Meeting Notes – Jan. 11, 2022

The LaFayette Rotary Club held its weekly meeting on January 11, 2022. Rotarian Diane Sherriff was responsible for the program and had as her guest speaker, Dr. Kelli Hodge, recently retired Superintendent of Chambers County Schools. However, today she was speaking to us about Southern Union State Community College (SUSCC). Southern Union (SU) serves an eight-county area of east and central Alabama. Almost 5,000 students are served through its campuses in Wadley, Valley and Opelika. SU offers a three-faceted emphasis: academic programs for transferability to a four-year college or university, technical programs for specialized career competencies, and a health sciences program for specialized training in the medical field.

Dr. Hodge is a member of the Southern Union Foundation Board. The main focus of the foundation is to support the mission and programs of SU. One of the primary ways of fulfilling this mission is through awarding scholarships. Until now, the foundation has primarily provided what is known as gap scholarships to high school seniors, dual enrollment students, and adults returning to college. These gap scholarships are for students who make too much money to qualify for any government assistance, but not enough money to pay for full tuition. The foundation also helps pay for areas where state tax-payer money (the SU budget) can't be spent, such as helping an SU school organization start a food closet on the campuses. Another way of supporting SU is helping instructors receive professional development. Due to budget restrictions by the state, the school cannot fully reimburse instructors for the cost of professional development activities. The foundation steps in and fills that gap. The foundation also provides recognition for outstanding faculty or students. Again, taxpayer money (SU budget) cannot be spent on plaques, medals, etc. Again, the foundation fills in the gaps.

Since 2018 the SU Foundation has awarded 187 Dual Enrollment Scholarships to area high school students. Last year, the foundation awarded $138,409.00 in scholarships to 27 SU students.

The foundation engages in several fund-raising activities. There is a yearly golf tournament and a spring luncheon. This year they will be holding a gala, which will hopefully turn into an annual event. They also receive gifts and endowments from individuals and corporations. Large gifts are invested to provide scholarships. Donors now have the opportunity to decide where they want their money to go.

Southern Union is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. In September of 2021 the foundation board sat down with President Shackett and set for themselves the goal of raising one million dollars in honor of the centennial anniversary. As of this month, they are already one-quarter of the way to meeting that goal. More information is available on the SU website for anyone wishing to donate or bequeath money through their will.

In addition to our speaker, Rotarian Butch Busby gave a quick update on our partnership with the Rotary Club of Birmingham, UAB Toget HER for Health and the Alabama Department of Public Health in an effort to reduce cervical cancer. Things are moving quickly and by spring of 2022 we should see visible signs of action. Rotary's role will be to raise awareness of the project and share information with the community.

Diane Sherriff