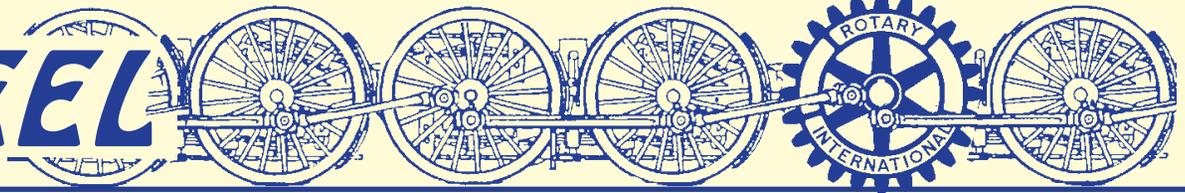


The BIG WHEEL



Rotary Club of Novato

Chartered April 26, 1954

The Golden Nugget of the North Bay

In The Valley of Gentle Seasons



December 12, 2025
Vol. 77, No. 22
Editor:
The Winner

Call To Order

At 12:15 pm, the bell rang out and slowly but surely, the crowd settled down. New member **Gary Lam** led us in the Pledge of Allegiance, and a recitation of the Four-Way Test. From the holiday classics, **Patty Dougherty** had two quotes. “All you can take with you is that which you have given away” from *It’s a Wonderful Life* and “It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humor!”, from *A Christmas Carol* by **Charles Dickens**.

Visitors and Guests

Visiting Rotarians included from the Rotary Club of Ignacio, **Barbie Hernandez**; from the Rotary Club of Mission San Rafael, **Melissa Prandi** and from the Rotary Club of Belmont and Redwood Shores, AG **Adele Della Santina**. **Russ Ketron** hosted two guests **John Walter** and **Emily Wilson**; **Linda Westerheide** was the guest of husband **Jorg**; **Laura Joss** brought along **Charlie Strickferden**; **Jim Spilman** brought as his guest, his beloved wife, **Diane**; **Michelle Whiteside** came along with **Ross Millerick**, and **Kathy Botko** accompanied husband **Jim**.

Community Care

We welcomed **Debbie Brusatori** back, who has mostly recovered from a very mean bump on the head. So good to see her! **Reggie** reminded members that **Jean Brown**

could use friendly cards, calls and texts to cheer her up. Then **Reggie** turned the mike over to **Capt. Sasha D’Amico** for a great report on former member **Mike Howard**. He is home from the hospital and though it may be six months to a year, he is expected to make a full recovery. Lots of the credit goes to **Mike’s** wife **Linda**, who is a former emergency dispatcher. She knew the signs of a stroke and got him emergency assistance immediately!

Announcements

Helpers and Heros

Sasha D’Amico thanked club members for their generous donation to the annual Helpers and Heroes event at which local police personnel helped 61 children buy gifts at Target for siblings and parents. **Sasha’s** favorite gift was the one that one young fellow got for his mom - a Crockpot!

2026 Super Bowl Board

Chris DeGabriele once again extolled members to purchase - \$20/square – squares in the Super Bowl Pool. **Reggie** filled in her 13, so squares are going fast!

Specs and Foreign Currency

Russ Ketron is collecting used eyeglasses to be distributed via a Rotarian in Baltimore to those in need in Mexico. He will continue to collect any foreign currency you might have lying around your house following your world-wide travels. The money will be sorted and given to the appropriate country reps for polio during the international District governor’s training in FL in January.

Novato Speakers Series

Gary Bramon suggested that a wonderful holiday gift would be a ticket – or a season ticket – to the Novato Speakers Series! Next speaker is on January 26, 7 pm at this very Jonas Center.

Holiday Brunch

President Lynn reminded all about the Holiday Brunch on Sunday, December 21, 2025, at the Marin Country Club. Flyers on the tables. RSVP to **Marsha Molloy** at mjmolloy@pacbell.net or 415-328-7745. Make checks out to Rotary Club of Novato.

New Signage

President Lynn also thanked **Phil** for the new Sandwich Boards extolling the benefits of Rotary.

U.N. 80th Anniversary

Mike Morrissey gave us a quick update on the 80th Anniversary Celebration of the United Nations, saying it was one of the best of these types of events he had ever attended. Several of our members were there. Rotary was there in San Francisco at the chartering of the U.N., and they were there in force on this 80th Anniversary. **Mike** and **Evan Blacksea** will also give us an update soon on their trip to Togo, the West African, not South Pacific, country!

RCN Board Nominations

The second Meeting in December is traditionally our official Annual Meeting and thus, the meeting at which nominees for the President-Elect Nominee (2027-28) and the Executive Board for next Rotary year are presented to the club. **President Lynn** asked for nominations from the floor and hearing none, asked **Larry Harrison** to announce that, after a couple of meetings, the Past Presidents recommended **Rene Prado** as the President-Elect Nominee. He will also serve as the Vice-President for 2026-27. To fill out the 2026-27 slate, **Peter Pelavin** will serve as President, **Marissa Remak** will continue in her role as Club Secretary and **Chris DeGabriele** will serve as Club Treasurer. Past President **Peter Oser** moved, and **Jim Spilman** seconded, that this slate be accepted by acclamation. And so, it was.

The BIG WHEEL

P.O. Box 657
Novato, CA 94948

The Four-Way Test

"Of the things we think, say or do:

1. Is it the TRUTH?
2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?"

Rotary Big Wheel Sponsor

Limited Sponsor Opportunity!

Show your support of the RCN and target people that share your commitment to supporting Rotary.

Limit of two sponsors!

Size: 1/4 column

Frequency of publication: 3x or 4x per month

Distribution: Over 130 like minded recipients

Open Rate: 68%

Cost \$600 per year, \$15 per issue (Prev. 3yr avg.)

Contact Bill Vespa: zip@sonic.net

Christian Thwaites

Driving Ukraine

Thurs., January 26, 2026

7 pm to 8:30 pm

Christian has volunteered to deliver front line vehicles to Ukrainian military and aid organizations the last two years.

In his talk, Christian will share his volunteer mission insights, life in Ukraine, personal stories about the Ukrainians and volunteers he met, Ukraine's resilience amid war scenarios, and thoughts about Russia/Ukraine economy and their journey towards peace.

Tickets: Adults \$30 • Students \$15

www.novatospeakerseries.com



Upcoming Programs & Events

December

- Dec. 19 **Unwrapping AI: The Gift That Keeps on Learning**
- Dec. 21 **Holiday Brunch** - Marin Country Club
- Dec. 26 **No Meeting**

January

- Jan. 2 **No Meeting**
- Jan. 9 **Novato Rotary Endowment Presentation**
- Jan. 16 **Club Assembly**
- Jan. 22 **Novato Speaker Series** - Christian Thwaites
- Jan. 23 **Club Social** - Music at the Harness' home.
- Jan. 30 **Mental Health & Rotary**

ITALIAN SUPPER & MUSIC

THE ROTARY CLUB OF NOVATO PRESENTS

A DINNER YOU CAN'T REFUSE

Bill & Adele Jonas Center • 1800 Ignacio Blvd., Novato

Saturday, February 7, 2026

5:30-6:30 Purchase Signature Cocktails
6:30 Dinner

Auctions through the Evening
Cocktail Attire Encouraged!

Silent Auction **Live Auctions**

Live Entertainment,
Music & Dancing
Featuring
"Frank Sinatra"!

Event tickets are \$100
subject to availability,
purchase before Jan. 30, 2026

NO Tickets at the Door!

Rotary
Club of Novato

THE NOVATO ROTARY ENDOWMENT IS A 501(C)(3)
ALL PROCEEDS SUPPORT COMMUNITY,
YOUTH, ENVIRONMENTAL, VOCATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS.

ROTARY CLUB OF NOVATO 2025/2026 OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Lynn Dawson
President

Peter Pelavin
Vice President

Marisa Remak
Secretary

Chris DeGabriele
Treasurer

Francesco Arezzo
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Mitone Griffiths
District Governor

Judy Johnson
*Assistant
District Governor*

DIRECTORS

John Reuscher
Logistics & Facilities

Phil Dougherty
Public Image & Awareness

Marcus Combs
Community Service

Gloria Dunn-Violin & Randy Baker
*Environmental Sustainability
(NR-CAT)*

Holly Axtell
International Service

Jorg Puhrr-Westerheide
The Rotary Foundation (TRF)

Ross Millerick
Youth Service

Patty Dougherty & Sonia Seeman
Membership

Sonia Seeman
Jonas Center Liaison

Peter Oser
President, Nova-Ro Corp.

Brad Williams
Chair, Novato Rotary Endowment

Tom Rickey
Past President

Featured Rotarian

Our Foundation Chair **Jorg Puhr-Westerheide** was the featured Rotarian of the day. He was born in Munich, Germany, but during the war the family moved south. After his father returned from a POW camp in Ukraine, they moved to Mannheim. He got a degree in mechanical engineering at a school south of Frankfurt. He married and had two daughters, **Sandra**, who currently lives in Larchmont, NY and **Yvonne** who resides in Vienna, Austria. He had a series of jobs in Germany - working in metals, cooling systems for jet engines, fully automated circuit breakers – and then met the love of his life – **Linda**. They have been married 31 years. **Jorg** has led an active life, playing tennis, learning to fall in judo, rock climbing, horseback riding, hiking, but his favorite is skiing. He skis wherever he can find snow. His Rotary moment was his first trip to Guatemala with H2open Doors, bringing clean water to a village.

Speaker

Program Chair **Sasha D’Amico** introduced our two speakers Marin native **Melissa Prandi** who is President and CEO of Prandi Property Management. Her belief in giving back globally and locally guides her life. She is a devoted Rotarian and loves growing membership. She has personally sponsored 40 new members into her Club. She is the proud mom to son **Matt** and **Jaw-Jaw** (Grandma in Ugandan) to a 2 ½ year-old grandson. In 2021 she traveled with H2open Doors to Uganda, an experience that profoundly shaped her worldview and deepened her commitment to service. Shortly afterwards the Melissa Prandi Children’s Foundation, a 501(c)(3) NGO, was born.

Barbie Hernandez belongs to the Rotary Club of Ignacio and is the Director of Finance for the Melissa Prandi Children’s Foundation. She is an insurance broker and works with our member **Peter Oser**. She is also a Rotoplast Board member.

Together the two women present a joyful program on the good works and stellar accomplishments of the

Foundation in Uganda. They have created baby homes, not orphanages where babies are dumped off, cared for in the hopes that parents will return to re-establish ties. These children are usually the result of rape or incest which is not a stellar start for them.

They also take in moms to give them hope and support, as well as access to vocational training. To date, they have distributed over 24K hygiene kits.

Patterned after the Garden of Eatin’ the North Bay Children’s Center, the foundation has established eight gardens in Uganda to instruct participants in planting and harvesting nutritious fruits and vegetables. They have helped to install power, bathrooms and clean water in needy villages as well as developing a sewing center where participants learn sewing and tailoring skills.

Assisted by our own **Holly** and **Keith Axtell**, they have developed a micro-loan program and are proud to say all the loaned money has been repaid.

They are planning to make available for teenage boys, Respect and Responsibility kits, as well as hygiene kits to include toothbrushes, toothpaste and floss. They hope to expand their hygiene kit program for children to Ghana.

The program has 182 children in boarding school and **Melissa** was proud to announce that the very first child that she sponsored now has her master’s degree.

Melissa thanked Rotary for the very best thing she has ever done!

Holiday Wishes from Nepal

President Lynn read a note of holiday good wishes from our club project in Nepal

Raffle

The 25er was won by **Kerry Bacho**. A little help for that holiday shopping list

DECEMBER

SPECIAL DATES

- 12-1 Michelle Ghirardo
- 12-2 Pat Eklund
- 12-3 Kathie Williams
- 12-5 Jim Spilman
- 12-7 Joanna Frazier
- 12-9 Diane & Jim Spilman
- 12-11 Linda Scott
- 12-12 Toni Bramon
- 12-13 Delyn Kies
- 12-15 Gary Bramon
- 12-19 Tom Bales
- 12-20 Mike Remak
- 12-25 Chris DeGabriele
- 12-27 Maggie Shao
- 12-28 Chris Siefkas
- 12-30 Michele Vespa



Gary Lam led us in the pledge.



Featured Rotarian Jorg with his wife, Linda.



Mike Morrissey reported on the U.N. 80th Anniversary Celebration.



Nominations for RCN Board positions. From the left: President Elect 2027-28, Rene Prado; President Elect 2026-27, Peter Pelavin; Secretary 2026-27, Marisa Remak; Treasurer 2026-27, Chris DeGabriele.



Our Speakers, Melissa Prandi and Barbie Hernandez from the Melissa Prandi Foundation.

Homeward Bound Gift Wrapping

December 15, 2025



Rotary Club of Novato's Community Service Director Jim Spilman encouraged our Rotary members to sign up and express our hearts and hands to show caring to others during the holiday season by wrapping gifts for 450 Adults. With the extraordinary planning & preparation, in a Catered Cookie and Coffee send off, with instructions by Andrea Rey Coordinator Of Volunteers at Homeward Bound of Marin. Sonia Seeman has been on the Board of Directors for 22 years. We joined a room full of tables, scissors, tape, labels and boxes lined the walls showing gift destinations. It was an all day production of efficiency and kindness.

Penny