



ROTARY CLUB of La Jolla

News Bulletin

01.07.25

Coming on Tuesday, January 14th.
Our Club Assembly



Under the direction of our new President-elect, **Russell King**, members will explore the past, present, and future of our wonderful club. Your good ideas and participation will be key to the future success and further enjoyment of our club. Please come!

Please RSVP to Natasha Vossen's email re: our next luncheon on January 14th, 2025, nataschavossen@san.rr.com

Hi-Lites from last week's meeting.



The meeting was called to order by **President-elect, Russell King** at 12:30 p.m. Russell was filling in for **President Bob Teaff**, who was unable to attend today.

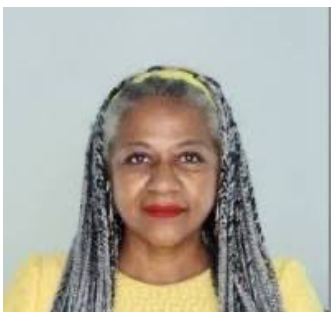
Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance



Leanne MacDougall led us in the pledge of allegiance and gifted us with a poignant reflection from our recently deceased, 39th President, **Jimmy Carter**:

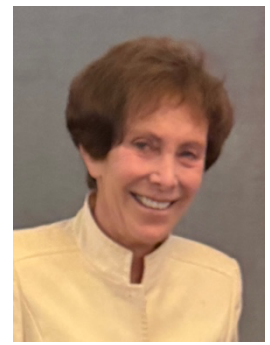
"We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams."

Guests of Rotarians



Roberta Camarena introduced **Anu Delouri**, a fellow UCSD employee, visiting our club. Coincidentally, both Roberta and Anu worked with **Russell King** during his time at UCSD. They obviously enjoyed the time spent working together.

Cindy Goodman introduced **Dave Schwab**, an accomplished journalist who previously worked for the La Jolla Light and now works for the La Jolla Village News and **offered \$50.in Happy Bucks**



Announcements



Penny Shurtleff thanked all the club members whose participation in recent League House activities greatly enriched the lives of our League House seniors. See the Dec 19th **La Jolla Light** for more details and pictures.

Penny also requested that club members step forward and volunteer for the honor of giving the Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation (or Reflection) at upcoming meetings. Think of your favorite quote, a thought, or a prayer and give Penny a call, text, or email.

Russell King is looking for a club member to host our monthly social event to be held on January 28th. We should also think of a future venue (like the YMCA firehouse, the “Living Room”. Etc.,) for a future social get-together.

Russell also offered help to any member who might have difficulty signing into our Rotary Club of La Jolla website. **Chuck Marsh**, our talented webmaster, is always ready and able to help any club member who might be floundering.

Guests



Mr. Chad Dye (pictured with Russell King) introduced himself and let us know he was looking for ways to pay back the La Jolla community for the exceptional life he enjoys in our fair town. Membership in our club may be an excellent way to accomplish his goal!

Happy Bucks \$\$\$



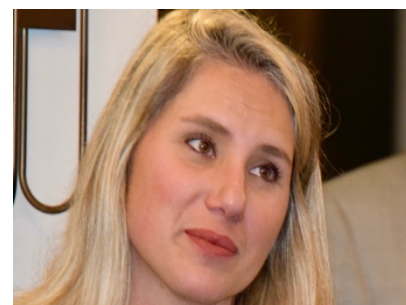
Orrin Gabsch offered **\$50.00** in recognition of the time and effort given by **Davis Cracraft** for his excellent, Writing, Direction, Production and Costuming of the **Barbara Brown Demotion Play**. The Demotion/Holiday Party was great fun!

Bill Burch gave **\$30** for his “backward sailing” misadventure. We hope to hear more of Bill’s dubious feat in the near future.¹



Pat Stouffer offered **\$80** in recognition of a recent celebratory event he claimed was unrelated to his turning 80 last week. “You can fool some of the people some of the time.”

Talyssa D’avila gave thanks and **\$20.00** in tribute to a recent well-needed relaxing trip to Kauai. Aloha!



Barbara Gerber happily donated **\$100** dollars to our club following a delightful family visit which included her granddaughter’s acceptance at multiple colleges. Her granddaughter is still waiting to hear from her first-choice college. Should her granddaughter be accepted, Barbara will undoubtedly add significantly to her generous club donation.

¹ It is amazing that he would publicly admit to such a dubious achievement

Bob Pecora offered Happy Bucks and celebrated visiting his 99-year-old mother and other relatives back east.



Last Week's speakers

Neil Senturia and Barbara Bry, authors of



I Did It: The Largest Woman-Run Ponzi Scheme in American History

Gina Champion-Cain

Bill Burch introduced today's speakers – **Neil Senturia** and **Barbara Bry**, a husband-and-wife team, who collaborated with Gina Champion-Cain to write their book.

Leading a life filled with diverse interests and accomplishments, **Neil Senturia** is without question a man blessed with many talents. His many endeavors range from writing sitcoms to becoming CEO of six technology companies.

Neil has taught new venture creation in the MBA program at SDSU and sits on the Board of Directors of SDSU's Entrepreneurial Management Center. Currently he is the CEO of Blackbird Ventures, an investor in high growth potential companies, and he serves on the board of directors of several other organizations.

Barbara Bry is well known to the San Diego community having served on the San Diego City Council from 2016-2020. She unsuccessfully ran for San Diego mayor in the 2020 election. She is a successful business entrepreneur herself, having worked for a venture capital group and founded Athena San Diego, an organization for women in the tech and life sciences community. She and Neil have also found time to raise two daughters.



The story of Gina Champion-Cain as told to us by Neil and Barbara is a fascinating tale of greed and power. The story is based on their extensive research, including court hearings and other documents, and frequent conversations with Gina before and during her current 15-year prison term.

Gina Champion-Cain, born was in 1965. She was well educated earning both an MBA as well as a Juris Doctorate from California Western. As a businesswoman she was both a successful entrepreneur and real estate magnate. After decades in real estate development, she purchased the Lamont Street Grill property in 2012 for \$1.4 million and reopened the restaurant as "The Patio". Gina oversaw an extensive restaurant remodel which eventually led to financial difficulties for her. During the purchase process She learned a great deal about the high value of

liquor licenses and the steps needed to acquire a license. She learned that the often-high-priced licenses were frequently financed by third parties with interest paid when the license was obtained. An investor would make short-term high interest loans to parties seeking to obtain California liquor licenses.



Over the next **seven** years, Gina was able to convince **290 individuals** to invest over \$400 million dollars in her scheme, which never bought even one license. She was wise enough to use the names of fictitious bars, nonexistent license numbers as well as restaurants outside of San Diego. For **seven years** her investors never questioned her investment scheme.

Gina's word, solid local reputation, community involvement, and charismatic personality were good enough for individuals to invest huge sums of money and occasionally their entire life savings. No liquor licenses were ever purchased. Gina paid herself a 2-million-dollar yearly salary and was able to purchase 10 restaurants, several other properties, as well as many luxury items; her lifestyle and power were all greatly enhanced via her scheme.

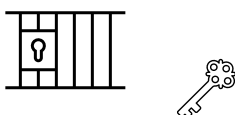
One key element in her success was the fact that a venerable and trusted company, **Chicago Title**, held all the funds in escrow. However, two women who worked for the title company were part of the scheme, and they allowed Gina to withdraw funds as needed. Of course, some of the investors received compensation including interest; j but just enough money to keep the Ponzi scheme going. Even her company's name, **American National Investments (AMI)** added to the legitimacy of her business dealings. Her continued involvement in many community organizations like Center City Development and the fact that her new ventures created upward of 800 jobs in San Diego, led the mayor to declare June 28th as "**Gina Champion-Cain Day**". According to Neil, Gina was not so much interested in money, but she greatly enjoyed the prestige and power that her elevated community status afforded her. It is reported she was preparing to run for mayor.

Eventually in 2019 a prospective \$50 million investor decided to closely scrutinize her business and discovered that the liquor licenses she listed as available had never existed. Gina Champion – Cain’s Ponzi scheme fell apart.

With 290 victims of her fraud, she would be charged with hundreds of counts of theft and fraud. Early on she wisely pleaded guilty to three and was sentenced to prison for 15 years. Chicago Title was forced to pay \$130 million, her restaurants and other businesses were mostly liquidated, and Gina went to Dublin Federal Woman’s Prison in northern California.

While at Dublin Prison she and other prisoners were reportedly sexually assaulted by several guards, which turned out to be a far too common experience at the facility. Gina and the women with the assistance of multiple experienced attorneys subsequently brought a 116-million-dollar lawsuit against the prison on behalf of the abused inmates and won.

In addition to the monetary compensation provided to the 100 abused women, the warden and two guards went to prison. Dublin Prison was eventually shut down. Gina is now serving time in a prison in Illinois and hoping for a compassionate release from her remaining sentence. She has also petitioned President Biden for a full pardon.



Russell King thanked Neil and Barbara for their fascinating presentation The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 pm.

Coming In Two Weeks, Joe Caviola, Vice Principal LJHS and Interact

Chief Reporter and Editor – Davis Cracroft

Copy Editor- Denise McGuire

