



Rotary Connection

Mentors, Shows and a Call from EdConnect

Club Meeting Highlights • Wednesday 9 September 2026

Acting President Jim Dillon was again in the chair at the Geraldton Golf Club at 7.00 am. Ian Taylor gave the invocation and the toast to Australia. Guests were Leni Tenwinkel and Leonie Forrest of EdConnect, who spoke about placing trained volunteers in Midwest schools. Next Wednesday Leni herself takes the microphone as guest speaker.

Meeting at a Glance

- Jim Dillon in the chair; Sergeant Bob Urquhart; invocation and toast by Ian Taylor.
- Guests: Leni Tenwinkel and Leonie Forrest, EdConnect Australia.
- Apologies: President Bob Hall and Di Gilleland. Don Rolston and Russell McKinnon back in the room.
- Grant spoke with Bob Hall in Scotland — travelling well with Maeve, home at the end of the month.
- Leni: tennis at Mount Tarcoola, teaching German at school, Chapman Valley Show, then Northampton.
- Leonie Forrest on EdConnect: 170 WA schools, 700 volunteers, four Geraldton campuses and a shortage of male mentors.
- Coming up: Leni as guest speaker, Wednesday 16 September.

Opening the Morning

With two tables set, Jim sent the top table to breakfast first. Ian offered the invocation — a blessing on the food, the fellowship and the call to service — and led the toast to Australia.

Hugh introduced Leni, inbound exchange student from Norden in Germany, and Leonie Forrest, area manager for EdConnect. Hugh had been at EdConnect's trauma-informed workshop the day before and called it one of the best training sessions he had sat through — less a catalogue of trauma than a set of ways of working with younger people that apply to all of us.

From Scotland, and the Diary

Grant had spoken with President Bob Hall the night before. Bob is missing Rotary, cannot change his plans, and will be back at the end of the month. He and Maeve are still in Scotland and travelling well.

The three dates that keep coming around: the Gold Polio dinner on Friday 23 October at Royal Perth Golf Club, keynote Professor Barry Marshall; the club Christmas function on Saturday 12 December at Tarts & Co.; and Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, open now for applicants aged 18 to 28. Applications close on 30 November. Inquiries to Grant, or to ryla@rotarywa.au.

Polio dinner bookings: trybooking.com/DPIZB

Radio Auction — a month to lift the pledges

Bob Symington reminded the room that advertising copy for the Radio Auction cuts off about three weeks before the event. That leaves roughly a month to gather pledges. Last year's givers have already had the email and the follow-up call. What is missing are the new businesses that have opened in the past twelve months and may never have seen a pledge form.

The auction remains the club's major fundraiser for the year and the book is a little down on last year. Bob has spare pledge forms and the covering letter; he can email them or bring a paper copy. Members who know a new shopfront should take a form, or pass the name on.

Northampton on Saturday — and Landor after that

Parking marshals are wanted from 8.00 am to 2.30 pm on Saturday 12 September at Northampton Showgrounds. Seven names are on the list and Barry Dring added himself this morning; Peter Sukiennik may yet find one or two more. Hugh will send a note on where to meet — most likely the showgrounds entrance — and asked people to bring a camping chair and a yellow vest if they have one. The club has vests for those who do not.

Karina Thomason, mother of outgoing exchange student Lara Day, plans to bring Leni and Lara up for the show while the club parks cars.

Jim also flagged Landor Races at the beginning of next month. Peter Sukiennik is still looking for help. Register early for ordinary Wednesday meetings as well: late acceptances make it hard to brief the caterers once the club is over the fifteen breakfasts already paid for.

Leni: Tennis, German Class and Two Country Shows

Grant introduced Leni — no further introduction needed, he said, except that the table had already decided her English is better than ours.

Tennis lessons have continued at the Mount Tarcoola courts: forehand, backhand, and a lot of fun. School is busy. She has an English presentation to give, and for a class project she is teaching her classmates a little German — hello, how are you, the useful first phrases rather than the numbers.

Last weekend she went to the Chapman Valley Show. It was cold and very full, which she did not love, but the food made up for it, especially a large spring roll. Next weekend she is at the Northampton Show. And next Wednesday morning she is the club's guest speaker.



Leonie Forrest — EdConnect and the Power of Turning Up

Incoming president Clare McElhinney introduced Leonie Forrest, EdConnect's area manager for the North East Metropolitan, Midwest and Pilbara.

Leonie grew up in Geraldton in the 1970s and does not dress the story up. Home was not safe. She attended four different primary schools and then John Willcock High School — now Champion Bay — in the mid to late 1980s, a restless time at that campus, and still keeps school friends from those years. She left town at 18, travelled, worked in Broome (bars, cleaning, the Chapman Bay veterinary clinic; she had wanted to be a vet until mathematics and science said otherwise), then spent about ten years in Perth in IT sales and marketing when networking still meant cables and Ethernet cards.

Fate, as she put it, sent her back. She married a Geraldton boy — Kevin and Marilyn Forest of Moresby are her in-laws — has two children, taught for about fifteen years, ran a small business, and in time found EdConnect, a charity that has been in Western Australia for some thirty years. It began as the School Volunteer Program. It now places volunteers in about 170 WA schools; some 700 people give their time.

The Midwest push is only about a year old. After a plea to her boss and a word from local principals, EdConnect started at Waggrakine Primary and now also works at Geraldton Senior High School, Geraldton Grammar School and Rangeway Primary. Ten volunteers cover the four campuses. At Waggrakine alone, four people give about 22 hours a week — community value in the order of \$38,000 a year. More to the point, Leonie said, they love it, and the children they mentor come to school more often. In a region where attendance is a running problem, that is not a small claim.



Two roles, one habit: consistency

Learning-support volunteers help with reading, numeracy, one-to-one intervention or the classroom teacher — an hour a week is the ask. Mentors are asked for at least four terms. They are matched to a particular student. The school sees a volunteer's short biography and says, we have just the child. The work is social and emotional rather than curriculum-aligned. That is the difference Leonie drew with education assistants: EAs are paid, assigned, and working to a lesson goal. Mentors hang out. They play. They listen. They turn up.

On her Friday off Leonie mentors two girls at a Perth high school. Their home lives are chaotic — she prefers that word to the overused "trauma." She is not a psychologist. She plays Uno. She is recruiting a colleague who can knit. What she can offer is the same hour, every week. One of the girls has sent the school counsellor away and kept Leonie, on the grounds that she is "cool." Consistency of relationship, Leonie said, is what shifts attendance and behaviour.

Volunteers must be 18 or over. There is no upper limit: EdConnect's oldest current volunteer in Perth is 91 and sits with children while they read. Recruits are screened and trained. If a child discloses something at home, the volunteer takes it to the school coordinator — usually a deputy, a chaplain or a senior teacher — because the school, not the volunteer, carries mandatory reporting. Leonie's aim is enough Geraldton volunteers to put someone on the ground here who can keep the training coming.

Questions from the floor

Barry asked whether a mentor in primary school would have made a difference to Leonie herself. She needed a moment. Yes. She and Jodie Reilley used to spend hours outside the house from the age of eight because inside was not fabulous. Her father and grandmother were a safe place; she still wanted her mother, and that was not safe. A person at school she could have spoken to would have changed the years at John Willcock. Resilience, she and Hugh agreed, is what people who have lived through that often have — and it is why she was in the room.

Grant asked how mentoring sits beside education assistants. Matching, time that is not curriculum-bound, and the simple licence to be with one child for an hour, were Leonie's answer.

Thanks — and a request

Hugh presented a certificate and a donation to Rotary's End Polio Now programme, enough for about 250 vaccinations. Photographs were taken. Leonie left brochures, her card and application forms on the table. There is a particular shortage of male mentors. The volunteer line is 1800 668 550.



Leonie Forrest with Immediate Past President Hugh Lavery and a certificate — plus a donation for about 250 Polio vaccinations.



President-elect Clare McElhinney, Leni Tenwinkel and Leonie Forrest.

More about the programme: edconnectaustralia.org.au

Coming Up

Wednesday 16 September — Leni Tenwinkel

Our inbound exchange student is next week's guest speaker. A fuller account of her year so far, in her own words.

October 2nd – October 5th — Landor Races

Peter Sukiennik is seeking volunteers. Speak to him if you can help, **0418 939 013**.and,

Register here [Landor Races | Rotary Club of Greater Geraldton](#)

Friday 23 October — End Polio dinner

Royal Perth Golf Club. Keynote Professor Barry Marshall. Dress is not denim. Members make their own arrangements.

Bookings: trybooking.com/DPIZB

30 November — RYLA applications close

Ages 18–28. 9–16 January at Serpentine. Follow up with Grant or write to ryla@rotarywa.au.

Saturday 12 December — Christmas function

Tarts & Co. Grant will keep the list. Di Gilleland, he warned, will be back sooner than anyone expects, and will remind anyone who has not written it down.

Fellowship and Fines

Barry's "On This Day" marked New Amsterdam becoming New York in 1664, the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, and Queen Elizabeth II becoming Britain's longest-serving monarch in 2005. Thought for the day: if you take a dog to school it does not make it a scholar — it makes the school a kennel.



Leni taking the fines box around — guests excepted, members less fortunate.

Heads and tails was won by Bob Symington. Sergeant Bob Urquhart then called Barry Dring, Terry Stewart, Russell McKinnon, Ian Taylor and Grant Woodhams. All were found guilty as charged. Traditional items included a late arrival (Barry's charger had tripped), Rotary badges on the way out the door, family birthdays and anniversaries.. The meeting closed at 7.58 am.

A Word of Thanks

Thank you to Jim for the chair, to Ian for the invocation, to Clare for introducing Leonie, to Hugh for the workshop report and the Polio certificate, to Leni for another clear update, and to Leonie Forrest for a talk that left a practical ask on the table: an hour a week, and the habit of turning up.

— Rotary Club of Greater Geraldton —