



# The Ramrod

Chartered in 1918

News of the Elyria Ohio Rotary Club

Visit the: Elyria Rotary web site: [elyriarotary.org](http://elyriarotary.org)



Tuesday, October 5, 2021

By Kristen Jones

**President Amanda** called the meeting to order back home again at Wesleyan Village and led us in our patriotic song “My Country ‘tis of Thee” and in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Helping today on technology was **Kent Iler**, and photography was by **Yours Truly**.

### Invocation

Today’s Pandemic Prayer was given by **Kristen Jones**. *We are not always given what we ask for, but we receive everything that we really need.*

### Guests

**Wilbur Lewis**, our newest member, who will be inducted in a couple of weeks.

### Oct 12th Program AT Wesleyan Village

District Governor Mary Aufdenkampe Annual Visit

**Save the Date:** Saturday, Oct. 30 – District 6600 Peace Conference @LCCC



Kent and Alejandro

**Kent Iler** introduced Alejandro Awe, a friend of our Club from Belize, who is staying with the Iler’s until February and looking forward to experiencing snow for the first time.

### Song of the Day

**Mark Mathes** led us in “R-O-T-A-R-Y,” in honor of our “all Rotarian” program today, and to make sure we know how to spell!

### SAVE THE DATE:

- **District Governor Mary Aufdenkampe** will attend our Club meeting on Tuesday, October 12. Please plan to be in attendance.

- **Jeanine Donaldson** spoke about the Peace Conference, the overarching theme of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and the fact that this conference is geared toward all ages. It will be held on Saturday, October 30 at LCCC. To register or for more information visit [Peace | Rotary District 6600](#) or contact **Jeanine**.



[Peace | Rotary District 6600](#)

### Jug/Happy Dollars

**Tammy Bertrand** gave Happy Dollars welcoming Rotary back to the Village.

**Sam Battle** gave for **Kathleen Runser**, for all her hard work on the new Central Library. The new Library is truly beautiful.

**Jim Vandemark** for **Steve Hosler's** dedication, hospitality, and efforts on the Fried Ice Cream booth.

**Gary McIntyre** on purchasing the "vehicle he's always wanted, a '69 Camaro." He is looking for a storage place for it - if anyone has one, please contact him!

**Kent Iler** for Alejandro receiving the FIRST library card issued at the new Central Library.

### Today's Program– Stephanie Forthofer, Jim Vandemark, Mark Wagner – The Effect of COVID-19 on Local Small Businesses

**Greg Kruzka** introduced and moderated our esteemed panel of Elyria Rotary members, representing a variety of sectors in our local economy: restaurant/hospitality, retail, and manufacturing.



*Greg, Stephanie, Jim, and Mark*

**Stephanie Forthofer** is owner and president of Smitty's Place Family Restaurant. Her family has owned Smitty's for 30 of its 80+ years.

**Jim Vandemark** is owner of Vandemark Jewelers. He has been involved in the jewelry business for 40 years, since getting his start at age 15 working at Brandau's.

**Mark Wagner** is owner of Wagner Electric Sign Company. He succeeded his dad, Carl, and the business has been family-owned for three generations.

### *How has COVID-19 impacted your business?*

**Stephanie** said that at first they decided to just close their doors during the initial phases of the pandemic. There was a lot of staff hesitation about exposure and the unknown, and so they took that unexpected blessing to do a lot of updating, deep cleaning, and needed renovations. They lost 50% of their sales in the second quarter but were able to rebound over time. The PPP loan helped them pay their employees at a higher rate once they reopened. Their long-standing history in the community helped them weather the storm, whereas new restaurants were tremendously hit.



*Stephanie Forthofer*

**Jim** said that in the retail sector they were also concerned about the mandated shutdown. The PPP loan helped to continue to pay staff on a regular basis and they were able to ramp back up quickly. The community has been supportive of small business.

**Mark** said that it was truly a blessing not to know how comprehensive the Pandemic would end up being. The success of their business is not “because of us, but in spite of us.” Their three-pronged business is wide-reaching and diversified across the country. Their theatre marquee business was severely impacted by the closure of all theatres. Other systems have been able to be more remote-oriented, and they were able to pay their employees throughout via the PPP loan.

***What challenges have you faced as the economy recovers?***

**Jim** said their business has been fairly stable. as is their staffing. due to their size, the longevity of employees, and loyal customer base. And there is a huge increase in weddings now!

**Mark** noted that their theatre projects stopped entirely, and these projects can be up to a million dollars in revenue. Delays in the USPS

system made accounts receivable difficult. Employees are tired and in short supply.

**Stephanie** said that pre-pandemic they would receive hundreds of employee applications; now they receive none. They are starting to get a few but the entire employment situation has changed. Product availability and delivery is a huge challenge. She does not see that this will be a quick turnaround, and their costs have increased 10-20%.

***Has the recovery created longer-term impact?***

**Mark** said that doing business remotely is the new normal. Working on projects all over the US makes this mainstream for them. He says that product price increases have been 20-40% in the manufacturing world, and it’s very difficult to manage contracts with a huge contingency in costs.

**Jim** remarked that their products are arriving on time as their merchandise primarily comes from within the US. They are plugging away and trying to steadily improve.



*Jim Vandemark*

**Stephanie** said that they are blessed to be in business, even with the challenges. They learned so much about their own personal resilience. It is difficult to remain positive all the

time, but it is all about trying to refocus one's energy to be grateful and make the products the best they can be. The online presence is big, and it helps them keep people informed, especially when they are forced to close for low staffing. Patience is hard for all of us, and the service staff often bears the brunt.

**Greg** noted that we all have a responsibility to be more understanding and patient.

Questions were taken from the audience.

**Stephanie** responded to a question about government subsidies for the unemployed, saying that the additional amounts were particularly impactful on minimum wage workers, who could often make the same amount to just stay home. Many of her workers are single parents, who also needed to home school.

**Mark** noted that their employees are from highly skilled trades, and it was already difficult to find these employees. He's not getting any responses now, even for those with no skills.



*Mark Wagner*

**Jim** said that one of the contributing factors is the massive amount of retirements nationwide,

including those now retiring early, along with the additional fear of exposure.

***Thanks to our panelists and moderator for a really insightful and fascinating program!***

### **Today's Book**

**Today's book, "Layla's Happiness," will be signed and then donated to the Elyria Public Library in honor of our speakers.**

### **Zoom Meeting Link:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86461082213?pwd=aVhiV1FBQ1o3cnlw>

**Meeting ID: 864 6108 2213**

**Password: Rotary**

### **Happy Dollar Link:**

[https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted\\_button\\_id=2922TCG6S5HTA&Z3JncnB0=](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=2922TCG6S5HTA&Z3JncnB0=)

### **A Pandemic Prayer**

Loving Creator,

We asked for strength, and you gave us difficulties to make us strong.

We asked for wisdom, and you gave us problems to solve.

We asked for prosperity, and you gave us purpose and brains to use.

We asked for courage, and you gave us fears to overcome.

We asked for patience, and you gave us situations where we were forced to wait.

We asked for love, and you gave us vulnerable people to serve.

We asked for justice, and you called us to be just and lead with integrity.

Lord, we have received nothing that we asked for or wanted.

And yet, we receive everything that we've ever needed.

For this we give thanks.

*Attributed to Dr. Colleen Hanycz, President of Xavier University*