

Rotary News, April 1, 2019, Submitted by Charles Ofstein

President Jeannie Brandenberger rang our meeting to order at approximately 12:30 PM. The club sang the Star-Spangled Banner. We were accompanied by Rotarian John Dilworth on the piano. Our invocation was given by Rotarian Dan Hartlieb.

Arts News was presented by Rotarian Dann Systma. Dann reminded us of several events in the local arts community, including a downtown Art Hop this coming Friday, April 5. Please continue, as always, to support the arts in Kalamazoo.

District Governor Jim Cupper announced our visiting Rotarians, Assistant District Governor Petur Gudlaugsson, and Jason Webb. He encouraged all members of the club to sign up for our signature program, Rotary is for Reading. We will read to the second graders in Kalamazoo Public Schools during the week of April 22. All of you should have received an email with a link to sign up.

Guests to this meeting (and their Rotarian hosts) included Jonathan Kraker (Allison H.) and Stephanie, Kevin and Stacy from Open Doors Kalamazoo (Nick B.) Welcome all!

Songs were presented by Past President Tim Kilmartin and Rotarian John D. In honor of MSU Spartan's win in the Elite Eight, Tim led the club in the Spartan fight song.

This week's business sponsor was Open Doors Kalamazoo. The non-profit's director, Stephanie Hoffman, introduced us to the charity's mission and its impact on the community. Stacy Vest, the non-profit's development director, invited everyone to the annual Open Doors Luncheon, which will be held on April 10 at the Radisson Plaza Hotel. For additional information, see <https://www.opendoorskalamazoo.org/discover-open-doors/>.

Rotarian Dan Ingles introduced a new fundraiser for our Satellite Club. The Satellite Club would like to cover Bronson Park with flags on Memorial Day in honor of our American heroes, both past and present. The goal for this year is to sell 200 American flags for \$5.00 apiece. If you are interested in purchasing a flag, please see Dan Ingles. For further information about the inspiration for this project, see https://www.commercial-news.com/news/local_news/it-s-breathtaking/article_425aa908-8417-5225-8617-3e916f6a3940.html

President Jeannie requested that all members respond with their Committee Choices for next year. She reminded everyone to look at their inbox for an email requesting that information.

Rotarian Rob Peterson introduced our speaker, Dr. Jim Robey. Dr. Robey is the Director of Regional Economic Planning Services at the from the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. Jim's research focuses on applied economics at both the national, state and local levels.

Dr. Robey informed us that the nation is currently experiencing the 2nd longest economic expansion since World War II. There are only a few indicators on the horizon of a recession. That said, a policy mistake or a combination of policy mistakes could cause the timeline to a recession to shrink. The stock market itself (which has been volatile) is not a great predictor of economic certainty.

Statistically, the nation's GDP is projected to remain solid, with a slowing rate of employment growth. Dr. Robey described this as "trending to normal." We should expect a GDP growth rate of about 2.5% in 2019.

We are at, or near, full employment nationally. Statewide and local indicators show the same trend. This usually means that employment expansion will have to occur through an increase in wages. We are seeing the start of that, with an upward tick in home prices.

Vehicle sales continue to remain strong. This is an indicator on the national level of solid economic growth. It has a tremendous effect on the state level, as Michigan is an exporter of vehicles and vehicle parts to other states.

From a Michigan perspective, the US/Mexico/Canada Trade agreement matters to our state. This is because we export a large percentage of manufactured goods to Mexico and Canada, in addition to exporting to other states. Border closures, such as those being described in the popular press, would affect our ability to export.

Regionally, the statistics show that Kalamazoo has not grown as fast as the U.S. overall. This is likely because Kalamazoo had a "pre-recession" recession around 2000. As a result, Kalamazoo did not have as far to go up when it comes to seeing good economic numbers during this cycle.

Thank you, Dr. Robey, for sharing your insight into national, state and local regional economic trends!