

Rotary Connects.....the World

Rotary Club of Parramatta City

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Welcome to the start of a brand new Rotary year, a year of opportunities for our club to grab and to make big changes within our local and global communities. The beauty of Rotary is that we are not bound by restrictions on what we can do and one small idea can blossom into something great, all that is needed is passion and the goal to succeed.

For example you will see within our meeting notes, PP Keith Henning volunteered to assist in delivering hot meals to International students at the University of Western Sydney campus at Parramatta, but Keith saw a greater potential to assist after spending some time with the students to find out what was their greater needs as well to identify better outcomes. Keith's call to action is on Page 5 and we aim to have at our first meeting past and current members to dropping off items.

This will be an ongoing commitment by our club until the crisis eases and students are able to support themselves. So if you want to assist Keith & Malcolm call them or email them your availability.

Our first physical meeting at Novotel took place last week and I must say the staff formed well, for me it was the first time back at having a restaurant meal for three months and I really enjoyed the meal. The spacing at the table was well laid out and there was enough spacing between each member. I will bring my binoculars next time so I can see who is sitting at the end of the table.

As mentioned at the meeting we are in need of identifying some new members in the fields of accounting and real estate, not only to bring diversity to the membership, but also to bring in the knowledge of currency in these wide ranging fields. So look among your friends or interests.

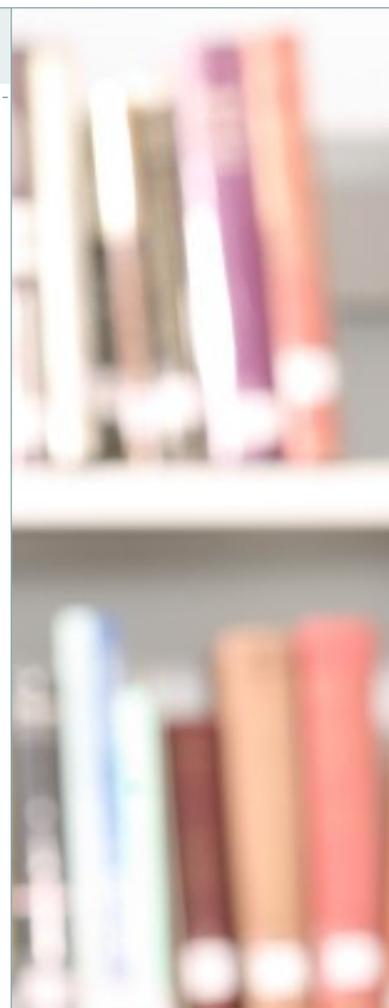
As we closed the books for this Rotary year, it was sad to receive the resignation of long term member and Past President John Totonian who is retiring his membership after 26 years. John mentions in his email that he stills wants to be involved in fund raising activities and events. Some of you may have know but John had taken on some huge responsibilities in the operational running of a Bowling Club and this along with his printing and mail house business has limited his ability to attend meetings and some functions. We wish John well and look forward to the times when he can join us.

Our next meeting at the Novotel will be 13th July and it will be the Club Changeover of Officers, a special time for reflect on the past year and to review what is happening for the next 12 months.

Have a great week

Barry Antees

President



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MEETING NOTES-MALCOLM BROWN

Cyberspace

29nd June 2020

This was an e-meeting of the club in a community still beset with the coronavirus. There were only four brave souls turning up: president, Barry Antees, PP Keith Henning, PP Malcolm Brown and our guest, Samah Shada, introduced by Barry. Samah was an applicant for a Rotary Peace Scholarship. Her application will be reviewed by Rotary International and she will know in November whether she has been successful. Samah is also an advocate for the Refugee Council of Australia.

The Parramatta Rotary Club Changeover

PP Malcolm said he had been to the changeover at Rydges Hotel in Rosehill on Saturday night. It had gone off very well and he was particularly impressed by the way the incoming president, Paula Jesse, had conducted herself. He said Paula, who is very ambitious for her club and has prepared a 51-page document on the way forward, has her head screwed on and should be fully supported by our club.

The Festival of Pangea

President Barry said the club was planning the Festival of Pangea to celebrate the centenary of the foundation of Rotary in Australia and to commemorate the United Nations which was founded as a result of an initiative taken at the Rotary International convention in Cuba in 1945.

The Food Drive

Barry said the club was embarking on a food drive to help sustain students at the University of Western Sydney who were experiencing hard times, most are international students with work and funds drying up due to the shut down. Keith Henning said the initial idea was to have the food cooked (an offer by Hunts at Liverpool) and delivered but it was now considered more efficient to deliver the canned or dry foods. Current and past Members of our club will be asked to bring specific food items, Keith will draw up a list of food/grocery items and he will organise people to drop off to the Students at the University. Parramatta Rotary Club has also been asked to assist in delivering help and the two clubs might take this on as a joint project being lead by our Keith Henning.

Samah Shada

Samah was born in Baghdad and grew up there. Her family hailed from the north of the country, bordering Turkey, and was ethnically Assyrian, a people who had been in the region for thousands of years and who could be regarded as aboriginal Iraqis. They were also a Christian people, which put them in a minority in a Muslim country, but they were able to get on with their lives and practice their religion without bother. Samah had travelled widely and displayed flags of countries which had been part of her life, including those of Syria, Turkey and the United States. She also included an Australian Aboriginal flag because she identified with their aboriginality. She now regarded Australia as her home and planned to spend the rest of her life here.

Samah said that her childhood in Baghdad in the 1990s was not without stresses. The country was suffering from international sanctions imposed on the regime of Saddam Hussein. Though her own parents had gone out of their way to make her life as normal and comfortable as possible, life was not easy for some Iraqis. Saddam ruled the country through “a culture of fear”, as some Shiites and Kurds had learned to their cost. For the ordinary Iraqi, “as long as you shut your mouth and did not criticise the regime, you were all right.” Such was the security Saddam offered at that time, that some Iraqis today reminisced about life under his dictatorship.

In 2003, when the United States again invaded the country, things changed, although the ordinary people, relying on the government-controlled media for all their information, were initially unaware of what was happening. A relative had got in touch with their parents and had advised them to leave Baghdad because things were no longer safe. Her parents had then moved the family to their ancestral village in northern Iraq, which was safe enough, though quite close to the city of Mosul, which was under attack. The people fleeing the big cities found relative safety, but they were confronted by other problems, such as closed shops and no water or electricity.

MEETING NOTES-MALCOLM BROWN

After the family had resettled in the village, the Saddam Hussein regime was overthrown. The family was able to find out what was happening from media outside the country. For the first time Samah heard an account of the Saddam regime and events affecting Iraq that differed from the accounts she had been spoon-fed through her schooldays. She had been taught that Iraq was always right that had it never lost. The situation became very difficult. One option was to get out of the country but her father feared that that would put them at the mercy of people traffickers. He did not want to put his children to that risk, so the family decided to return to Baghdad.

Arriving back in the capital, Samah saw things were different. Some buildings were burning and one particular building had been blown to bits. The schools did reopen and she went back to school. But now there was a lot more crime and armed militia and extremist groups had emerged. Being in a religious minority, the family was now afraid it might be persecuted and even if not, might be caught in cross-fire. As a result, members of the family only left home to attend to essentials, such as going to work and going to school. Samah finished her schooling in 2008 and applied for a place at Baghdad University to study interior design. She spent a year there but found that people in academic circles were being targeted because they voiced their opinions on what was happening. When a bomb went off at the university gates, killed some of her friends and injuring others, that was the last straw.

Samah decided to relocate to Syria, which at that time was safer. There was a program in Damascus to accommodate Iraqi refugees. She received help there and applied to become an international student. At the end of the year, she got a scholarship to a college in Iowa in the United States. She found herself a refugee in the United States, which made her appreciate the situation of all people who came from a refugee background. There were no specific services for people in that background. She was also able to gain a better understanding of Iraq, where the rest of her family remained. She felt most distressed with the fact that she enjoyed relative comfort, her family did not. She devoted her thought and attention to the situation of people who had got out to a new country, as she had, but were far from settled and in many ways where denied social justice.

In 2014, Samah decided to return to Iraq, a course other Iraqi refugees did not take, and that year was a bad one for Iraq anyway, with the emergence of ISIS. She saw a chance to help people, including her family, who were refugees in Iraq itself. She went north and found a great deal of need in the mass of Syrians and Iraqis who had fled the violence but found themselves trying to exist without the utilities such as water and electricity. Most of her work involved supporting NGOs which were doing their best to help people cope. Some of the refugees would never have the chance to go back to where they had come from. The only way forward was to invest in strategies to provide sustainable refugee communities.

Life for refugees was dangerous. A colleague of hers caught a taxi and the driver kidnapped the colleague and took her to the militia. The colleague escaped but that fate was in the offing for all refugees, including Samah herself, who was a Christian and a woman and did a lot of travelling. Samah had a sister in Australia who offered to sponsor the family to come to Australia as refugees. But first, the family had to go to another country and live while their applications were being processed. The family went to the nearest country, which was Turkey, where millions of Syrians and Iraqis had already fled. They were safe there but life was not easy, especially for those who had no wealth or income behind them. "One did not qualify for any government assistance and there were work restrictions," she said. People not speaking the Turkish language had to make way the best they could. They could engage an interpreter but at a price.

Samah worked for an NGO in Turkey to help where she could. The refugee children did not have access to education. Part of Samah's work was provide programs for the community to bridge the gap between themselves and their host community. She helped with language training to give refugees basic skills to get ahead. Last year, the applications by the family members were accepted and the family arrived in March, to be welcomed by many relatives who had preceded them. Samah felt lucky but after 18 months still felt "very raw", trying to find out how things worked. Being able to work here and study was "everything" for a refugee and she had devoted herself to help people in her situation get the best chance and have what they were entitled to.

MEETING NOTES-MALCOLM BROWN

Poignant Pictures



Rotary Club of Ramon Magsaysay
Letter from President Elvira Bautista

Dear PP Keith,

Good day!

It was indeed a great experience to lead my club and serve the people in need. I knew that my term would soon end. I just wish that I met the expectations of the club and the people who believed in me. Though I had experienced ups and downs during my term, as a whole I felt it's worth for I was able to lend my hand to the needy and listen to their pleas. For me, that is the main objective of the Rotary, to serve within your heart.

We felt so blessed that no one among our members or any of our families has been infected by the pandemic. However, our economy suffered much and until now the number of positive cases are increasing. I just wish that this virus will be over so that the whole world will be back to normal.

We are still under General Community Quarantine and part of our safeguards is to conduct meetings via Zoom same as yours.

Before I turn over my term to the next President, I had this unfinished project that I want to implement despite this crisis and pandemic which is called "TULONG SA BATANGUENO - Livelihood Project: Fish Traps (Materials for Fishing) and Hog Farming". These are the livelihood projects intended for the people of Batangas who suffered much from the recent eruption of the Taal Volcano. They were tremendously affected right now given the fact that they have not fully recovered yet with the outburst of this volcanic eruption then here comes another one, the Covid-19. The above mentioned projects are both sustainable.

We can't thank you enough for the support you've given to our club ever since RCRM was chartered in 2004. With that, we owe you so much. From the bottom of our hearts and on behalf of our Incoming President, thank you so much for your untiring support. We would like to acknowledge receipt of your remittance. Again, thank you very much. God bless you more!

Yours in Rotary,

MA. ELVIRA Z. BAUTISTA

Rotary Club of Parramatta City

International Student Support Project

We received a request last week from DG Di North seeking assistance for needy overseas students studying at UWS. These students have been financially affected by loss of part time jobs due to COVID 19.

The original request suggested we obtain free takeaway meals from a Rotarian who owns a hotel at Casula. Due to distance this is considered impractical.

Many Rotary Clubs are already providing ongoing support for students by providing food hampers and support packages.

We have been in touch with the Chaplaincy Coordinator at UWS and he has provided an initial list of 4 students residing in the Parramatta area who are struggling long term and need help.

We have decided to make up our own hampers, containing non-perishable foods and other personal items, which can then be delivered to the students' homes.

The following is a list of some of the items required

Lentils

Rice cakes and biscuits.

Brown rice (or white)

Pastas

Long life milk

Breakfast cereals

Personal hygiene items (toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, shampoo, etc)

Tinned or dry vegetables

This will be an ongoing project while the need exists. **We are asking all members to participate by bringing some items to each meeting.** These will then be packed and distributed to the students.

Keith Henning

ROTARY

WE CONNECT PEOPLE

Rotary unites more than a million people

Together, we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change – across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.

WE TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES

We take action locally and globally

Each day, our members pour their passion, integrity, and intelligence into completing projects that have a lasting impact. We persevere until we deliver real, lasting solutions.

Giving to Our Causes



Promoting Peace



Fighting Disease



Providing Clean Water



Saving Mothers and Children



Supporting Education



Growing Local Economies



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