



Rotary
Little Rock



Rotary Club 99: Tuesday, July 2, 2024

Kick-Off of Rotary Year 24.25: Welcome President Jason Chacko!

This Week at Club 99

THAT'S A WRAP: ROTARY YEAR 2023-2024





To the MOST FUN Rotary Club, The Rotary Club of Little Rock: I can't believe this is my last newsletter note to you all as your now Immediate Past President. Before I repeat some remarks from last Tuesday, let me first say I will absolutely miss being your president, but I am so looking forward to President Chacko's year. Jason and I have worked alongside each other for the past couple of years, and I can tell you that he has an absolute love of Rotary and is excited to share that passion with all of you and our community. It's going to be a great year under his leadership, and I'm happy to be a part of it.

There's so much to say about this past year of FUN, but first let me say what an absolute honor it has been to serve this Club in all the many capacities that I have over the years, but most definitely as your President. I know you're going to be shocked, but I have had SO MUCH FUN doing this! Yes, it's a lot of work. Yes, it can feel like another full-time job sometimes. BUT I wouldn't trade any of that!

It truly has been a joy to do, and I'm thankful for all of you who went along with a theme that was pretty different for the state's oldest and largest civic organization. It wasn't a "buttoned-up" type theme, but I think it was the perfect match for a year where the goal was to engage more with each other and learn more about each other outside of our 1-hour Tuesday meeting.

And - WOW - how The Power of Fun theme has permeated into everything we have accomplished together this year.

It really was a Year of TRUE FUN at Rotary Club of Little Rock, and you know what I'm going to say here. Why do we know it was TRUE FUN? Because it had all the elements - Connection, Playfulness and Flow. I loved going through all the pictures of our past year. It helped me get into the mindset of how I wanted to reflect on this year.

And it really is all about the smiles and moments of laughter I kept seeing time and time again as I scrolled through Nelson's picture galleries of every week and our many socials and service opportunities. You can literally see the fun, joy and happiness we are having with each other, which honestly just fills my cup so much. That was the goal and to see it happen each week over the past year has been one of the best moments of my life.

This year was all about member engagement and helping you all get to know each other outside of the Tuesday meeting, and I think we definitely did that!

Thanks to an amazing Board, committee chairs, members and staff, we accomplished a whole lot this year. Here's a quick look in numbers at some of our successes.



We started out the year with two champagne hoop girls, an awesome trumpet player, a few circus acts, a video of your President riding roller coasters and a new member. One of the best moments of that kick-off day to my year as President was when our new member, Steve Straessle, said "Wow, if I had realized there were dancing girls and champagne at Rotary, I would have joined way sooner!"

So funny, glad you joined Steve, along with an awesome 43 new members this year thanks to Membership Recruitment Chairman Elizabeth Clogston, her committee and

many of you who brought guests and shared the many benefits of this Club among your friends and colleagues.

We coordinated 12 service projects with the goal of having at least one quarterly outing where we were out and about in the community. We also continued with long-term projects such as supporting Dunbar Middle School and working to get the Literacy Lab up and running in the Little Rock School District, which will see a new and improved version rolling out for this upcoming school year thanks to a core group of Club 99ers who are dedicated to making this happen.

We also hosted 12 socials for our members to have fun together â€” everything from getting the first sneak peek to Wrightâ€™s Barbecue when it opened and a night of pickleball fun at the brand new Little Rock Athletic Club pickleball facility to several happy hours, a sake and bourbon tasting, dinner parties at Club 99ers homes, a family picnic, Top Golf and more!

And we created new Affinity Groups â€” continuing to grow the Women of Rotary group and adding a new monthly Book Club for Club 99ers focused on leadership and hosted by fellow members in their homes and workplaces.

We also added one new, beautiful and FUN mural to the downtown landscape â€” making our mark on the River Market District, where we meet each week, and helping share our message of The Power of Fun this year by reminding visitors and residents that Little Rock is Big on Fun!

We coordinated 46 programs this year â€” everything from panel discussions on anxious teens and antisemitism to school choice and Arkansasâ€™ lithium rush to the groundbreaking of the new Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Music Center, the business of Halloween, the federal Farm Bill, Titanic collecting, Little Rockâ€™s Real Time Crime Center, AI in schools, duck-onomics, Arkansas foodies, the power of women of color, and so much more! All of which were fabulous and also gained a lot of attention from media, which published or ran 248 stories about all the FUN and learning we are having at Club 99! Shoutout to Libby Lloyd on my Ghidotti team who made that happen each week!

And we produced, directed and edited 41 awesome member videos showcasing all the unique and special TRUE FUN our members are having.

And, FINALLY, we added one more addition to the Rotary 4-way test: adding the very important 5th test of â€” IS IT FUN?!

It was a FULL Rotary year, and I could not have done any of it without some very special people who I would like to recognize and thank!

First, to our Board members â€” Jason Chacko, Mitch Bettis, Denver Peacock, Molly McNulty, Don Cole, Drew Harper, Wendy Wood, Nate Coulter, T. Martin Davis, Lena Hayes, Tanya James, Greg McCarroll, Kevin Newton, Sue Owens, Viji Kuruvilla, Jessie Wilson and Suzanne Peyton â€” thank you for your leadership and guidance this past year.

Next, to our amazing Committee Chairs:

Amy Meins, Programs
Dan Parker, Service
Membership Recruitment, Elizabeth Clogston
Membership Engagement, Mandy Richardson
Literacy Lab, Mitch Bettis
Socials, Alisha Curtis
Affinity Groups, Juli Brandenburger
Aldersgate Fish Fry, Jason Parker
Business and Professional Leader, Chris Bahn
Police & Fire Awards, Ed Owens and Becky Finney
Drug Take Back, Courtney Little
College Scholarships, Sara Beth Estes
Dunbar Middle Partnership, Mitsy Tharp
Sergeant-of-Arms/Greeters and Meeting Volunteers, Wendy Wood
Ottenheimer International Youth Program, Cindy VanVeckhoven and T. Martin Davis

Thank you for an incredible year of Service Above Self to make Club 99 the very best Rotary Club out there! You made this year all about The Power of Fun, and Iâ€™m so thankful for your hard work!

Last Tuesday I also made a few special recognitions.

First to our audio-visual team: **Club 99er Brad Bureson, Jane Madden** on my Ghidotti team, **Kyle Looney** with Elevate Creative, Photographer **Nelson Chenault** and **Jake Wyatt** with CWP Productions. This team has been a huge part of The Power of Fun this year. All of the audio and visual that has been a part of this past year is because of them.

Brad, Jane and Kyle have worked so hard on making these weekly member videos come to life with everyoneâ€™s passions. I have absolutely loved watching them, and I know you have too. I loved recognizing them last week with special awards: Brad Bureson for Best Director, Jane Madden for Best Producer and Kyle Looney for Best Videography. You guys are true rockstars. Thank you!!!

And to the worldâ€™s best photographer, who captured all the fun this year â€” thank you, Nelson! You really brought to life all the big and small moments over this year, and I have loved having those for people to see on the Facebook page and share.

And none of this would ever happen each week without the calm presence of Jake Wyatt. You never really see him as he is always in the back behind a screen, but he is making sure presentations, videos, sound and our Zoom meeting are all happening seamlessly! Thanks, Jake!

Next up? **Karen Fetzer** and **Lael Foster** â€” clearly NONE of this would ever happen without these two. Thank you to you both! I truly appreciate everything you have done to help make this year a success. We have had some stressful moments as you do with any massive undertaking like this â€” but, mostly, weâ€™ve had some truly fun moments together and a lot of laughs!

I also recognized two exceptional Club 99ers last week: **Dan Parker with the Service Above Self Award** and **Amy Meins with Rotarian of the Year**.

The Service Above Self Award recognizes someone who truly has put Service Above Self, and loves Rotary for all that we do in our community. I was honored to give this award to my friend, Dan Parker, who so graciously agreed to chair our Service Committee this year. The Service Committee is one that we havenâ€™t had as a specific committee in a long time, but I wanted to bring this back to ensure that we had a laser focus on service and a variety of volunteer opportunities in front of our members throughout the year. The goal was to have at least one outing each quarter for members to participate in, and Dan exceeded that.

Thank you, Dan, for jumping in and fully taking on this leadership role. You put together a fabulous Saturday together working on Ms. Maeâ€™s house for Habitat for Humanity, along with setting up members to teach life skills at The Salvation Army, taking a group over to the Arkansas Foodbank to volunteer and much more. You were absolutely dedicated to Dunbar and our partnership there, and I know that team is forever grateful for your time and commitment.

Next, each year, the President gets the honor of recognizing someone as Rotarian of the Year. I was honored to receive this award from President Kenny Gibbs during his year, and itâ€™s a recognition that I will always treasure. This year, I presented Amy Meins, Miss Programming Extraordinaire, with the Rotarian of the Year Award.

Talk about Service Above Self. I called Amy a month into my presidency almost in a panic â€” our Programming Chair had left to take a job in Northwest Arkansas unexpectedly, and I had to quickly fill a major role in a matter of a couple of weeks. Amy did not hesitate to say yes. Not only did she say yes, but she absolutely took the mission to the next level. I never had to worry about having a solid, interesting, thought-provoking program. Amy saw the vision of The Power of Fun and made it happen every week. I am so grateful for her organization, her fearless attitude, her leadership â€” but, mainly, her friendship. She and I had several toasts after the meeting last week - a very FUN way to end a great year together! Thank you, Amy, and congrats on being Rotarian of the Year!

And, finally, a huge thank you to my team at **Ghidotti Communications**. They have taken on a lot of extra work this year while I have been focused on Rotary. They havenâ€™t let one ball hit the ground. Itâ€™s because of each of them â€” Bethany, Lance, Angela, Libby, Jane, Kelly and Courtney â€” that we have been able to serve our clients while

also serving our community. Thank you! And a crazy special thank you to Jane Madden, who has been mine and Karen's right-hand Rotary gal this year. Can't even thank you enough for all that you have done to support the two of us and for making all my last-minute changes to my presentations!

And, last but not least, to my husband, Jason, and two kiddos, Nathan and Corinne, massive thank-yous. Serving in a capacity like this takes away a lot of your free time, and I appreciate them all understanding how important this was to me to serve in this way. I also appreciate them always accepting the frantic excuse, "I have that Rotary thing!"

I will not say that it will be back to normal at our house because Jason and my kids know me very well; I'll fill this newfound time with another volunteer gig (or two), I'm sure. Thank you, Jason, for all your help in keeping things going on the homefront when I have been "Rotarying." Love you and appreciate you more than you know!

My biggest hope from this year as your President is that you learned something about having fun in life. It's like Brad Burleson told me last week "surely, there is SOMETHING you picked up from me reading to you more than half of Catherine Price's book! LOL!"

But, seriously, I hope that a spark has been ignited here and that no matter how busy our lives get, no matter the pressures we have from others or ourselves to achieve and produce, that we remember to make room for fun. Hopefully after 46 weeks of "fun tips" from me, you've picked up a few things to add to your arsenal.

Honestly, I think every year at Rotary should be The Power of Fun, and we can all make that happen by continuing to engage, learning more about our fellow Rotarians and what brings them joy, and coming together in Service Above Self!

I'll see you at the next Rotary meeting ... I will be happily somewhere in the back FINALLY getting to eat that fabulous lunch again!

Could not attend the meeting in person? Watch a video of it [here](#).

Members Caught Having Fun This Week: Thank you, President Natalie Ghidotti!

The Rotary Not Ready for Prime Time Players certainly had tons of fun at President Ghidotti's last meeting. The players using a Saturday Night Live (SNL) format paid tribute, including: Tuesday Updates with Past Presidents **Kenny Gibbs** and **Jeff Hildebrand**; special guest interviews with **Lori Arnold Ellis**, as President Natalie; **Kelley Bass**, who we learned really wanted to join the Women of Rotary Affinity Group; a visit by **Cathy McGlothlin** as "Nat the Cat" (or Sally O'Malley of SNL); director **Karen Fetzer**; and special musical guest, **Rodney Block** and his trio. We finished the meeting with President Ghidotti's signature "second line" and a champagne toast! What FUN!





Who's Having Fun This Week

In our final Power of Fun member video we get a few insights on what is fun for RY 24.25 **President Jason Chacko**! Check it out [here](#).

Upcoming Programs

July 2024

2 No Meeting - Happy 4th of July Week!

9 RY 2024-2025 Kick Off, President Jason Chacko