rogers, who was here to bestow three Paul Harris Fellowship Awards.

Bob reminded us that Paul Harris started Rotary International in 1905, and that the Rotary Foundations was started in 1917 with the proceeds leftover from the Atlanta Rotary Convention. The two organizations collective mission is to advance world understanding, goodwill, world peace, improvement of health, support of education, and the alleviation of poverty. In 1957, the foundation developed the Paul Harris Fellowship, to recognize those who donate \$1,000 or more.



Today, Bob honored brand new Paul Harris Fellow, Hal Kwalwasser.

Bob mentioned that for every \$250 donated, a life is saved.

Dan Rasmus earned a Paul Harris plus Four Pin.

Harry Polley earned a Paul Harris plus Seven Pin.

Congratulations, Hal, Dan, and Harry!

🍎 RECOGNITIONS 🍎

[There were no recognitions this week, what's up with that?? Possible reasons;

1. The club has too much money and collecting more fines just makes the problem worse,
2. The Russian ransomware group has captured Dan's computer and he won't pay the \$5 to release it, or
3. There is only so much fun and frivolity that can be captured in one meeting.

The most likely answer is Number 3, but what if?? -Ed]

🍎 COMMUNITY NEEDS SUMMIT UPDATE 🍎

Dan then turned the Roto-Spotlight on **Hal Kwalwasser** to deliver the results of the recent Sebastopol Community Needs Summit. After a successful summit, it's time to get to work! Again, the goal was to make all of the service organizations smarter about the projects we need to support. **Hal** mentioned that all of the service clubs in Sebastopol came together as a group, which will work together to tackle the issues that face the community. The group received 69 surveys from local nonprofits.



The top concern is mental health. COVID-19 has increased mental health issues locally. Local schools are also dealing with increased mental health issues.

The second issue is housing. The Community Church of Sebastopol has a safe parking area for the homeless. West County Community Services have expanded their homeless outreach. Other organizations are helping as well.

The third issue is food insecurity. Local churches, along with Ceres Community Project and Food for Thought have been active in dealing with this issue, and keeping up with recent demands.

The fourth issue is the environment. Local groups like Land Paths and the Laguna Foundation rely on volunteers, who have been in short supply since the pandemic began.

The fifth issue is education. In addition to mental health issues, the high school consolidation is opening potential problems that will need community and business support.

The final finding is that is that local institutions (EG: Community Center, Sebastopol Center for the Arts, Library, etc) are facing financial stress from the increased demands caused by the pandemic and are desperately short of volunteers.

So, what can we do to help? The summit looked for three responses. First, what can the service organizations collaborate on? What can individual service organizations do? What can individuals do on their own? Hal sent an email to all club members on Tuesday, June 8th asking the same questions. As of Friday, he only received three responses. ONLY three responses! Please take a moment to review **Hal's** email, and reply back!

ROOKIE SKETCH

Gail Gijzen then delivered her Rookie Speech. We learned that **Gail** grew up in Sebastopol with her brother and her father who raised her. He was a jazz musician, on top of running his own business. Her mom is a Highway Patrol officer in Oakland.

She describes herself as careful and adventurous. Growing up, **Gail** helped to support her siblings and her dad by taking on two jobs and helping with her dad's business.

She is most proud of being the first person in her family to get a degree. She got a double major in Behavior Science and Psychology at San Jose State University. **Gail** worked in the Advertising industry, was an avid volunteer, and was a court appointed advocate.

She eventually returned to help with her dad's business. After two years working non-stop, she took a two-month vacation to Europe, which changed her life; it was where she met the father of her children. Despite the relationship not working out, she has two amazing children, and an incredibly happy life in Sebastopol.

Her top priority is her family, and her kids, Chuck and Verona. They are her little love bombs. She loves watching how they take in the world. She takes pride in giving them solid ground to grow and blossom.

She returned to Sebastopol from San Francisco during her first pregnancy, so she could take care of her father who had Leukemia. When her father passed away, she moved back to her childhood home. She had been working for her father who ran a fire sprinkler business.

She decided to re-career and landed in the home loan business. After getting settled in her new career, she wanted to give back and reconnect to her community. She learned about all the work Rotary does and after some arm twisting by her good friend **Aleia Coate**, she decided to join. She was taken aback by how the club welcomed her with open arms. She joined right as the pandemic began but jumped right into the fray by helping **Keller** offer dining certificates to front line workers.



DEBUNKING

Unless you have been hiking alone in the Andes for the past three months, you know that June 25th is De-bunking! It's the day that every skeleton in **President Dan's** closet will see the light of day! The crack De-bunking investigators have uncovered enough dirt to make Mister Clean give up his day job! Yes, every detail, from frat parties to beer pong, will come to light! If you want to take part in the fun, tickets are still available (until June 21 only.) This is a debunking you will NOT want to miss!



Just in case you have forgotten how to play beer pong, **Aleia Coate** and **Meredeth Bertacco** teamed up to demonstrate. Be sure to practice so you are ready for the fun and games.

BROOKHAVEN INTERACT UPDATE

Dan brought **Pauline Pellini** up for a quick recap on Brookhaven School's Interact year. We learned that the Interact clubs had challenges due to the pandemic. Being an Interact advisor is a big commitment, but the students and their gifts and talents make it worthwhile!



She invited Jamie and Peyton up to talk about their year. We learned that the club met through Zoom originally, and finally in person in May. They immediately started a fundraiser by selling over 200 lollypops to students. They gave \$200 each to Canine Companions, The Living Room, Forgotten Felines and the Earl Baum Center for the Blind. They also shopped for holiday gifts for the adopt a family event in December. **Pauline** gave her thanks to the school principals for their support.

THE PROGRAM

Bob Rogers introduced our speaker, James Alexander. James started by sharing a story about **Bob** with the Roto-flock. He shared how **Bob** invited Barb Spangler's family and four of her neighbors to stay with him during the 2017 wildfires. Barb calls **Bob** her fourth brother! James explained how this act exemplifies Rotary's big heart, and the amazing work Rotary does. James was supposed to join us in May, but he took a fall which gave him numerous stitches, which he still carries. James thanked **Dan** for his hospitality and **Jeff Boal** for his caring and concern.



We learned that James grew up in Chicago. He joined the Marine Corps, where he was promoted twice. In the Marines, he became very loyal, and loved to help people. He learned to love well, but not wisely. He was involved in a drug related incident where a man died. James said that even today, it's hard to understand forgiveness, but he's been shown love throughout his life, and knows that forgiveness is real. He spent 28 years in the California State Prison System where he met people of different stripes, some great, some you would never want to be next door to.

It was there where he met John Kelly, AKA Father John, from Prison Ministries in San Mateo. Father John changed his life and his outlook. Father John told James that he had a smile that needed to be shown to the world. He learned that there is something he can be proud of, and that he could talk and meet with people as a human being. He learned that he had purpose, purpose of service. He started inmate programs at

San Quentin to help fellow inmates. Additionally, he earned his electronic technician certification, an X-ray technician certification, and an alcohol and drug abuse counselor certification.

After leaving prison, he earned his Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Psychology. He sat on the board of the California Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors.

James shared a life changing story. Shortly after he was released from prison, he crossed paths with retired Duke Basketball Coach Mike Krzyzowski. He took away a huge gift from Mike; the importance of standards. Mike wanted people to maintain certain standards. James realized that he does not have to be a stereotype and a label. He can live up to a standard, one where he understands and loves other human beings. He began to help people by finding things to do to help people.

He was honored by The Dali Lama as a Unsung Hero of Compassion in 2014. When he was honored in San Francisco, he thought about two things, not tripping, and not reaching his hands out, as instructed by his handlers. The Dali Lama reached out and embraced James and told him, "well done son, well done." The words reached his heart.

When James met Governor Newsom, he said that he wanted to be the first ex-convict to serve on the parole board. He told the Governor that he worked for the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services and was a Case Manager helping homeless individuals. Governor Newsom said; "James from Santa Rosa, if you solve the homeless problem, I'll appoint you to anything you want!" James said he's still working on it! He currently sits on the board of the Friends Committee on Legislation in California and is still very active in advocating for Criminal Justice Reform. In addition, he was featured in an IBM commercial, which highlighted his work with the homeless.

Today, James is working on a major project in Zimbabwe. After he married his wife, Constantia, they traveled to Zimbabwe where he saw how lack of water was impacting the crops in villages. He was charged to help! He went to some friends in Saint Helena to talk about the problem and his wanting to do something. They spoke of building a well and raised enough money to build it. Thanks to the new well, the crops were plentiful, and the women did not have to walk to get water.

He shared his experience in Zimbabwe with the Rotary Club of Saint Helena. After his presentation, the club said that they too would like to help! He then spoke to Rotary Clubs in Napa and Santa Rosa. They all stepped forward to help. They also got involved with a Rotary Club in Zimbabwe. The collaboration, the coordination, and the hard work paid off. Last month, a Rotary Global Grant was approved for the construction of two wells. They will be starting work soon.

More is going to be done. Constantia's nonprofit, The Courage of H.O.P.E. Foundation, met with one of the Education ministers in Zimbabwe, to offer help to the schools in Zimbabwe. They received great support from the government and will be working to improve conditions in some of the schools. Success is not measured in what you gain, success is measured by the first step. Prison to Homelessness to Zimbabwe. James will not stop with Zimbabwe. As James' former Lieutenant Colonel said, "when a marine is given a mission, they don't stop until it's completed."

James is not going to stop being of service. He is an inspirational speaker, and has collaborated in the authoring of a book, and has also written his own book: "Courage in the Face of Cruelty: My Twenty-Eight Year Journey Through The California Prison System."

THE FINAL BELL

Prez Dan thanked James for an interesting and inspiring presentation. With that, **Dan** struck the Roto-bell at 1:15 pm sharp!

AFTER THE FINAL BELL

[An amazing thing happened this week. By Tuesday evening, your **-Ed** having not received any scribe notes began to panic and started calling around only to discover that notes had not been taken due to a minor mix up on who was responsible. By the way, writing the scribe notes is the hardest part of publishing the AppleKnocker so it is kind of a big deal. The response from many of the club members was terrific and by Wednesday evening a full and complete set of scribe notes was delivered and ready for editing. It is hard to not love this club and the members **-Ed.**]

FUTURE PROGRAMS



June 18, 2021 – The Three Biggest Issues Facing Sebastopol – Diana Rich

Sebastopol Rotarian and Sebastopol City Council member Diana Rich will share her insights on the three biggest issues facing Sebastopol today. Don't miss this chance to get an insider's view of our home town.



J E O P A R D Y !

The Debunking of Dan Rasmus
June 25, 2021 • Russian River Vineyards