

# Illuminate the Rock

Rotary  
La Petite Roche 

**Rotary Club 99: Tuesday, May 2, 2023**

**About the Program: Dr. Melissa Taverner of Lyon College and OneHealth's Merritt Dake with Moderator Skip Rutherford**

Please join us Tuesday for an update on Lyon College Institute of Health Sciences and OneHealth's Efforts to locate the state's first dental and veterinary graduate schools in Little Rock.



**Lyon**  
COLLEGE

Institute of Health Sciences

About the Panelists & Moderator:

### **Melissa Taverner, President, Lyon College**

Since becoming interim president in August 2021 and being selected as the College's 19th president in February 2022, Dr. Melissa Taverner has been integral to several of the most transformational decisions in Lyon College history.

Dr. Taverner has worked with the Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff to expand the College's mission statement and offer select graduate programs; has overseen the initial transition to NCAA Division III for Scots athletics; and has been instrumental in organizing a partnership with White River Health on a proposed RN-to-BSN nursing program at Lyon.

Since joining Lyon College in October 2017 as Provost and Dean of Faculty, Dr. Taverner has worked with stakeholders to establish degree programs in anthropology, communications studies, and exercise science, as well as future graduate professional schools in dental and veterinary medicine through the newly proposed Lyon College Institute of Health Sciences.

Dr. Taverner is married to David Taverner and has two children, Rachel Titus and Jordan Taverner. She received a Ph.D. in environmental science from the University of Virginia, an M.S. in virology from the University of Reading (United Kingdom), and a B.A. in biology from Randolph-Macon Woman's College.

### **Merritt Dake, CEO, One Health Companies**

Merritt grew up in a very rural area of Southern Missouri in a town called West Plains. He graduated in 2008 with degrees in Accounting, International Studies, & Chinese from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX. Dallas is where he started his career as a CPA with Deloitte. Through this work, he found his way into dentistry through a client group of Orthodontists looking to build a national brand.

In 2012, Merritt moved to Little Rock, and alongside a partner Orthodontist, started a small group of Orthodontic practices. Somewhat by accident, this became a multi-faceted services & products business with the mission of supporting independent providers to compete with dental consolidators. In 2015, a group of those providers, alongside Merritt, created Rock Dental Brands with the goals of giving providers more freedom to focus on quality treatment and improved multi-specialty peer to peer collaboration, while addressing the inefficiencies that make dentistry less accessible to patients.

During his tenure with Rock, the core realization of Rock's cross-specialty Doctor Executive Committee was the two biggest stated barriers to accessibility to dentistry, "cost and convenience", were due to the same root problem: there is a nuanced supply and demand gap between the access to the appropriately trained providers who optimally utilize their own and their staff's abilities.

### **James L. "Skip" Rutherford III, Moderator**

Skip Rutherford is Dean Emeritus of the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service. He served as Dean from 2006-2021. Prior to becoming Dean, he coordinated the planning, construction and opening of the Clinton Presidential Library and Park.

A graduate of the University of Arkansas, he received the Journalism Department's first Distinguished Alumnus Award. He has an extensive private sector background in communications and public relations.

He has served as a visiting professor at Lyon College, the University of Arkansas, the University of the Ozarks, and the University of Central Arkansas and was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree from Hendrix College.

He serves on the Board of Trustees at Lyon College and the Board of Directors of the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI). The Arkansas Children's Inc. Hospital System, the Arkansas Newspaper Foundation, and the Arkansas Cinema Society.

He has been named Headliner of the Year by the Arkansas Press Association; Arkansan of the Year by the Arkansas Broadcasters Association; Arkansan of the Year by the Arkansas Times and was recognized as Tourism Person of the Year.

He and his wife, Billie, are the parents of three adult children and have two grandchildren. They are members of Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church where he co-teaches a young adult Sunday School class; is a past chairman of the Board of Stewards and co-chaired the church's centennial.

He also co-owns and manages two family farms in Independence and Jackson counties.

## **Did You Miss the Maternity Health Crisis Panel and "Giving Birth in America: Arkansas" Trailer?**





According to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Arkansas has the highest rate of maternal mortality in the nation.

During Tuesday's Club 99 meeting, a panel of subject matter experts in the fields of obstetrics, gynecology and community health weighed in on factors driving the continued health disparities and discussed potential solutions and efforts to improve our maternal health landscape.

The panel discussion took place one day before the world premiere of Every Mother Counts' new short film "Giving Birth in America: Arkansas," which follows three mothers through their pregnancies and postpartum periods and highlights Arkansas' growing maternal health crisis. To kick off the panel discussion, guests were shown the two-minute film trailer.

Panelists included Pearl McElfish, Ph.D., MBA, MS, director of the Office of Community Health and Research at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS); Rosalyn Perkins, MNsc, APRN, WHNP-BC, director of the High-Risk Pregnancy Program in the Institute of Digital Health & Innovation at UAMS; Eddie Phillips, M.D., OB-GYN, chief medical officer at Baptist Health; and Gloria Richard-Davis, M.D., MBA, NCMP, FACOG, OB-GYN / REI, executive director of the UAMS Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Dr. Phillips opened the discussion by highlighting a concerning lack of OB-GYNs and other health care professionals trained to address prenatal and postpartum care. Physicians are retiring and new ones are not entering the workforce at the rate needed to support the state. Dr. Richard-Davis added that Arkansas also suffers from a lack of hospitals. "Thirty-five of our 75 counties are considered maternal health care deserts," she said, meaning that these counties do not have a birthing hospital or obstetrical services.



Another factor driving Arkansas' maternal mortality rate is the overall health of Arkansans. In Arkansas, much like across the nation, we are facing an epidemic of obesity. Obesity in patients, especially pregnant and postpartum mothers, can lead to an increased risk of diabetes, hypertension and other serious conditions. Panelists discussed the need for all mothers to have access to quality pre-conception and prenatal care to address health concerns before they become fatal.

Dr. McElfish pointed out that while we are certainly facing a maternal care crisis in the state, things are improving. She said over the past year, the state has begun testing a program to send moms home with telemedicine units and do earlier follow-ups, rather than waiting until six weeks postpartum to check on mothers. She also mentioned a pilot program to deliver healthy food to moms during pregnancy to ensure they get the nutrition needed to maintain a healthy weight and sustain their pregnancies.

Perkins underscored the importance of prenatal education and ensuring that all mothers have access to those early services to identify potential challenges. She identified advances in telemedicine that help to reach mothers in parts of the state where prenatal and maternal care is a challenge.

Dr. Phillips also highlighted collaborations between hospitals, such as UAMS and Baptist Health, that aim to get more OB-GYNs graduated and in practice around the state. He said they are also working on a program to train family practice physicians to perform basic obstetrical services as well.

Watch the full panel discussion [here](#). The full-length film is also now live on the Every Mother Counts website. Watch "Giving Birth in America: Arkansas" [here](#).



**The Big 5-0! Special Welcome to Jim and Wade!**

We exceeded our 2022-2023 goal of adding 50 new members with the introduction of Jim McGill of AquaSHIELD and Wade Palmer of Servpro. Steve Ronnell sponsored

McGill, while Molly McNulty sponsored Palmer. Welcome to Club 99, Jim and Wade! Congratulations to Molly and the entire membership recruitment team!

## Upcoming Programs and Events

### May 2023

2 Update on Lyon College Institute of Health Sciences and OneHealth's Efforts to locate the state's first dental and veterinary graduate schools in Little Rock with Lyon College President Melissa Taverner, One Health's CEO and Founder Merritt Dake with moderator Skip Rutherford  
9 Natural State Advisory Council Panel with First Gentleman Bryan Sanders, Tom Walton, Mindy West and moderator Suzanne Grobmyer  
16 A Conversation with Toby Enqvist, EVP and Global COO of United Airlines, with Mike Marquez  
23 Evening Social: Ottenheimer International Scholars Program 75th Anniversary Gala at AMFA (No Noon Meeting!) with entertainment by Rodney Block (RSVP required)  
30 Jonathan Martin, Politico

### June 2023

2 *Service Project: Dunbar Project Locker Service Day*  
6 La Petite Roche Global Service Awards Honoring the Little Rock Nine  
13 Ross DeVol, Heartland Forward  
20 Northwest Arkansas Council Conversation with Nelson Peacock and Marshall Saviers  
27 President Peacock Farewell / Transition to President-Elect Natalie Ghidotti

## Zoom Login for May 2, 2023

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83086326824?pwd=V2ZSQIZPNFFKTzdtOU9JVjlmazJDUT09>

Meeting ID: 830 [8632 6824](#)

Passcode: 185449

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Meeting ID: 830 [8632 6824](#)

Passcode: 185449

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/keFv5MxW82>

## 2022-2023 Club Leadership





**President Denver Peacock**  
The Peacock Group



**President Elect Natalie Ghidotti**  
Ghidotti Communications



**President Nominee Jason Chacko**  
The Chacko Group at Morgan Stanley



**Past President Kristina Bolhouse**  
Arkansas Financial Group, Inc.



**Treasurer Leigh Ann Biernat**  
Stephens Public Finance



**Treasurer Elect Don Cole**  
Methodist Family Health



**Secretary Tammie Davis**  
BancorpSouth



**Sergeant At Arms Greg McCarroll**  
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**Foundation Chair Bill Booker**



**Mitch Bettis**  
Arkansas Business Publishing Group



**Eilon Cockrill**



**T. Martin Davis**  
Davis Law Firm



**Lena Hayes**  
Baptist Health Foundation



**Wanda Hoover**  
Bowen Law School



**Tanya James**  
Arvest Bank



**Kevin Newton**  
CBM Construction



**Jessie Wilson**  
Dale Carnegie Training



**Kenny Gibbs**  
Assistant District Governor