



Rotary Club of Kalamazoo

March 4, 2024

Editorian: Charles Ofstein

President-Elect Taylor S. Huie called our meeting to order at approximately 12:15 PM. The Club recited the Pledge of Allegiance. Past President Seth Weeldreyer presented a compelling invocation concentrating on current issues.

Rotarian Troy Thrash presented Arts News. The focus this week was on music, theatre, dance, and the joy of leap year! As always, for up-to-date information, such as times, locations, and other information for events in our area, click: <https://www.kalamazooarts.org/>.

Visiting Rotarians today included Past District Governor Kathy Gallagher (Battle Creek). Visiting guests included Eric Wimbley, Jennifer Jackson, and Jerry Albertson (introduced by Rotarian Jack Hopkins).

Announcements

- Please continue to donate to Rotary Charities. We provide grants to local organizations two times per year. These grants are targeted towards capital expenses and or to new projects rather than operating expenses. For additional information, reach out to President-Elect Taylor S. Huie.
- Please continue to bring guests! Outreach is important in our community, especially as we exit the pandemic.
- Our next 5:01 will be on March 12th at KNAC, 315 W. Michigan Avenue.
- Rotarian Jeff Murphy encouraged everyone to participate in this year's Red Rose Award nomination process.
- President-Elect Taylor Huie requested assistance with lodging for an international Rotaract student. He will be here during the week of May 8th to take a class at Western Michigan University. For more information, please reach out to Taylor.
- Our meeting next week will be at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 247 W. Lovell. Our permanent meeting location at Milestone Senior Service will be undergoing renovations.
- There are lots of upcoming volunteer opportunities. This includes the Kalamazoo River Valley cleanup project, on April 20th. Past District Governor Kathy Gallagher continues to look for sponsors for this important project.

New Member Intro

Our newest Rotarian, Eric Wimbley, introduced himself to the group. Eric, 60, is married with two children. His professional career began with teaching. He now serves as the current CEO of Pretty Lake Camp, located on Q Ave in Texas Township. In addition to its summer programming, it is committed to being the “Community’s Camp” – a year-round resource for campers, families, schools, retreat guests, and the community at large. For more information, see <https://www.prettylakecamp.org/>.

Welcome to the club, Eric! We appreciate your enthusiasm for our mission, as we appreciate yours!

Happy Bucks

- Nick Boyd’s son will appear in Disney’s the Lion King, Jr., April 19 through April 18 at the Civic’s Parish Theatre.
- Bill Rose contributed to honor Rotarian Sandy Bliesener’s influential involvement as a sponsor in the Kalamazoo River Valley cleanup project.
- Kathy Gallagher contributed Rick Briscoe’s dollar for the Kalamazoo River Valley Cleanup.
- Don Flesche announced that his grandson captains the squash team at Princeton University, who finally beat Harvard this year.
- Eric Wimbley contributed a dollar because he was enthusiastic about Rotary.

Presentation:

Today’s speaker was introduced by Bill Rose. Diego Zambrana is a staff member at the Children’s Nature Playscape, a new non-profit nature inspired landscape near Bronson Park. Significantly, our Rotary Charities contributed some of the seed money to get this project started. The concept was presented at a club presentation a few years ago.

The Children’s Nature Playscape is a space where children are encouraged to engage in creative unstructured play with natural elements in a park-like setting. Its mission includes bringing nature to kids aged 0-10 who do not have direct access to it. Its signature programs include Reading in Nature, a literary based program featuring local authors, and Exploring in Nature, a STEM program associated with Western Michigan University. The Playscape also hosts several pre-play and after-play programs in affiliation with events at Bronson Park.

The Children’s Nature Playscape is well on its way to Phase 2 of the project. Phase 2 includes the addition of an Executive Director, Nora Seilheimer, and intentional programming focusing on the values of Play, Explore, Grow, and Restore. The Playscape intends to offer its enhanced programming to daycare centers and elementary schools in the greater Kalamazoo area. It will focus initially on the “CNP Zone,” a 10-block radius near the Playscape.

Additional goals of Phase 2 include increasing the percentage of citizens using the Playscape within the CNP Zone, connecting families with more resources, and exposing even more Kalamazoo children to nature. The Playscape has recently added a chime

fence, a music center, and intends to add a learning pavilion. The Playscape will open this spring with the new stations.

The Playscape is actively seeking donations and is increasing networking within the community. For additional information and to connect with this inspiring project, please see <https://www.kalamazooplayscape.org/home>.

Thank you, Diego, for answering all our questions about this important project in Downtown Kalamazoo!