

COMMUNITY NETWORKER No 25/2017-8

ROTARY CLUB OF PARRAMATTA CITY Inc. DISTRICT 9675

www.parramattacityrotary.org.au

Rotary Four Way Test

The Four Way Test challenges Rotarians, in everything they do, to ask of themselves:

Of the things we 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?

Meeting 22nd January 2018

Our Toast

PDG Barry Antees proposed a toast to the Rotary Club of Atlanta which in 1994 presented a Paul Harris Award to former US President Jimmy Carter in recognition of his humanitarian work. Barry also pointed out that on 21st January 1977, a day after his inauguration, Carter issued a presidential pardon to all Vietnam War draft dodgers.

Our Guest

President Natalia welcomed Mahir Momand, 35, chief executive officer of Thrive Refugee Enterprise, a non-profit company dedicated to helping refugees settling in Australia to start their own businesses. Mahir was born in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion and when his father, a military general, was imprisoned, his grandparents took him and his siblings to Afghanistan, where Mahir grew up. He has spent time in Canada and in Afghanistan but was forced out of Afghanistan by the Taliban who were intolerant of his initiative in helping ordinary Afghans to become self-sufficient. After acquiring two Masters degrees, one at Sydney University, he has set up in Australia and dedicated himself to the welfare of people who, like him, have been displaced.



Mahir Momand with President Natalia

Honouring Our Fallen

President Natalie said Richard McCarthy OAM, director of Honour Our Fallen, had written to district governors about Rotary helping in a project to honour our deceased war veterans buried in Australia by having Australian flags placed on their graves on Anzac Day. The movement wants to conduct this project in company with local schools who will utilise the families and the local community to identify the graves.

ClubRunner database

President Natalie said our club had been asked to update our ClubRunner data base.

The Charles Perkins Centre

President Natalie said the Charles Perkins Centre at Sydney University was experimenting with a particular diet program and had asked for volunteers aged 65-75 to participate.

Digitalised Rotary Club Records

President Natalie said Bruce Allen, manager of the Rotary International office in Parramatta, which held paper records of Rotary clubs in Australia and the Pacific Islands, had decided to digitalise all the records in order to save space. Natalie said we would take paper records from them.

Call for More Paul Harris Fellows

PDG Barry said that the more Paul Harris Fellows we created, the more funds we got for the Rotary Foundation. He said anyone could be made a Paul Harris Fellow, including the deceased.

The Australia Day Barbecue

John Stamboulie said he had "eight or more" people listed to attend the Australia Day Barbecue at Parramatta Park on Friday. He needed help on Thursday, 25th January, to put the barbecue together. We would have to convene at midday and it was likely to continue till 2.30 or 3 pm.

Top Blokes Foundation

PP Phil Brophy advised that our board had discussed a draft application for funds for the Top Blokes Foundation. He had gone to Louise Skilbeck at the foundation. She had said she was not confident of getting an AMB Grant but that a grant from Parramatta Council looked more interesting and applications for that did not close till early March. Phil had chased up a final report from Parramatta High School. Louise would be coming to speak to us on 19th March, together with someone from CUA, someone from the school, and one of the students. "That is where it starts so hopefully we will get some feedback," he said.

The RYPEN Camp

PP Keith Henning said the RYPEN Camp was coming up soon. It was available for young people from years 9 to 10 at high school. It involved participating in a weekend where there would be a leadership development and enrichment program.

Bob Rosengreen

Bob, after celebrating his 80th birthday on Saturday, in a most joyous event at his home, went into the Sydney Adventist Hospital on Monday for an operation to remove a cancerous growth from his neck. At time of writing the operation has been a success. The surgeon thinks he has removed all the cancerous tissue but it was a very serious intrusion and he is now in care at the hospital dealing with the after effects. Keith Henning will email club members to report on his progress.



PP Bob with Rotarian friends

Thrive Refugee Enterprise

Mahir in his presentation described his own journey as a refugee. Though born in Afghanistan, for most of his life he had lived outside that country. In Pakistan, he had become the breadwinner for the family, selling things by day and going to refugee school at night, where the focus of the teachers was on weapons and insurgency. Even the teaching of numbers and letters in the alphabets use armaments as an illustration. These, he said, were the insurgents of tomorrow. It was not till the age of about 30 that he was able to shake off the effects of that and realise it was wrong. "It is not the whole reason we still have wars in Afghanistan but there are generations who have been trained in this mentality," he said.

After the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001, and the United States invaded Afghanistan, he started work with the UNHCR and for the World Bank Microfinance program to help people in remote areas of Afghanistan to become self-sufficient with their own enterprises. But the Taliban attacked what he was doing and he went as a refugee to Canada. Later, he decided to return to Afghanistan to resume his operation, but in "an Islamic way", to see whether it was acceptable to the Taliban. Disregarding expressions of disbelief, he did return and started work with the help of the United States, giving small loans to people to start their own businesses and grow crops like saffron. He included women in the economic fabric. "In five years, we established 165,000 small and medium enterprises and employed a million people" he said. "In a country with a population of 30 million, that was a significant success."

But the Taliban still disapproved, partly because he was taking people who would otherwise become insurgents, he was diverting agriculture from opium poppies and he was employing women who in strict Islam were not meant to work. The personal danger was so severe he had to have several bodyguards. But he could not provide bodyguards to all his 120,000 employees and 13 of these were kidnapped and murdered. In 2012, he came to Australia as a refugee. He already had an MBA but he did another one at Sydney University. Most refugees were like himself, he said, not people seeking a life on the beach, but people who had been forced from their country. He had responded to all that

by founding Thrive Refugee Enterprises which had the support of large corporations such as KPMG, Deloitte and Westpac. There were a number of prominent people as directors, including David Gonski.

“Here in Australia you need to have an ABN, you have to have proper coordination,” Mahir said. “Refugees don’t understand the whole thing. We assist them with a business plan and a marketing plan. The refugees can be lent up to \$20,000 and then \$50,000 in the next [phase] to assist them.” It bypassed the banks whose first check when someone applied for a loan was to look at their credit history and if there was no credit history, they would not get a loan. In Australia, there was a high failure rate with small businesses. In fact, eight-five percent failed within two years. “We provide support, we visit the businesses, we make sure they are on the right track and if they are not we assist in making sure they are on the right track,” he said.

Thrive was a non-profit organisation but wanted to be integrated into the economic framework of Australia. There were national benefits. “For 30 business operating successfully over three years, we save about \$3 million Centrelink benefits and the businesses would be paying \$1 million in taxes,” he said. At present, Thrive had supported 320 businesses operating in Australia, the majority in western Sydney. These included bricklaying, brick washing, Uber driving, some business such as groceries, mainly service industries, which was in line with the trend in the Australian economy anyway. Between 10 and 12 people come to Thrive each week looking for help.

Australia took in 13,755 people a year as refugees. That was only 0.48 percent of the population. “It is not massive but people say they are filtering in and taking over the country,” he said. But those who did come did have a lot of entrepreneurial spirit which could be harnessed. Taking into account that Australia’s birth rate at 1.8 per woman was not enough to sustain the present population numbers, and given the aging of Australia’s population (In 12 years one in five Australians would be over 65), that infusion of people was a positive benefit. Even now, during the construction boom in Sydney and Melbourne, it was very hard for ordinary householders to acquire the services of a tradesman. But at present, only 31.7 percent of refugees were employed. Couldn’t they be taken into the construction industry?

Mahir was concerned that refugees were living in pockets in the community and Thrive also sought to help them integrate. Refugees integrated faster if they had language skills. “If they don’t have enough skills, they learn them by running a business,” he said. There were plenty of refugees like Sir Arvi Parbo and Frank Lowy who had come to Australia with nothing and been outstandingly successful. There were local successes such as President Natalie’s hairdresser who came without a word of English and had established thriving businesses. “We want to shorten the interval between people coming to Australia and being integrated into the community,” he said. Thrive needed financial support to keep its operation going, It also needed people to mentor the new businesspeople.

PDG Barry thanked Mahir and congratulated him for his “wonderful work”. He said in the 1980s Australia had had a flood of refugees and Rotary had been active them in getting them settled. “We would like to see whether we can do it again,” he said. Barry offered his own services as a mentor.

Joke of the Week

Still on the true story line, the eastern suburbs has been all a-titter over the last few weeks about poor Oscar. Oscar was a beloved Labrador who was left in the care of a house-sitter, Susan, while his owners went overseas on a holiday. Sadly, Oscar died and Susan, most upset, rang the owners in New York. They were also upset and told Susan to ensure that Oscar was cremated so they could

have his ashes. Susan, living in Edgecliff, had to get Oscar to a veterinarian in Bondi to have it done. Having no car, she put Oscar into a suitcase and got on the train. Getting off at Bondi Junction, she had to lug this very heavy suitcase up a flight of stairs. A gentleman offered to help and walking up with it asked what was in it. Too ashamed to say it was a dead dog, she said it was full of highly valuable electronic equipment. The gentleman got to the top the stairs and then ran off, ignoring Susan's please for him to stop. Susan went to the vet, tearfully explained what had happened, and he gave her the ashes of another dog and said she could pretend they were Oscar's. She did, the owners returned and were happy. And the thief? Well, he got a suitcase. And he got Oscar.

For Your Diaries

26th January. Australia Day Barbecue

29th January. Regular club meeting. PP Malcolm to speak on "My Life in the Underworld".

14th February. Address by Noel Trevaskis at Rooty Hill on ways to improve Rotary.

16th February. District 9675 Presidents' Meeting at Toowood Lounge Sans Souci.

18th February. PETS training at Bankstown Sports Club.

19th February. Joint meeting with Parramatta Rotary Club.

2nd – 4th March District 9675 Conference at Mudgee. Registrations now open.
<https://www.trybooking.com/31182>

17th March 2018. A Peace Conference was being held at the Sydney Town Hall
Registrations
<https://arinex.eventsair.com/rippc-2018/form1/Site/Register>

18th March. New Members' Breakfast, Camden Golf Club.

8th April. PETS training at Bankstown Sports Club.