

Rotary

Club of Oakland



Speakers

September 17
Shirley Kazuyo
Muramoto

October 8
Clifford Stoll

October 23
Dr. Emil Kakkis

Special Events

**Rotary Collaborative
Impact Summit**
Sept. 19 – 9 am – 5 pm
San Jose McEnery
Convention Center

**Rotary Golf
Tournament**
Sept. 22 – 12 noon
Tilden Park Golf
Course

**Port of Oakland
Harbor Tour**
Sept. 25
5:30 – 7 pm Tour
7 – 8:30 pm Post
Tour Reception

Service Projects

SOS Meals on Wheels
Sept. 28 – 9:15 -11:30 am
Contact Karen
Friedman for
information

Next Club Meeting – September 17, 2026 – Shirley Kazuyo Muramoto

Past President Joe Goralka announced that next week's speaker is **Shirley Kazuyo Muramoto**, renowned Oakland-based musician and teacher. She will describe Japanese Koto Music & Culture. The noon meeting will be September 17th in the Henry J. Kaiser Center for the Arts.

The meeting will be in person as well as on Zoom.

For those joining on Zoom, use this link [Thursday Club Meeting](#)

Rotary Meeting Highlights for September 10, 2026

Call to Order

President Merlin Edwards welcomed Rotarians and guests to the regular meeting of the Rotary Club of Oakland, the 3rd oldest club in the Rotary world. **President Merlin** acknowledged the unusually warm weather and reminded members and guests to stay hydrated!

Visiting Rotarians and Guests

Several Visiting Rotarians were in attendance including Bobby Woo and his wife Linda of the Diablo View Rotary Club of Walnut Creek, 2019-2020 District 5170 Governor Ramesh Hariharan and his wife Sobha, and former **Oakland Rotarian John Notch** who is planning to return!

Two Past Presidents of Oakland Rotary were introduced after prolonged absences, **Rich Williams** and **Syd Saperstein**. Due to his prolonged absence **Syd** rang the bell five times. Not to be outdone **Rich** rang the bell for all the past presidents in the room (8)! **President Merlin** reminded the audience that each bell ringer is worth \$100 to the Oakland Rotary Endowment.

Several guests were introduced by **Sam Davis**, **Past President David Stein**, **Kathleen Uribe** and **President-Elect Kerry Hamill**.

Thought for the Day – David Stein

Birthday Greetings

Happy Birthday!

Celebrating are:

September

01 – Ali Medina

05 – Syd Saperstein

06 – Vera Hannush

07 – Nikki Lowy

08 – Dominique Enriquez

08 – Marlo Seligman

09 – Carey Clausen

10 – Nancy O'Malley

13 – Anne Marks

17 – Janice Brickley

17 – Susan Smith

19 – Leslie Hilger

20 – Fred Morse

21 – Greg Gilbert

22 – Trisha Connors

24 – Erich Harris

24 – Wil Hobbs

25 – Sam Davis

27 – Ricka White

29 – Jesse Schmidt

Membership Anniversaries

Thank you for your years
of service to the Club
and the community!

September

Wayne Goodroe – 42
years

Shanna O'Hare – 32 years

Johanna Leonard – 28
years

Rosemary Darden – 24
years

Ginni Ring – 20 years

Keri Butkevich – 11 years

Alex Kaffka – 10 years

Ed Brail – 5 years

Erich Harris – 3 years

Ryan Bates – 1 year

Aaron Smith – 1 year

Always willing to fill in where needed, **Past President David Stein** stepped up to provide the *Thought for the Day* with a quote from former Vice President Humbert Humphrey.

"It was once said that the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

Member Self Introductions – Robert Harris and Kaitlin Levenstrong

President Merlin invited **Robert Harris** to the microphone to present his three-minute introduction.

Robert shared that he is retired from PG&E. He was born in Arkansas and attended elementary school in a two-room schoolhouse. His family moved to California when he was in high school. He attended Oakland Technical High School and graduated in 1961. He is a graduate of San Francisco State University and worked for the Department of Probation from 1965 -1969. He attended UC Berkeley where he received his law degree after which he joined PG&E. It was then that he first joined Oakland Rotary. He is active in the California Association of Black Lawyers, served as the President of the National Bar Association and honored to argue a case at the Supreme Court (which he won!). **Robert** is the author of "*Goodbye, Arkadelphia! Turning Obstacles into Opportunities*". **Robert** is proud to have rejoined Oakland Rotary "the best club in the world!".

President Merlin exchanged **Robert's** red badge for his permanent blue badge.

Next, **President Merlin** invited **Kaitlin Levenstrong** to give her three-minute introduction.

Kaitlin shared that there are three main themes that have guided her in her life: Curiosity, Connection, and Community. Her curiosity was fostered by living in five different states and always meeting new people. Her decision to major in journalism was an extension of her desire to know the stories of people. She traveled to South Africa to attend college where she learned the traditional African philosophy of Ubuntu which translates to "I am because we are". Her commitment to community is shown in her desire to live communally as well as her commitment to making an impact professionally. She began her professional career with the Girl Scouts, then the UN Association in Boston, spent time at the East Bay Community Foundation and now is the Executive Director of Oakland Goes Outdoors. She resides in Oakland with her husband and four-year-old son.

President Merlin exchanged **Kaitlin's** red badge for her permanent blue badge.

Announcements

Dana Sack announced that he is in the planning phase for a trip to the Bombay Queen City Camel Races and Auction in November 2027. See **Dana** if you are interested in attending.

President Merlin reminded members of the following:

The RI International Convention begins on June 26, 2027 in Barcelona, Spain. Early registration and reduced fee are available through Sept. 19th.

The District 5170 Impact Summit is on Sept. 19th in San Jose. Register on the District website.

The Piedmont Montclair Rotary Club has invited us to their annual Pickleball tournament. Specific information is coming.

The September 25th Off Site meeting is a Port of Oakland Harbor tour. Limited to 40 Rotarians. Register with **Jesse**.

The annual Halloween party will again be held at Chapel of the Chimes (thank you, **Ed Brail!**) on Oct. 29th. Lots of fun and prizes for best costumes. Families are welcome.

Members will be receiving an email of the Club Constitution with proposed changes. Please review when you receive.

We are still accepting eyeglass donations at next week's meeting.

Those wishing to support victims of the Colombia earthquake can do so by ringing the bell and designating for earthquake victims.

Assistant District Governor Dudley Thompson announced that on this Saturday there are District programs available on leadership. See **Dudley** for more information. Also, the club Golf Tournament is Tuesday, September 22nd. Please sign up in the next few days.

Bell Ringers

President Merlin opened the floor to bell ringers. These included:

Karen Friedman, David Stein, Jim and Linda Boessenecker, Rick Draper, Ken Richardson, and Joe Goralka in honor of Columbia earthquake victims.

Ken Richardson in honor of **Syd Saperstein**

Dudley Thompson in honor of **Rich Williams**

Jesse Schmidt in honor of UCLA's win over UC Berkeley

Rich Pease in honor of the Salvation Army Event honoring **Gary Payton**.

New Members

President Merlin was thrilled to announce that we are inducting three new members!

Keith Uriarte introduced **Oakland Fire Chief Damon Covington** as our first new member. **Chief Covington** is a graduate of Bishop O' Dowd High School, Sonoma

State University and Golden Gate University. He was promoted to Chief in 2023 after 27 years in the department, beginning as a fire engineer and moving to a department chief, interim chief, and Chief. He lives in Oakland and is the proud father of a son.



Don Sheppard introduced **Major Richard Pease** as our next new member. **Major Pease** has been married for more than three decades and is the father of three boys and one grandchild. He has been a Salvation Army Officer for thirty years. He is an Eagle Scout and a Certified Fraud inspector.



Isaac Kos-Read introduced the final new member of the day, **Ann Marks**. **Ann** is currently the Governmental Affairs Director for PG&E. She has a long background

in violence prevention planning and is the former Director of Youth Alive! **Ann** lives in Oakland with her wife and child. In her spare time, she enjoys trivia (watch out she's an expert!) and writes for The Oaklandside.



After a warm welcome from the audience, **President Merlin** presented each new member with their Rotary pin, badge and new member packet.

Speaker for the Day – Alysse Castro

Sam Davis introduced our speaker of the day, Alysse Castro, who is the Alameda County Superintendent of Schools, elected in 2022. She is an expert in Alternative Education that breaks the school to prison pipeline and is known for her ethical and moral leadership.

Superintendent Castro provided an overview of the role of the County Office of Education and how it relates to the individual school districts. As a former High School Principal, she understands the unique role of the office she now holds. The County Office of Education is designated in the California Constitution. It serves as a safety net to school districts. While the schools and districts do their best to serve all kids there are those that fall between the cracks. The County serves kids that are not being served at the local school. These include those in juvenile hall, children expelled from the local district, parenting teens and drop-out recovery programs.

The County staff visit schools and help to identify and solve problems. The office recognized that there were not enough teachers in OUSD so they developed eleven different pathway programs to fill the pipeline for teachers to serve their local community. At the beginning of the 2026 school year the OUSD teacher positions were 98% filled.

Ms. Castro then took questions from the audience.

Question: How is AI being integrated into the schools?

Answer: Schools are learning together with AI leaders and thinking about what youth need to know to use technology.

Question: What incentives are in place to ensure that good people are teaching our youth?

Answer: Salary is not the best incentive – salary is mid-level compared to other positions. The most important is support. Principals make a huge difference and schools that are invested in ensuring wrap-around services are most successful.

Question: What do you see as the aftermath of COVID?

Answer: Lost some youth. We have some that have been out of school for 2-3 years and haven't returned. However, we believe you are never out of chances, so we provide opportunities for adult school, etc.

Question: How are you helping to keep school districts solvent?

Answer: Public school financing oversight and technical assistance.

Question: What are the challenges of school districts funded by property tax and those by average school attendance?

Answer: Most districts' property tax goes to the state and then the school district receives money from the state. Oakland gets more back than it puts in. It has one of the highest per pupil rates in the County.

After thanking the speaker, **President Merlin** presented her with a copy of the Rotary District 5170 book.



Adjournment

President Merlin reminded everyone that tomorrow is the 25th anniversary of the

September 11th attacks and asked that members remember those who lost their life in the attacks. The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 pm

???????

**2027 International Convention
June 26th -30th - Barcelona, Spain**

Early Bird registration opens on September 17th. You can register using this link: for the Rotary International Convention opens on September 17th [Barcelona Convention](#)

The convention price increases 40% after September 21st, so if you want to attend, register on Thursday for the best price. When you register for the convention, you can also reserve your hotel.

If you want any information on going to a Rotary International Convention, talk to **Past President Mary, Past President Joe or President Merlin.**