

President Josh Goodlock called the meeting to order at 12:03 p.m.

Rotarians and guests recited The Pledge of Allegiance.

Rotarians and guests recited The Four Way Test.

Chris Buckley gave our invocation.

Our greeter Ginny Dell introduced our visitors: advisor Rick Searing and Kirby Back from Portage Northern High School (PNHS) Interact and Kathleen Hoyle, our speaker for today.

President Josh introduced Rick Searing, PNHS Interact advisor. Rick introduced Kirby, a PNHS Interact leader and senior (on his way to Notre Dame in the fall). Kirby shared highlights of fundraisers, including \$2gether for Tuleeni, which has raised over \$65,000 since 2008. Tuleeni is located in Moshi, Tanzania, on the lower slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. The Tuleeni Orphanage was founded by Mama Faraji, a teacher, who began to care for orphans, starting from her home to creating one big “home” to increase the growth and development of the children. When Portage Northern began supporting Tuleeni, there were 30 students, now there are over 100! Education in Tanzania is lacking, as more than 32 million children remain uneducated around the region. PNHS Interact students keep a continued relationship with Mama Faraji and these children, writing letters and donating money. They love to support and see students go off to college, while others get into better schools and many step foot into their first classroom, all due to the money that PNHS student raise.

President-elect Randy Orwig introduced our speaker, Kathleen Hoyle, Director, City of Portage Parks & Recreation. She has her MBA from Western Michigan University, background with Binder Park Zoo, marketing director, and many more. There are 20 parks in Portage, including an ice rink, beach, and miles of bike trails. Their vision is to create a pedestrian transportation network to connect neighborhoods, businesses, and recreation with a focus on pedestrians, not just automobiles. They plan to create a quality-of-life experience for all generations. This vision offers many benefits, including equitable access, health opportunities, and more collaboration with businesses. Current focus is on the Southeast side of Portage. Celery Flats is the non-motorized transportation hub.

With a focus on bike culture, Portage has achieved silver level status as a Bicycle Friendly Community by The League of American Bicyclists. They moved from bronze to silver and have their sights set on achieving gold next.

The 2024 plan for park facilities includes Lakeview Park – Phase 1 – 2024/2028, with a proposed sledding hill and other fun features. Portage Farmer’s Market updates are planned for 2024/2025 in the city central area, with a campus feel and a minimum of 50 stalls (increase from current 30 stalls in the City Hall parking lot). The East Center Trail should be completed this year to get people of Centre Avenue with a more direct route to Celery Flats. A 3-mile Austin Lake Trail is planned for 2025/2026, bordering Austin Lake. Lexington Green Park Renovation began in 2018 and should be completed this year with a playground with tot swings, widened walking path with lights, walking loop, new expanded parking, new restroom building, and a new picnic pavilion. Lexington Park

already features tennis/pickleball courts, basketball courts, and a new bike skills course. 2027 plans include the Elijah Root Dam with matching funds from the Army Corps of Engineers, with a dam that is failing and needs to be removed. Historical markers, including Lathrop Hotel (was a log cabin first) and Austin's Tavern are planned for 2024/2025.

Other plans include:

- Expand bike rentals
- Install a new ADA playground at Ramona Park
- Improve Ramona Beach ADA dock and amenities
- Expand historic markers
- Collaborate MDNR with Gourdneck State Game Area
- Partner with Portage Cultural Arts Committee
- Continue trail system development – this year, they will add a 1.0-mile trail between Portage Road and Lovers Lane – in a few years, 7 new miles will also be added

## **Announcements**

- Send your 2024 Rotary Hero for Rotary Club of Portage nominations to Josh by **March 22** (josh@skillquestntl.com/517-605-1925!
- Blood drive signup for Thursday, **April 18**
- Memorial Day parade for Monday, **May 27**
- Marathon volunteer signups for Sunday, **May 5**
- **Thank you** to the Portage Education Foundation for their \$2,500 grant for our therapy dog at Portage Community High School (CoHS). We have raised close to \$9K for this project so far! Our goal is \$10K. The dog's name is Rio, and he will arrive on **April 4** to CoHS. Kirby shared a nice shoutout re: Dobbs, the therapy dog at PNHS.
- The Rotary is for Reading program, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Kalamazoo, has openings for reading volunteers. Look for an email from Jim Cupper to sign up. Two Rotarians each visit a second-grade classroom in the Kalamazoo Public Schools during the school district's college awareness week and a read a book called, "What do you see in Room 21C?"
- Please complete your survey that Randy Orwig emailed to each member ASAP.
- Daisey Dollars are here! \$20 each. Pick them up from AJ Srmek.
- Saturday, **April 20**, Earth Day volunteer opportunity for Kalamazoo River cleanup from 11 am – 2 pm. Several groups will be assisting to clean the river from Jackson to Douglass.
- Do not forget our Miller Auditorium fundraiser. Our next show is Jurassic World Live. We must sell ten tickets to each show to make \$10 per ticket. Be sure to use the QR code on the flyer.
- Check your Rotary email to register for the 2024 District Conference at the Radisson in downtown Kalamazoo on May 3-4. Register by **March 15** for the chance to win \$100. All registrations include a free Rotary t-shirt. The deadline for registration is **April 19**. All District 6360 Rotarians are invited to attend. Highlights include:
  - o Interact conference on Friday morning
  - o Edison neighborhood urban garden fruit tree planting Friday afternoon
  - o Taco bar party and art hop presentation, art hop, and pub crawl Friday night
  - o Yoga on Saturday morning

- Mental health awareness walk on Saturday morning
- Lunch and sessions, including Rotaract, Youth services – community impact and membership growth, DEI education, and strategic doing on Saturday afternoon
- Dinner with Rotary Club Heroes and club awards on Saturday night
- Register today!

Happy anniversary to Pete and Char Marsiglia—65 years!

Happy bucks from Randy Orwig, Daniel Cook\*, Art Roberts, Dick Hewitt, Mary Lou Wright, Michael Marsh, Sarah Anne Gerstner, AJ Srmek, Chad Schuring, Mark Bielang, Rick Searing, Kirby Bach, Helen Driver, Kathleen Hoyle, Jose Santamaria (he and Roy are off to PETS this weekend for their Rotary president training), Roy Dangle (support Roy in his Housing Resources Inc A Walk to End Homelessness walk fundraiser), Jim Martin, Ginny Dell, and Mike Marshburn.

Congrats to Daniel Cook\* and our local Blain's Farm & Fleet for winning the community service award.

Our pass the bucked raised \$200 for Tuleeni for today!

Paul Carlson paid a fine for being late.

50/50 drawing: Travis Grimwood won \$50!

Ace of spades drawing: Travis Grimwood did not draw the ace of spades for \$479. The pot grows!

Our next meeting is **March 20** features Portage Mayor Patricia Randall to share her State of the City presentation. Hear all about the amazing things happening in Portage!

Meeting adjourned at 12:55 pm by President Josh Goodlock.