

CLUB NEWS

December 2, 2025

UNITE
FOR
GOOD

The Wilmington
Rotary
Club



Founded April 1915 • A Century of Service Above Self

We're halfway to funding goal; 'Leaders' nominations needed

With early commitments from sponsors, the 2026 Leaders in Service Awards fund-raiser is already nearly at the halfway mark toward our goal of \$125,000 gross receipts, **Mark DeLoach** and **Jack Clark** have reported.



Jack Clark



Mark DeLoach

They are leading the new campaign's fund-raising team, which began reaching out to potential sponsors in September. By November's end, the 17 solicitors had commitments for \$60,000.

The LIS Committee, headed by **Donna Cameron** and **Albert Sementa**, is hoping for 100 percent participation from everyone in the club, whether as sponsors or by buying tickets to the May 13, 2026 awards banquet.

Still lagging, however, are nominations for the coming year's awards. Both club members and the general public are encouraged to propose honorees. An online nomination form will

be open until Jan. 15. It's on the awards website: www.leadersinservice.org

Nominees will be accepted in three categories: private sector, public sector, and non-profits. Persons nominated should have held a leadership position in their organization or local branch.

Other criteria are that nominees have made a significant impact on community needs in one or more of Rotary's seven Areas of Focus. They should also have led their lives and managed their organizations in harmony with the Rotary Four-Way Test, and have demonstrated strong leadership skills, personnel development, and collaboration with other community leaders.

Plaques recognize past-year honorees

Leaders in Service
Service Above Self



The Legacy Award, which may not be given every year, is memorialized in the plaque above. Gene Merritt, Jr. and Bertha Todd are the only two honorees so far.

The Leaders in Service 'Roll of Honor' plaque, above left, names honorees in all three categories starting with the awards' first year, 2022. The newest names on both plaques were unveiled at our Nov. 4 meeting.



Bob Kitchen, last year's co-chair, describes why Margaret Weller Stargell, Eugene Merritt, Jr. and Ben David were honored with the 2025 Leaders in Service Awards.

Giving the upcoming Leaders in Service Awards campaign a strong early boost, the club invited past honorees and sponsors to attend our Nov. 4 meeting. Their names have been added to a pair of plaques. The club is looking for a suitable place to hang those plaques permanently.

The 2025 LIS honorees **Mar-**

garet Weller Stargell and **Ben David** were present, as was 2025 Legacy honoree **Eugene Merritt, Jr.** (Private-sector honoree **James S. "Chip" Mahan** was unable to attend.)

Also invited to join the Nov. 4 lunch meeting were all the 2025 sponsors, who were encouraged to renew their support for 2026.

Rotarians step up, sorting and collecting food, thanking teachers



Eymani Alston, Donna Shiro, Cat Marinich, Don McGlynn, and Ben David at work at Food Bank.



Volunteer vegetable sorters include Rosemary Guendner, Greg Lewis, and Nicolette Fulton.



Rotarians Dale Smith and Michael Gillespie show off pecks of peppers they picked & packed.

On Sept. 27, Rotarians sorted more than 6,000 pounds of fresh produce at the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina. The veggies provided more than 5,000 meals for food-insecure families.

Rotarians wore new “Rotary In Action” t-shirts to showcase our brand.

Leadership course graduates 3 members

Several of our members attended the Rotary Leadership Institute Oct. 25 in Leland and three graduated from the course. While new Rotarians are encouraged to participate, RLI is also useful for veterans, as President **David Grandey**, Past President **Steve Yates** and Secretary **Elliott O’Neill** learned, finishing three sessions and graduating. The club pays the registration fee for any member who wants to attend.



A discussion at the Oct. 25 Rotary Leadership Institute session includes Elliott O’Neill and Steve Yates. Both graduated from RLI and said even long-serving active members can benefit from the course.



Virgo Academy Office Manager Michelle Dykes accepts snacks for the faculty from Kate Baillon.



Alderman Principal Bobby Garcia welcomes David Grandey, who presented snacks and cards.

As the new school year began, Rotary volunteers offered teachers a morale-booster: hand-written cards to show our appreciation. Written Oct. 7, the cards were delivered to Alderman Elementary School, DC Virgo Academy, and Williston Middle School.

President **David Grandey** delivered 40 notes and a selection of snacks for teachers at Alderman.

Rotarian **Kate Baillon** delivered 20 notes, and some treats, to D.C. Virgo.

Also helping deliver were **Dori Bis-hara**, who coordinated the project, **Donna Hargens**, **Marissa Ruehle**, and **Eileen Stephan**.



Marissa Ruehle contributes a box of groceries.



Bunny Donahue and Chris Sepich bring non-perishable food, under the approving eye of Tracy Linderholm, right.

In November, our club joined with other Wilmington area Rotary clubs to collect nonperishable foods for the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina.

On Nov. 4, 11, and 18, members of our club donated 324 pounds of groceries, plus \$300 cash, which the Food Bank used to buy more food.

This campaign was especially timely because the Food Bank’s resources were being stretched by the suspension of federal SNAP food-assistance benefits for low-income families during the federal government shut-down.

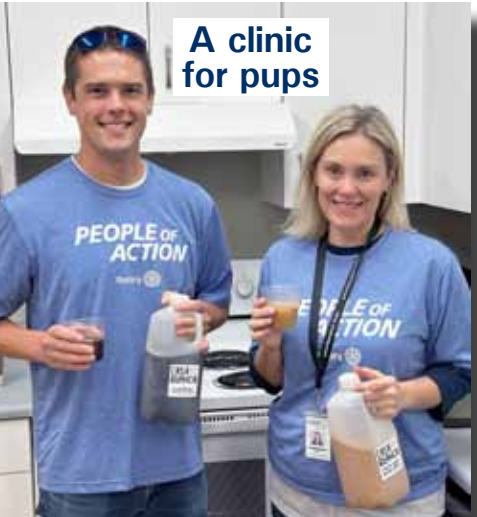
Projects include a coat collection and help for service-dog training



Bob Kitchen, Ramona Farrell and Don McGlynn.

The six Rotary Clubs in Wilmington set a goal to collect 120 winter coats for First Fruit Ministries to distribute to homeless people. On Nov. 11, our members supplied two-thirds of that goal, donating 80 coats.

First Fruit’s mission is to support the homeless and victims of human trafficking with food and other assistance.



Jimmy Brewer and Melissa White take a break for liquid refreshment donated by Mariss Ruehle.



Max Wagenseller and Marissa Ruehle get some puppy love from a service dog in training.

On an Oct. 25 work day, Rotarians helped set up paws4people’s in-house facility for the medical care of its puppies, in training to become service dogs for people with disabilities including post-traumatic stress disorder. This work was part of a \$2,000 District Grant project to create that neonatal care space at paws4people’s Castle Hayne facility.



Chris Utesch, Jimmy Brewer and Jack Kane at the wheelchair ramp that our club donated.



Kate Baillon and Tracy Linderholm hard at work.



Jack Kane, Max Wagenseller, Marissa Ruehle, Tracy Linderholm, Bunny Donahue, Eymani Alston and Chris Utesch get to know the pups.

Booth at biz expo attracts interest from dozens of prospective new members

As we have several times in recent years, the club exhibited at the *Greater Wilmington Business Journal’s* “Spark” exposition on Oct. 1. We presented attendees with information about our club, including a slide show about the Leaders in Service Awards. Staffing our booth were President **David Grandey**, President-

elect **Tiffany Kitchen**, President-nominee **Matt Hilliard**, **Pam Hardy**, and **Bob Kitchen**. They connected with dozens of people who expressed interest in joining us and provided their contact information. Our Membership Recruitment Committee followed up and reached out to those prospective members.



Matt Hilliard converses with a biz expo attendee.



Rotarians including Katie Corpening and Jameson Tomlin hob-nob at Wine Knot Sky Bar.

Fifth Wednesday social features high-rise space with great views

The latest in our occasional Fifth Wednesday socials took Rotarians high atop the Murchison Building Oct. 29, for drinks, snacks and socializing at Wine Knot Sky Bar.

Jamie Stokley dies at 40; was home health firm founder and Rotarian

Jamie Stokley, a four-year member of this club, died unexpectedly on Oct 24. She was 40 years old. Jamie became a Rotarian on July 13, 2021, sponsored by David Morrison. She was in the home health care business, having founded and operated the agency called Helping Hands of the Cape Fear. Jamie was a Wilmington native and had over 15 years of experience in home care. According to her organization, Jamie held degrees in business and healthcare administration. She was also active in civic service, including the Rotary Club and the New Hanover County Endowment Advisory Board, and was recognized as a WILMA magazine

“Women to Watch” honoree. Her peers remember her as someone who “saw people, not problems,” turning her professional skills into life-changing support for the region’s most vulnerable. Under her leadership, Helping Hands’ mission was to provide respite housing for unsheltered people recovering from illness or hospitalization, giving them a safe place to heal and return to a stable life. Survivors include her children. Funeral services were held on Nov. 5 at Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church in Wilmington. Burial followed in Calvary Memorial Cemetery.



Jamie Stokley had been a member of the club since 2021.

Russ LaBelle, manufacturer, Rotarian, past District Governor, dies at 86

Russell J. LaBelle, a member of this club since 1992, died Nov. 11. He was 86. Born April 10, 1939, in Michigan, he graduated from Muskegon Catholic Central High School and attended Muskegon County Community College until he was drafted into the Army. As a boy, he sold Grit newspapers in his neighborhood. He caddied for golfers and, as a teen, worked for a builder, an auto parts store, and a furniture manufacturer. After his army service, Russ graduated from Western Michigan University in 1956 with a degree in engineering. After working in the plastics industry in Akron, Ohio, he moved to Greensboro where he began his business,

manufacturing machinery for molding plastic bottles. In 1972, he moved the company to Wilmington and named it Wilmington Machinery, Inc. Russ was an avid boater who cherished his 46-foot trawler, the Freda-Bea. He loved cars old and new. A patron of the arts, he supported Cameron Art Museum. He loved jazz music. As a Rotarian, he was district governor for 2004-05. He served as president of the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce and was a board member at UNC-Wilmington and New Hanover Regional Medical Center. He is survived by his life partner, Michael T. Jones. A funeral mass was held Dec. 2.



Russ LaBelle was a major philanthropist and District 7730 governor for 2004-05.

President David Grandey speaks at the centennial celebration at Greenfield Park. He offered remarks about the park’s history and our club’s extensive investments there, which include the Heber Johnson Amphitheater and the Rotary Wheel Garden, seen here.



Rotary celebrates park’s 100th

When the City of Wilmington created Greenfield Park in 1925, it was largely the result of lobbying and other support from this club, then ten years old. A century later, on Nov. 1, we were part of a Centennial celebration in the Rotary Wheel Garden that we donated to the city in 1965. We set up a table with information about our club and Rotary International.



Lawler: Is it the truth?

Four-Way Test minutes

Starting Oct. 28, the Four-Way Test Committee has been presenting brief talks about the meaning of Rotary’s central statement of ethics. Paul Lawler kicked off the series with thoughts about how different people define truth. Julie Rehder followed, on Nov. 18, with thoughts about how we interpret fairness. The next three-minute installment will be on Jan. 27, addressing good will and friendship.



Rehder: Is it fair to all?

- 1. Is it the truth? 2. Is it fair to all concerned? 3. Will it build good will and better friendships? 4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?



Newsletter photos

Robby Collins, Dori Bishara, Heather Evans, Ramona Farrell, Mary Feurer, David Grandey, Allan Lusk, John Meyer & Donna Shiro

New members inducted, introduce themselves

Seven new members have joined the club since late September, and we have heard brief introductory speeches from several of them. Donna Hargens, Jameson Tomlin, and Max Wagenseller joined on Sept. 23. Donna and Jameson gave new-member talks Oct. 28; Max on Oct. 14. Donna is a retired superintendant of the Louisville, Ky. public schools and the Catholic Baltimore Diocese’s parochial schools and is an eleven-year Rotarian, having been a member of Rotary Clubs in Cary and Louisville. Joe Owen is her sponsor. Jameson is development director for Cape Fear Habitat for Humanity. Christina Ferris sponsored him. Before coming to Wilmington, he and his wife were missionaries in Nicaragua. Max works in real estate and property management and is an advisor for the New Hanover High School Interact Club. He first encountered our club as a student musician from Williston Middle School, when its orchestra played for our club’s annual holiday party. Joe Owen is Max’s sponsor. On Oct. 14, Heather Wilson was inducted, sponsored by Tiffany Kitchen. She is director of the Cameron Art Museum.

Also Sept. 23, Jarrett Donmoyer spoke to the club. He is chief operating officer at Thalian Hall. He was inducted Aug. 12, sponsored by Mark Ihnat. Giving his new-member talk Oct. 7 was Marty Meyerson. A retired radiologist, he joined the club Sept. 2, sponsored by Clint Meyer. Since retiring, Marty has volunteered at the Cape Fear Clinic. Paul Niggl spoke on Nov. 4. He recently retired as a major after twenty years in the Marine Corps, working as an intelligence officer. He was inducted Sept. 9, sponsored by Dori Bishara. On Nov. 11, Brittnei LaRue joined. Her sponsor is Erin Payne. Brittnei is a financial adviser, working with Banker’s Life Securities. She delivered her new-member talk on Nov. 25. Also Nov. 25, two more members were inducted. Montgomery Coudriet was sponsored by Hansen Matthews. She works in business development for Citrus Cans, which cleans trash containers. Teresa Wolf was sponsored by Mimi Cunningham. Already a Rotarian, she was a member of clubs in San Jose, California and Durham. She is chief executive officer of the job-training agency StepUp Wilmington.



Nov. 11, our newest members and their sponsors: Cunningham, Wolf, Coudriet and Matthews.



Donna Hargens



Jameson Tomlin



Max Wagenseller



Heather Wilson



Jarrett Donmoyer



Marty Meyerson



Paul Niggl



Brittnei LaRue



Montgomery Coudriet



Teresa Wolf



David Grandey and other Rotarians tour the kitchen at Salvation Army's Center for Hope.



Chris Sepich, Steve Yates, and Dale Lazar check out part of First Fruit Ministries' housing area.



Deacon John Walsh, center, leads a tour of the St. Mary sanctuary. From left: Steve Lester, Rich Trubia, John Hatcher, Terry Smith, Terri Everett, Bob Kitchen, Tiffany Kitchen, Katie Corpening, Donna Hargens, and Rob Zapple.



Rotarians gather for a tour of GE Aerospace factory at Castle Hayne, which makes jet engine components. From left: Allan Lusk, Jimmy Brewer, Kevin Crane, Jay Martin, Alex White, Ally Adams, Rosemary Guendner, Don McGlynn, Jack Clark, Kate Baillon, Marissa Ruehle, Nick Rhodes, Charlotte Davis, and Paul Lawler.

Vocational Day introduces Rotarians to six workplaces

Sixty Rotarians visited six locations for Vocational Fellowship Day on Oct. 21. This chance to visit a variety of work places was coordinated this year by **Ramona Farrell, Allan Lusk, and Michael Gillespie**.

Host sites were: The Basilica of St. Mary; Beacon Education and GLOW Academy; First Fruit Ministries; General Electric Aerospace; Greenfield Lake Amphitheater; and the Salvation Army's new Center for Hope.



Young Rotarians socializing Sept. 24 at Covey, clockwise from left: Austin Griffie, Eymani Alston, Carter Jewell, President-elect Tiffany Kitchen, Max Wagenseller, Albert Sementa, Jimmy Brewer, Allan Lusk, Jameson Tomlin, Marissa Ruehle, Alex White, committee chair Donna Shiro, Layne Cromwell, and Jarrett Donmoyer. The committee's next social will be Dec 3.

Under-40s network, serve

The club's younger members are devoting energy and creativity to social gatherings, service projects, and other committee work. Twelve of the club's 23 members younger than 40 socialized Sept. 24 at Covey restaurant and bar.

Many joined in a club-wide service project Oct. 25 at paws4people (SEE: *page 3*), which was part of a \$2,000 District Grant project at that service-dog training organization.

The Under 40s will have another social from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Dec. 3 at Wrightsville Beach Brewery's private Barrel Room. This is open to anyone under 40.



At lunch at Terri Everett's house were: Lou DiGiuso, Terry Smith, Terri Everett, Nancy Bullock, R.B. Richey, and David Grandey.

Celebrating veterans with parade and lunch

Rotarians **RB Richey**, ex-Navy, and **Lou DiGiusto**, Coast Guard, rode in Wilmington's Veterans Day Parade on Nov. 8. **Terry Smith** drove them in a car donated by former club member Noah Woods. Afterwards, they and spectators were treated to a lunch at **Terri Everett's** house where **Nancy Bullock** and her husband, Bruce McGuire, helped prepare food. The following Tuesday, Terri presented our Veterans' Day program.

Pub crawl and service project coming soon

The club's second annual Holiday Crawl is scheduled for 5 to 7 p.m. Dec. 11. Participants will visit two downtown eating and drinking places on South Front Street, and take in downtown's Christmas decorations. To join in, sign up with **Cat Marinich** by email to cat.marinich@nothingbundtcakes.com.

The next major service project will be garden-maintenance work from 9 a.m. to noon Dec. 13 at Willowdale Farms, 215 N. 30th St. This is part of a District Grant project. To participate, sign up by email with **Dori Bishara** at dbishara@revfcu.com.

Programs cover Wilmington's attractions, garden make-over, leadership, spycraft, and berry farms



Staton: cool Wilmington



Achec: native garden plan



Hufham: tourism promo



Hirschak: Ghost Walk tour



Everett: national intelligence



Webb: Lewis Farms berries



Jones



Long



Redenbaugh



Strech



Taylor



Wilson-Mathis

Representatives of six non-profits spoke at Sept. 30 meeting.

Our guest speaker on Sept. 23 was **John Staton**, the *StarNews* arts and entertainment reporter. He spoke on "What makes Wilmington cool," including film and TV production, theater and music, art, comedy, and several up-and-coming neighborhoods.

Representatives of six non-profit agencies made presentations about their work on Sept. 30. They were: **Dick Jones** of the YMCA; **Wendy Long** of Feast Down East; Rotarian **Elizabeth Redenbaugh** of Coastal Horizons; Rotarian **Cara Strech** of Cape Fear Collective; **Tommy Taylor** of Cape Fear United Way; and **Jen Wilson-Mathis** of Beacon Education and GLOW Academy. The club presented \$300 checks to five of the agencies; Cara asked that the Cape Fear Collective's share be divided among the others.

On Oct. 7, landscape designer **Patti Achec** and **Margee Herring** of the Alliance for Cape Fear Trees returned to present a proposal for a native-plant demonstration garden at the Rotary Wheel Garden in Greenfield Park. For details on that plan, SEE: *sidebar below*.

Kim Hufham, CEO of the Wilmington & Beaches Convention and Visitors Bureau, spoke Oct. 14 about the state of the local tourism business and area visitor attractions.

Because Oct. 21 was our annual Vocational Fellowship Day, we did not meet for lunch at Tileston. Members divided up to visit half a dozen host venues. SEE: *page 6*.

Haunted houses and ghost stories were the topic Oct. 28, when **John Hirschak** of Ghost Walk of Old Wilmington presented a spooky pre-Halloween program.

The Nov. 4 program focused on the club's Leaders in Service Awards fund-raiser. With past honorees and sponsors as our guests, we heard a talk on leadership from **Dr. Rebecca Guidice**, professor of management and director of the Executive MBA Program at UNC-Wilmington's Cameron School of Business.

Rotarian **Terri Everett**, a retiree from the federal intelligence community, gave a Veterans' Day program Nov. 11 about the role of intelligence in national security.

On Nov. 18, for our annual Farm-City Week program, **Walt Webb** of Lewis Farms described his company's business of growing and selling berries and the importance of migrant labor from Mexico to his company.

Our Nov. 25 program featured six Rotarians talking what they are thankful for. Among the most common themes included community, family, friends, and this club. President **David Grandey** introduced the other five: **Kate Baillon, Nicolette Fulton, Pam Hardy, Matt Hilliard, and Alex White**.



Herring: Rotary Wheel



Guidice: leadership



Grandey: Thanksgiving

The garden reimagined

The Rotary Wheel Garden could become a demonstration plot for sustainable native plants and trees. At our Oct. 7 meeting, speakers Patti Achec and Margee Herring presented a plan to redesign the plantings inside the brick walls, add informative signs and spaces for events. Total cost is projected to be around \$400,000 total, mostly for plants and new walkways.

Upcoming programs & events

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

The Rotary Foundation: Doing good in the world, with Rotarian **Ramona Farrell**, Foundation Committee chair.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

Affordable housing: Challenges and solutions. Panelists **Marlowe Foster**, **Andy Jones**, and **Katrina Knight**, moderated by **Ben Schachtman** of WHQR radio.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

Holiday Crawl: an after-hours social. Visit and network at fun new locations downtown. 5-7 p.m. SEE: *page 6*.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

Annual holiday party. Members' spouses, children and grandchildren are invited to join us for lunch and fun.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23

No meeting. Christmas holiday.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30

No meeting. New Year's Day holiday.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6

Economic outlook for 2026 and beyond, with **Dr. Mouhcine Guettabi**, economist at UNC-Wilmington.

MONDAY, JANUARY 12

Board of Directors meeting, 5:15 p.m., First Carolina Bank conference room, 5815 Oleander Drive.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13

Developments in treating blood cancers, with **Frank Monaco** of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

The wreck of the steamer *Waccamaw*, with underwater archaeologist **Mark Wilde-Ramsing**.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27

The CART Fund against Alzheimers and other Rotary initiatives, with a speaker to be announced.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

Girls' and women's sports in the 21st Century, with a speaker to be announced.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9

Board of Directors meeting, 5:15 p.m., First Carolina Bank conference room, 5815 Oleander Drive.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

Using the hospital sale money: With **Shannon Winslow** and **Sophie Dagenais** of the Community Endowment.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Rookie Teachers of the Year Awards: with five beginning New Hanover County Schools educators.

Rotary news briefs

District matches all five grants: On Oct. 7, President David Grandey announced that all the club's grant projects had been approved for matching District Grants. Those grants are going to: Cape Fear River Watch, Nourish N.C., Community Enrichment Initiative, paws4people, and Operation Pretty Things. The total for all is \$14,645.

Blood drive continues: The next monthly blood drive sponsored by area Rotary Clubs and other groups will take place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 17 at Independence Mall. Previous drives were held Oct. 23 and Nov. 28.

Raffle aids CART: From July through September, our club contributed \$841 from raffle proceeds to Coins For Alzheimer's Research Trust. CART dedicated to funding research aimed at finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease. Since 1995, Rotarians have raised more than \$13 million to support research grants including \$2 million this year.

We try random seating again: The Sept. 30 and Nov. 25 meetings featured the return of "musical chairs," by which the club's members were asked to sit at randomly assigned tables. Proposed by President-elect Tiffany Kitchen, this occasional initiative is meant help foster conversation and enhance networking among Rotarians.

"Stuff the Truck" helps furnish homes: On Nov. 15, Rotarians contributed household items including bedding, towels, and kitchen gear that 2Share, Inc. will provide to families establishing their households. The Stuff the Truck project was a collaboration with Wrightsville Beach United Methodist Church.

Rotary 101 course resumes: A series of information sessions, providing the basics about Rotary International and this club, resumed on Oct. 28. The Rotary 101 sessions will begin at noon on the fourth Tuesday of each month. Course materials are being prepared for posting online for Rotarians who can't attend in-person sessions.

Bells to ring through December: Rotarian volunteers will ring the bell for the Salvation Army's Red Kettle Campaign, which funds holiday programs to help families in need. Two-member teams will spend an hour each on Tuesdays through Dec. 23. David Brown is coordinating. Sign up through a link under the "For Rotarians" section on the club's website: www.WilmingtonRotaryClub.org.

Foundation giving recognized: At the District 7730 Foundation Dinner Nov. 15 in Wallace, our club was commended for its support for The Rotary Foundation's Polio Plus campaign. Eradicating polio has been a priority for Rotary and its Foundation since 1987.

Boys & Girls Homes residents see game: Members of the club took thirteen residents of the Rotary Cottage at Lake Waccamaw to a UNCW men's soccer game on Oct. 18. This club has supported the homes and their Rotary Cottage since the 1960s.

Board of Directors Meeting Get In Touch

5:15 pm, 3rd Monday of each month
First Carolina Bank conference room,
5815 Oleander Drive
Wilmington, NC 28403

President David Grandey . . 910-352-2935
Pres.-Elect Tiffany Kitchen . 910-523-2399
Secretary Elliott O'Neal. . . . 910-397-3613
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Submit News Items

Send photos or other information for the newsletter to jmeyer1@ec.rr.com. Please include all pertinent details: names, dates, etc.

Website

www.WilmingtonRotaryClub.org