

THE STAFFORD ROTARY HIGHLIGHTER

January 10, 2024



Rotary Club of Stafford  **People of Action**

January 10 Program - Welcome, District Governor Rene

Rene Laws, Governor 2023-2024 Rotary District 7610

District Governor-Elect Rene' Laws has a passion for service and has dedicated much of her life to causes that help her community, domestically and globally.

Beginning as a young military spouse, she explored volunteering through the USMC Key Volunteer Program, providing much needed family support before, during, and post-deployments.



She expanded her service reach in the 29 years that followed by working with organizations such as Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, Marine Spouses' Clubs, USMC Family Readiness Program (where she helped develop and execute the program for Marine Forces Reserve in 2008), The Marine Toys for Tots Foundation, and various charitable organizations and churches, including educational and intermural school clubs.

Raising six children with her Marine husband, and moving many times over the years, has given Rene' a unique perspective on her communities and those that reside within, helping her to see the gaps in assistance and provide support when available.

In 2013, Rene' was introduced to Rotary, and it broadened her horizons when she

Club Calendar January Is Vocational Service Month

- ❖ January 10 – Regular Board Meeting
- ❖ January 10 – Official DG visit
- ❖ January 15 – Visit to RI Headquarters
- ❖ January 17 - Sheriff David Decatur
- ❖ January 24 – TBD
- ❖ January 31 – Club Social
- ❖ February 7 - Mark Cook, Shelter Box
- ❖ February 14 - TBD
- ❖ February 21 - PDG Leigh Hudson, D7710 - Roots of Rotary
- ❖ February 23- Rotary is 118 years old.
- ❖ February 28 – Club Social
- ❖ March 6 - TBD
- ❖ March 13 - TBD
- ❖ March 20 - Dr. Thomas Taylor - STAFFORD COUNTY School Superintendent
- ❖ March 2024 -District Grant Seminar
- ❖ District Training Assembly - April 2024
- ❖ May 25-29, 2024 -Rotary International Convention in Singapore
- ❖ Fall, 2024 – District Conference

became a member of this international organization via the North Stafford Rotary Club. Since that time, she has expanded her level of responsibility within Rotary, becoming Club President in 2018 and District Chair for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in 2019, while also stepping into the job of Area Four Governor. She continues to serve in leadership roles in CPETS and has been a participant in RLI.

Rene is a member of The Paul Harris Society and The PolioPlus Society. She strongly believes in the ideals of Servant Leadership and is excited about this opportunity to serve the Rotarians and communities here in Virginia as the District 7610 Governor in 2023-2024. She is excited and ready to serve the Rotarians and communities here in Virginia. Rene and her husband Bill who is also a member of the Stafford Rotary Club, live in Stafford.

“Rotary changes us and those we serve. I believe we can change the world, one life at a time.” ~ Paul Harris (founder of Rotary)

January 3 Meeting

President Jamie presided. Holly gave the thought of the day. *“And the only measure of your words and your deeds is the love you leave behind when you’re done.”* This is from a song by one of Holly’s favorite folksingers, Fred Small.

Announcements:

- ❖ President Jamie thanked PE Shekela for hosting such a fantastic holiday party
- ❖ January 15 is the trip to Chicago to visit Rotary International Headquarters.
- ❖ PE Shekela has set up a Square for charging club dues. Please make sure to pay your club dues promptly.
- ❖ Leigh Ann and Jack have moved to North Carolina, but have chosen to remain club members until they’ve had time to find a club in their new home town.
- ❖ On a sadder note, Jack is hospitalized again.
- ❖ George and Julie Franklin have left the club, because they find that the remote membership isn’t working for them.
- ❖ Youth Services – Donna reminded everyone that the speech and essay contests will be coming later this winter.

Program: Susan Sigmon Justice Service Director, Empowerhouse

Empowerhouse is a non-profit organization providing confidential domestic violence assistance in planning district 16 (to include the city of Fredericksburg, and Stafford, Spotsylvania, King George and Caroline Counties). These services include a free and confidential 24-hour hotline, a temporary emergency shelter, information, referrals, and advocacy. Empowerhouse is an accredited Virginia domestic violence program funded by state and federal grants, Rappahannock United Way, donations, and fundraising events. It is the only domestic violence support service in our planning district. They work under the provisions of the Violence against Women Act of 2000.

Their Mission Statement states:



“Empowerhouse empowers survivors and their children to believe in themselves and build new lives filled with dignity, respect, safety, and hope. We give victims the time, space, and tools to heal their hearts, restore their connections, rebuild their lives, and renew their spirits.”

Empowerhouse was incorporated in 1978 and opened The Haven, a shelter for battered women and their children in 1979. A New Haven, an improved shelter was built and opened in 1988. Opened a public office in Fredericksburg, Virginia in 1996. In 2005 they began a new program and partnership to serve the Latino community with bilingual, bicultural services and community coordination in 2005. They began a new transitional housing program in 2010.

Susan described domestic violence as a crime “hidden in plain sight”. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience domestic violence sometime in their lives. New technology and easy access to firearms have increased instances of abuse. Pregnancy is the most dangerous time of life for women. She praised the Stafford County Sheriff’s Department for their excellent work with domestic abuse cases.

Empowerhouse served 3,800 clients in our planning district last year. She described their work with schools and the booklets they distribute to teens on safety in personal relationships. She reminded us that about every 5 days someone in Virginia dies because of domestic violence, and only about 25% of domestic violence victims report to law enforcement.

Here is a list of the services Empowerhouse offers:

Free and confidential services to victims and their children including:

- ❖ 24-hour Residential Shelter & Transitional Housing
- ❖ Emergency Shelter
- ❖ 24-hour Hotline
- ❖ Court Advocacy
- ❖ Crisis Intervention and Advocacy
- ❖ Risk Assessment and Safety Planning
- ❖ Cell Phones
- ❖ Support/Education Groups for Women
- ❖ Groups for Children called Forgotten Victims
- ❖ Groups for Teen Girls
- ❖ Spanish Language and Culturally Relevant Services

Intervention services:

- ❖ Certified Batterer Intervention Program: Fresh Start for Men and Fresh Start for Women (fee for service)
- ❖ Groups for Teen Guys (fee for service)

Awareness and Community Involvement

- ❖ Volunteer Program
- ❖ Community Education or Training
- ❖ Educational School Programs on Dating Violence Dangers
- ❖ Used Cell Phone Drive- a collection to distribute 911 phones to survivors
- ❖ Empty Bowl Fundraising Event (Held in January)
- ❖ Annual Golf Tournament (Held in October)
- ❖ Candlelight Vigil as part of October’s Domestic Violence Awareness Month
- ❖ The Bathrooms Project- awareness posters in bathrooms with hotline number tear off cards



❖ The Clothesline Project- an exhibit of t-shirts telling personal stories of violence against women displayed on a clothesline. The t-shirts serve as an artist's canvas and are pieces of art created by survivors.

Q & A

During the question and answer session Susan was asked if they work in partnership with LoisAnne's Hope House. She answered that there was no direct partnership, but that they coordinate services to help send clients to the correct agency.

When asked about whether they work with trafficking victims, she answered that although there is some overlap in services Empowerhouse is not designed to work with trafficking victims.

Do they offer temporary safe shelter for men? Yes.

The teen groups meet one day a week. Admission to the groups could be either a court ordered situation or a request from a parent or guardian. Like all Empowerhouse service, these groups are very confidential.

Empowerhouse is not a mandatory reporting agency under Virginia law, but they do report as needed.

Thank you, Susan for a comprehensive presentation on a serious problem that many find difficult to discuss.

A Bit of Club History- Ducks, Etc.



Before there was Stafford Rotary's Wings and Wheels at the Stafford Regional Airport there was the Great Rappahannock Rubber Duck Race. The event began in 1992, sponsored by the Virginia Housing Coalition. After several years that group found that the event was too large to manage by themselves. They asked to partner with our Rotary club beginning in 1998. After a few years Stafford Rotary became the sole sponsor of the event.

The event was held at Old Mill Park in Fredericksburg.

Thousands of rubber ducks were thrown into the river and kept in line by Rotarians in kayaks. The event attracted a large crowd, but it was a huge undertaking. Some years the river didn't cooperate. It was too low or dangerously high. The last year we held the event at the river we weren't allowed to throw the ducks in the water because of the danger. That year we began to use a crane, and we let retriever dogs pick the winning ducks from the pile of ducks thrown on the ground from the crane.

This event was a mixed blessing as a fundraiser. There were very good years, as well as years we didn't always make much money at all for our club projects. The very best year financially for the race in the river was the year Sponge Bob came to visit. A television station lent us a Sponge Bob costume. We had families from DC and Maryland come to Old Mill Park just to have a picture taken with Sponge Bob. We also had a sumo wrestling tent that year. Visitors could rent fat suits and pretend to be sumo wrestlers. People really liked it, and no one got hurt.

The rented ducks arrived very dirty. The night before the race, club members had to meet and wash all the ducks. We turned this disgusting task into a party.

We moved to the airport in 2004 and eventually abandoned the duck part of the event.

Here's a news article from the April 8, 2008 ***Inside NOVA***

STAFFORD — The Stafford County Regional Airport will soon be overrun with little yellow ducks, and they planned it that way. The airport will host the fourth-annual Wings Wheels and Ducks Fly-in on Oct. 5. The event, which evolved from the old Rappahannock duck race, is a charity function to raise money for the causes the Stafford County Rotary Club supports. “This is a great event that promotes the awareness of the airport as well as the charities who are involved with the Rotary,” said Ed Wallis, general manager of the Stafford County Regional Airport.

The event will feature a car show, a motorcycle show and airplanes that will fly-in for the special occasion. The Rotary will also be using a crane to drop rubber ducks used for the race, into a ditch to watch them race down the hill, according to Wallis.

Moving the event to the airport brought larger crowds, but the air show had its own problems. There were years when the weather kept the vintage planes grounded. Traffic and parking were an enormous amount of work. As the airport expanded there was less space for our vendors, our major source of fund raising for the event.

2014, the year of Stafford County's 300th anniversary, was the last time we held this event. We made a lot of money that year, but we no longer could manage such a large event. It was fun while it lasted.



JANUARY IS VOCATIONAL SERVICE MONTH

Rotary International has designated January as Vocational Service Month. Vocational service is one of Rotary's Avenues of Service, and it means using one's professional skills to serve the community and promote high ethical standards. Rotarians are encouraged to focus on vocational service during this month by organizing activities such as vocational awards, community projects, and vocational education funding for post-secondary students.

Vocational service is an important avenue of Rotary service that helps promote the value of various vocations and encourages young people to choose a career where they can shine. It also means networking and doing business with other Rotarians, which can help build trust and confidence in their abilities to treat others right and get the job done.