



THE ROTARY CLUB
of *La Jolla*

News Bulletin

November 6, 2025

Celebrating Decades of Impact

"Together we Unite for Good"

Coming next Tuesday, December 2,

Mitzi Merino

**San Diego School Supt of Area C
encompassing La Jolla, Mission Bay,
University City and Point Loma schools,
K-8**



Mitzi Merino graduated from San Diego Unified School District which is the same public school system she now helps lead as an Area Superintendent. After graduating from San Diego public schools, Ms. Merino went on to earn a **bachelor's degree** from **UCLA**, a teaching credential from **UCSD**, and a **master's degree in educational leadership** from **San Diego State University**.

The school communities Ms. Merino oversees as an Area Superintendent stretch from the San Diego coast and inland to the city's eastern edge. They include the diverse communities of La Jolla, Imec, San Diego, and Madison clusters.

As an Area Superintendent, Ms. Merino is equity driven and focused on designing professional learning for school leaders, developing systems and structures for monitoring student learning and supporting principals through job embedded coaching and feedback. She puts support for student learning at the heart of her work, and that commitment has paid off with national awards for excellence going to many schools in her service area. To help expand this success, Ms. Merino spends much of her time in schools, working closely with individual school leaders to ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

Her background as a member of the community has also enabled Ms. Merino to play a key role in bridging neighborhood needs with support and services available from the school district. Ms. Merino began her career with San Diego Unified as a teacher, serving as an elementary school principal for 10 years before being promoted to an Area Superintendent in 2008.



High Lights from last Week's Meeting:



President Russell King opened our meeting promptly at 12:30 PM



Past President **Charles Dick** offered the day's Inspiration saying, " In the past, we have had members who were from nearly every local denomination in La Jolla, naming Bob Pratt, (a Baptist Minister) and Past Presidents Bob Fehlman (LJ Methodist) and Claire Berry (Torrey Pines Christian), Bishop Bob Wolterstorff and Past District Governor Ben Laverne (St. James Episcopal), as well as Rim Madden of the American Bible Society

"When Bob Pratt offered his Inspiration, he would say is "Let us bow our hearts," and then Chuck added, "to give thanks for all the bounty of this life that enables us to give back through our service to others".

We then stood as Chuck led us in the pledge of allegiance.



Guests

Randy Large La Jolla Sunrise Rotary
Gordon Shurtluff Torrey Pines Rotary
Laura Applegate
Francis Sanchez
Robert Elpers, Louisville, Kentuck

Club Announcements

We will serve our annual **Holiday Poinsettia luncheon** at the **League House, 7465 Olivetas**, on December 4th. **Penny Shurtleff** will be in charge. If you can help, please contact her. plssunrise@sbcglobal.net



Randy Large from **La Jolla Sunrise** advised us that **Freedom Park at Navy Pier** has reserved the First Section of the Park for our **Rotary District 5340 Legacy Monument**. Currently 64 bricks are reserved for each club, and an additional 45 bricks for individual Rotarians to purchase. The individuals' bricks are first-come, first-serve.

Contact Randy for more information.

Get Ready, Our Holiday Party will be held at the La Valencia on December 16th, beginning at 5:30 PM.



A Message of Gratitude



Flynn Dartland a **Florence Riford Scholar** and recent graduate of **Berkeley** came to our club to express his gratitude for receiving the scholarship for four years. His chosen field is **Molecular Biology**, (he also was President of the **Berkeley Surf Club**) and yes, he has a job in San Diego in his field of endeavor.

The Dewhurst Award

To a standing ovation, this year Vince Glorioso awarded the esteemed Dewhurst Award for more than 10 years of outstanding service to our community to Cynthia Goodman.





Cindy was happily joined by her Dewhurst brethren for picture taking



Our Speaker Last Week, Charles Hartford



Charles leads and likely always has led a more than full life. He is a graduate of **West Point**, a career military man who has done service in both Iraq and Afghanistan as ground-assault commander on the **Joint Special Operations Task Force**. Currently, as a civilian he is also an outstanding athlete, having just completed his first **ultra-Marathon**. He is also a successful entrepreneur in Wealth Planning, a 15-year Rotarian member of our club as well as past

President. He joined our club when Bill Burch was President. Importantly he is also a husband of 27 years and the proud father of 4.

In talking to us, he began by telling us of parallels he has found between serving in the military and serving our community as a Rotarian.

He also told us of his 4 children, **William**, an aspiring professional golfer, and with his wife Bayla who is expecting their first child in March of 2026.

Kate, a recent **ROTC graduate** of the University of Oklahoma, an Army Second Lieutenant, and on her way to the **Army's Flight School** to become an attack helicopter pilot.

John, a junior at **West Point** and a starter on the men's rugby team.

George, a high school senior, and long-distance runner who plans to attend the University of California beginning next year.

Charles then segued into three of his many days of service in Iraq, when he commanded a special operation task force to rescue a **POW 19-year-old, supply clerk, Private 1st class Jessica Lynch**.

A Military mission to Remember

On March 23rd, 2003, **Lynch** had been taken by Iraqi forces when her convoy had been ambushed in Nasiriyah, a stronghold of Iraqi Forces. She had suffered several serious injuries during the attack: a broken back, a broken arm, a crushed foot and nerve damage to her left leg. The Iraqi's took her and held her captive at the **Saddam General Hospital in Nasiriyah**.

An Iraqi interpreter learning of her existence and mistreatment by the Iraqi forces walked to an Army checkpoint 6 miles away to tell them of her captivity and location. A decision was made, to rescue her, which meant invading Nasiriyah. In all, 1200 US military participated in her rescue.

Lt Col Charles Hartford, an airborne Ranger Infantry officer, planned and led the Special Operations task Force.

On March 29th, he flew into Southern Iraq from Saudi Arabia, where he was doing combat missions on the Iraqi border, on an advance team to start getting things ready for the rest of the unit to come forward. He did a daylight reconnaissance to better figure out the best routes to get in to get Lynch.

They found a route on the east side of the city, down the main street, and tailored this organization of more than 1,200 people — an air component,

his ground component, special operators from all services and a unique convoy of vehicles. The only information he had on Private Lynch, was her last location, her blood type, B+, that she was injured and was facing imminent amputation of a leg. They also were told 50 – 75 enemies were occupying the hospital as a headquarters of some sort before they got there.

In the dead of night, April 1, at 1:35 a.m. they made entry into Nasiriyah. They cut the power to the entire city. Charles was part of the team. He was in an armored Humvee a few vehicles behind a tank, which had to get burning vehicles and other things out of the way. This was all before the word IED was even commonplace. There was a lot of fire — actual fire and gunfire.

His vehicle took direct fire as they entered the compound. It hit the window next to my head. Fortunately, it had an armor plate, so it didn't penetrate. But the Humvee was wide open in the back, and He had a radio operator from Minneapolis. He was standing, trying to keep communications open with our commander, and Charles yelled at him to get down.

The driver of his vehicle was a member of a very special Navy team. He was a little nervous and stalled my vehicle three times, and I remember just having a matter-of-fact sense of peace. I remember putting my hand on his shoulder and saying, 'It's going to be OK, just turn the vehicle back on.

Then his turned into the hospital compound and had about 30 minutes of a good firefight as we surrounded the compound. The rangers did their clearing of individual rooms, including the morgue, and there was a team that landed on the roof, and they cleared from top down, knowing that was her last location. The enemy had cleared out, so there was no resistance inside the hospital. From the time they penetrated that hospital to the time Jessica Lynch was in his battalion surgeon's hands was less than 36 minutes.

After Jessica was helicoptered to safety, having learned there were also dead Americans who had been buried there, a recovery team of Army Rangers and Navy Seals although lacking shovels, dug up the graves with their bare hands. 11 bodies were recovered, 2 from the morgue and 9 from shallow graves in a soccer field. This was done for the express purpose of

allowing their families to bury them in the US and have a sense of peace and closure. During all this Charles emphasized to us the decision to save Jessica was done because **and only** because she was an American.

Her rescue was the first successful rescue of a U.S. POW since the end of WWII. She remembers little of her capture and rescue.



Coming In two Weeks,

20 Years of Saving Lives, San Diego Project Heartbeat,

Karen McElliott and Maureen O'Connor

Editor and Reporter: Denise McGuire

