

Rotary Club of the Valley of the Moon

6520 Oakmont Drive, Suite A, Santa Rosa, CA 95409

Visit our website: VOMRotary.org

Volume XXIII Issue No. 28 David Beach, President February 29, 2024



The **Four-Way Test** of things we think, say or do:

Is it the **Truth**?

Is it **Fair** to all concerned?

Will it build **Goodwill** and better **Friendships**?

Will it be **Beneficial** to all concerned?

President **David Beach** rang the opening bell at 8 a.m. and immediately had **Fred Merrill** introduce our speakers, as **they had other commitments**.

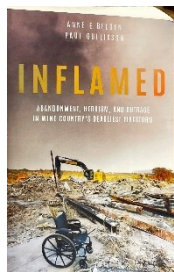
SPEAKERS:

Fred Merrill introduced our speakers, Anne Belden and Paul Gullixson. Anne runs the journalism program and advises the newsroom at SRJC. Before teaching, she spent 18 years as a journalist, working as a reporter and editor on the San Francisco Peninsula where her hews, features, and investigative articles were recognized by the CA Newspaper Publishers Assn., San Francisco Peninsula Press Club, and Parenting Publications of America. Anne holds a bachelor's degree in mass communication from UCLA and a master's degree in media studies from Stanford U. She lives in Sebastopol.



Paul is a seasoned journalist with more than 35 years of experience working for West Coast newspapers, including the Press Democrat, the SF Chronicle, and other Bay Area newspapers. As

columnist and editorial writer for the PD, he played a key role in the newspaper winning the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the October 2017 fires.



Paul and Anne have written a 400-page book about the fires, called **“INFLAMED”** and brought copies with them, which drew huge interest from our members, who were able to purchase a copy of the book at the meeting for \$22.

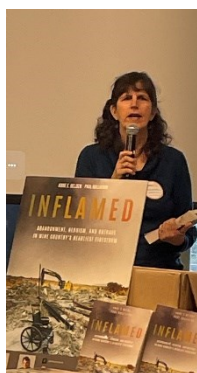
I’m sure there’s not one person in Sonoma County who doesn’t have a story relating to this horrendous event that swept through our area on that night in October, but Paul and Anne delved much deeper into the story by getting interviews from those directly involved in the tragedy that unfolded on Fountaingrove at Villa Capri and Verona.

Paul told stories of residents that, when the fire alarms went off, to go back to sleep. The fire alarms were then turned off. When they smelled the smoke, the staff had evacuated, leaving them to fend for themselves. Those who were mobile made it to their garages, but the power was off and, even when those that were able to open the garage doors, which is difficult for most, they were faced with smoke and embers from the fire. They closed the doors and waited.

Paul continued on to tell us stories of heroism by family members and others, who drove around barricades and through trees dripping with fire and embers to assist those left behind. Villa Capri burned, but Verona did not. There were no casualties during the fire, but several seniors later passed away from fire-related illnesses.



Paul talked about the cover-ups by Oakmont Senior Living (built by Bill Gallaher) and the lawsuits that followed, including records being sealed. Oakmont Senior Living claimed the staff helped rescue residents, but, in truth, 24 elderly were left to fend for themselves. When they tried to leave, the doors from the lobby to their living quarters locked behind them, and the door to outside was also locked. There they were, stranded, until



Anne laughed when she told us about the writing of their book, which was to be a full accounting of what happened that fateful night and following, and which ended up being 400 pages! There was a lot to tell and the stories flowed freely. Anne & Paul were able to acquire depositions from the lawsuit, which turned out to be a treasure trove of valuable information. In researching Bill Gallaher, he turned out to be like a 10,000-piece puzzle with many pieces missing. The 52 caregivers at Villa Capri were not trained for evacuations, nor were keys left to the shuttles parked there. Some of the caregivers did stay to help, but there was no phone service, no flashlights, and no emergency lighting. At Verena, the person in charge stayed for 2 hours and took a few tenants, but never returned.

Those that came to help, did what they could.

Residents who are still at Verena are traumatized to this day. Corporate never thanked those who risked their lives to help and continued denials and cover-ups. Also, Oakmont Senior Living

cleared the burned Villa Capri site before residents and their families were able to come and search through the debris for treasured articles of their lives.

Both Anne & Paul talked about senior living centers and their lack of safety features. Over 75% of the victims of the Paradise fire were seniors. Legislation is very lax when it comes to senior housing. They talked about Bill Gallaher, letting us know they had their book vetted regarding the 1st Amendment and did make changes to avoid being sued by Gallaher.

A lot of the stories they featured in their book were privileged information, so actual names were not used. Paul told the story of RJ, a welder from Petaluma who went to Verona to check on his grandfather and then went to Villa Capri to help rescue folks from there and was told the building was empty. He had a headlamp, so he went to the door to find the 24 locked in the lobby and got them out.



Our members were riveted to these stories, but time flew by and Anne needed to get to class, but Paul stayed on to answer questions after the meeting.

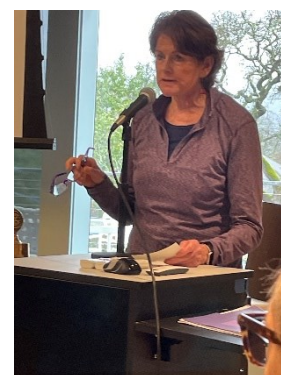
VISITORS:

Sgt-at-Arms **Fred Merrill** introduced our other guests, JD Thompson (**Phil Wigen**), and Mary Ann Allen (**Jim Allen**).

GETTING TO KNOW YOU:

Maureen McGettigan has had a VERY interesting life, but she broke it down to just a portion of it, which was about her joy and gift of photography. She told us that, in 1998, she was in Lassen Nat'l Park and saw an incredible sunset. It was then that she decided she needed to pursue photography to be able to capture such beautiful scenes on film. She bought a professional camera and joined a San Francisco photo club. She worked part-time for 2 newspapers close to Golden Gate Park. At 50, she then took a leave of absence and attended a 3-month intensive course at the Rocky Mountain School of Photography, then back to SF where she took photojournalism classes at SF State.

Maureen said she likes photos of people and events and has done many photo tours around the world. She's even learned to put her photos to music. She presented a 15-minute video of her recent trip to Japan. It takes a lot of her time to finish the photos and put them together. We're so lucky to have our very own professional, super photographer right here in our club! Here are some photos she took at the Crab Fest last Saturday. Thanks, Maureen.





PRESIDENT AND MISCELLANEOUS ANNOUNCEMENTS:

President Beach thanked all of our members for their fantastic work on the Crab Feed.

Jim Allen said the Russian River cleanup with Healdsburg Rotary is scheduled for Saturday, March 9th, weather permitting. He cannot attend, but if you plan to help, please let him know.

CRAB FEED UPDATE:



Daymon Doss let us know there would be a final Crab Feed meeting on Monday, March 11th in Room B at the OVA. We'll be discussing the Crab Feed and changes that could be made for the next one.



BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES:

None.



HAPPY/CRAPPY DOLLARS:

Karen Sites was excited to win some loot on the Santa Rosa Rotary Super Bowl Pool and she's happy to be donating a good chunk of it back to our club (in true "Sites" fashion!)

RAFFLE:

Craig Clissold drew **Fred Merrill's** ticket number for the \$211.50 jackpot, but he didn't draw the Joker.

ADJOURNMENT:

President Beach adjourned our meeting at 9 a.m., noting he had forgotten the Pledge of Allegiance, but felt our country would survive without it this one time! We recited the Four-Way Test.

UPCOMING PROGRAM

3/7/24 – Magic Acts, Barry Brilliant

3/14/24 – Bay Nature Institute, Bruce Hartsough

3/21/24 – Food For Thought, Amanda Wood

MEMBERSHIP:

Share Rotary with your friends. We should invite business friends and neighbors to a meeting. Who do we do business with, what neighbors do we know, and what former Rotarians could be asked to join us? Guests and potential Rotarians are invited twice at the Club's expense.

When introducing your guest at a meeting please do not introduce them as a prospective member. No one can be a prospective member until the Board votes on their application. Just introduce them as my friend or neighbor or whatever is appropriate.

MANY PEOPLE SAID THEY WOULD HAVE JOINED ROTARY HAD SOMEONE ASKED THEM!

ERRORS & OMISSIONS

Editor: Star Power
(E-mail – starpower7@att.net)
Publisher: Valerie Hulsey
Photographer: John Derby

Club Officers:
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President-Elect: Fred Merrill
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