

Service awards net \$80,000

Our fourth Leaders in Service Awards fundraiser set records for attendance and for money raised. The May 13 banquet packed UNCW's Burney Center. Including sponsorships, banquet tickets, and miscellaneous income, it brought in a gross of over \$116,000, exceeding its \$110,000 goal. With the banquet well-attended by Wilmington's movers and shakers, we raised an additional \$355 from guests who followed QR codes on the tables.

After deducting expenses, mostly for the banquet and for printing, the event will put some \$80,000 into the club's charitable foundation.

This year's honorees were James S. "Chip" Mahan of Live Oak Bank in the private sector; Margaret Weller Stargell of Coastal Horizons Center in the non-profit sector; and Rotarian Ben David of the Community Justice Center in the public sector. The club also presented its second-

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Leaders in Service honorees: James S. "Chip" Mahan, private sector; Gene Merritt, Jr., Legacy Award; Margaret Weller Stargell, non-profit sector; Ben David, public sector.

Member engagement, improved tech are among new President David's priorities

President **David Grandey** promised to make Rotary International's 2025-26 motto "Unite for Good" a statement of this club's purpose "and a rallying cry for action, collaboration, leadership, and service." He offered thoughts about the coming year after being inducted at a dinner June 17.

The induction took place in the officers' wardroom aboard the Battleship North Carolina. The banquet was catered by Middle of the Island, supplemented by pizza donated by Rotarian **Alex White** and his Pizzeria Don Luca, and cakes from **Cat Marinich** and Nothing Bundt Cakes.

Before a social hour and dinner, Rotarians and guests were offered tours of the battleship. After dinner, as darkness fell, the battleship was lit up in blue and gold: Rotary colors. The venue was arranged by **Lou Digiusto**.

New District Governor **Andi Young** inducted club officers and directors.

A top priority for David's presidency, he said, will be "making your Rotary experience as engaging, rewarding, and joyful as possible." That means a emphasizing fellowship, with fun, meaningful events, fresh member spotlights, and a focus on meeting attendance and in-room energy.

He promised to schedule programs addressing Rotary's seven areas of focus, aiming "to spark conversations, inspire ideas, and reflect the diversity of our members' passions." He also wants to get every member involved in a service project "that speaks to them."

Other initiatives will include a streamlined digital member application process and targeted recruitment of both top community leaders and "changemakers under 40."

Among his plans for the coming year will be "fireside chats in members' homes, service projects during our lunch meetings, and committee

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District Governor Andi Young with David Grandey after she inducted him as president.

Leaders in Service

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ever Legacy Award to Eugene W. Merritt, Jr., for his decades of work to improve downtown, help the tourism and hospitality industries, and secure funding to build Interstate 40.

Accepting the award, Merritt said that as a former Rotarian and son of this club's 1972-73 president and our 1976-77 district governor, he has always tried to follow Rotary's Four-Way Test.

Eugene W. Merritt, Sr. was a member of this club from 1952 until 1999.

In follow-up sessions after the event, co-chairs **Bob Kitchen** and **Donna Cameron** offered thanks to all who helped, with special attention to:

Gabe Rich and **Mimi Cunningham**, who oversaw selection of the award recipients; **John Hatcher**, **Jack Clark**, and **Mark DeLoach**, who led the fund-raising team; **Lou DiGiusto**, who produced the video that showed the honorees' reasons for serving; **Cat Marinich** for managing the banquet; **John Meyer** for graphic design, printing, and publicity; **Albert Sementa** and **Vicki Scott** for name tags and programs; and **Mollie Shiflet**, who procured the trophies.

Bob Kitchen is stepping down as Leaders in Service co-chair. **Albert Sementa** will take his place for the 2026 awards.

Videos from the awards banquet are available to members online. Follow the link labeled "find a meeting video" under "For Rotarians" on the club website: www.wilmingtonrotaryclub.org



Ben David accepts his trophy from fellow Rotarian Cedric Dickerson.



Rotarian Mark Ihnat presents Leaders in Service private-sector award to Chip Mahan.



Gene Merritt describes the influence of Rotary values on his long career.



Margaret Weller Stargell accepts her trophy from Rotarian Elizabeth Redenbaugh.

Club pursuing Global Grant for Sierra Leone

In May, our Board of Directors approved a Global Grant project to improve energy infrastructure at the Rotifunk hospital in Sierra Leone.

That West African community has been the focus of previous projects, led by **Dale Smith**, that our club has supported. Spearheading this new project is **Michael Gillespie**, who visited Sierra Leone and will present a program on this project Aug. 19.

We are waiting for approval from the Rotary Foundation. Global Grants typically leverage funds from multiple Rotary Clubs, including one

in the target nation.

The goal is to restore and upgrade the electricity supply at Hatfield Archer Memorial Hospital in Rotifunk. An existing solar-power system has deteriorated, threatening the hospital's access to electricity, which is especially a problem for surgical wards and oxygen systems.

The project will also include webcam monitoring and will make improvements to the hospital's oxygen and water-supply systems.

The hospital serves thousands of people in a wide rural area, playing a critical role

in maternal and child health.

Our International Projects Committee is working with a Rotary International grant specialist to ensure that our proposal meets RI guidelines and that only up-to-date, durable components are bought.

We are seeking buy-in from other Rotary clubs, to raise enough money to match the Global Grant. Also needed: international partners with relevant technical expertise.

RI and the Rotary Foundation will not give final approval to a global grant until all other funding sources have been secured.



Mothers and babies wait to be seen at Rotifunk's hospital.



Club directors and officers sworn in June 17: Chris Utesch, President-nominee Matt Hilliard, Laura Lisle, Jack Clark, Bob Kitchen, Dori Bishara, Secretary Elliot O'Neal, Peter Maloff, President-elect Tiffany Kitchen, Pam Hardy, District Governor Andi Young, President David Grandey, Treasurer Stacy Ankrum, Ramona Farrell, Christina Ferris, Mark Ihnat, Albert Sementa, Dale Lazar. Dori, Pam, Mark, Dale, and Albert were elected on May 27.

New president's agenda for year

Continued from page 1

meetups in social settings," David said.

He urged improving our visibility through marketing, partnerships, and storytelling, including wearing "Rotary At Work" shirts at service projects.

To simplify the business of Rotary, he promised steps to cut down on the administrative time spent during meetings, and making it easier for members to pay dues and get involved.



Left: in honor of his weekly 'history moments,' the club presented past President Paul Lawler with two books of local history, recommended by his wife Patricia as something he's had his eye on recently.



Right: After formally relinquishing the presidential gavel to David Grandey, Paul received a commemorative copy, mounted on a plaque, a traditional gift for all departing presidents.



Rotarians socializing in battleship's wardroom before induction banquet.



John Fonda, guide Chris Morin, Jody and Chris Sepich, Mitzi Fonda, and Peter Miller on a below-decks tour of the battleship June 17.



Six get a RISE pin for service

Past President **Paul Lawler** presented Rotarian in Service Excellence (RISE) pins to six members for years of vital service to the club. These were given at the June 17 banquet and on June 24.

Honored were: **John Hatcher** for heading our fund-raising efforts: in ten years, his teams raised more than \$600,000 for the club's foundation;

Bob Kitchen for co-chairing the Leaders in Service Awards; **R.B. Richey** for serving as club Foundation chair; **Larry Sackett** for service as club treasurer; **Vicki Scott** for publishing the club handbook; and **Steve Yates** for work on Williston, meeting set-up, and Health & Happiness. All but Steve are stepping down from those roles.

Medical library in Moldova: focus of proposed Global Grant project.

Our International Projects Committee is working on a Global Grant project to improve libraries in Moldova, an impoverished Eastern European nation.

Committee chair **Gabe Rich** reported to the club June 10 on his recent visit to Chisinau, Moldova's capital, to lay the groundwork for the project.

His visit was part of an existing partnership between Moldova and North Carolina, run by Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, who has spoken about it to our club.

www.sosnc.gov/divisions/moldova

Specifically, Gabe participated in an education and health exchange between the UNC-Chapel Hill Adams School of Dentistry and Moldova State University of Medicine and Dentistry. The Carolina delegation provided general dental care and dental surgery to underserved patients at the state university's dental clinic.

While there, Gabe met with members of the Chisinau and Centru Rotary Clubs, to secure co-sponsors for the grant project. It would create a model library, including a health education center. During his visit, Gabe presented the Chisinau Rotary Club with a \$1,000 check from our club.

This will help with that model library project. The partners' ultimate aim is to have a grant proposal ready for the current 2025-26 Rotary year, following directly after our 2024-25 Sierra Leone Global Grant project. SEE: *page 2*.

We are also cooperating with the Wilmington East Rotary Club, which has also led Global Grant projects to improve Moldova's medical libraries.



Rotarian Dr. Gabe Rich, center, and Dr. Cheryl Siegel, far right, greeted by Moldovan dentists on their arrival in Chisinau. Gabe and Dr. Siegel are adjunct professors at UNC-Chapel Hill's dental school. They led a group of five dental students as part of the university's global health exchange.



Gabe and others in the North Carolina dental group accept traditional greeting of bread and salt.



Gabe, at right, observes oral surgery at the Moldovan medical and dental school.



Dental-care partners from North Carolina and Moldova pose at Chisinau's medical university. Gabe Rich is in right center.

John Murchison, wholesaler, Army vet, 70-year Rotarian, dies at 96

John R. Murchison II died peacefully on June 28, 2025 following a fishing accident just a few days before. He was born May 6, 1929. He was preceded in death by his wife Frances Penton Murchison and four siblings.

Survivors include a daughter, Rotarian son John R. (Reid) Murchison III, four grandchildren, and twelve great-grandchildren.

In 1951, after graduating from UNC-Chapel Hill, where he had been captain of the lacrosse team, he joined the Army. He served as a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers during the Korean War.

After his service, he and Frances returned to Wilmington. Here, he joined the fam-

ily business, J.W. Murchison Company, a wholesale hardware and sporting goods distributor. From 1963 until his death, he served as president and CEO of that company and its successor company.

John's civic life included nearly 70 years in this club; he eventually held Badge #1. In 1915, his grandfather became the club's first president. John was committed to his church and spiritual renewal. Other causes included Habitat for Humanity, a homeless shelter at St. James Church, and the Good Shepherd Center's Second Helpings ministry.

He was known for his love of family and friends and concern for the welfare of others.



John Murchison was part of a multi-generational Rotary family.

Membership growth reaches + 20 net

With inductions and new-member talks, we have gotten to know some of the new Rotarians who contributed to

our net gain of twenty members in 2024-25.

On May 6, **Kate Baillon** addressed the club. A native of England, she had a widely varied career in several countries; she is now director of the Cape Fear Museum. Inducted April 15, Kate was sponsored by Tufanna Bradley.

Two members joined May 20. **Austin Griffie**, sponsored by Mark Ihnat, is a financial advisor with Raymond James. **Jeremy Gunn**, sponsored by Dori Bishara, is a painting contractor. His firm is JBG Services LLC. His new-member talk was on May 27.

Two more were inducted May 27: **Dan Bruer**, sponsored by Elizabeth Redenbaugh, is an energy advisor his business is New Energy Economics. **Scott Cislo** is the Wilmington franchisee for the Home Helpers Home Care agency. His sponsor is Dale Lazar. He spoke to the club June 10.

Also June 10, **Eymani Alston** set a record for the youngest member ever to join this club. She is 22. Joe Owen is her sponsor. A former Interact and Rotaract member, she is now doing academic research at UNC-Wilmington,

focused on the neurobiology of adolescent drinking.

Two former members rejoined us on June 24. **Scott Betz**, a broker with People's Mortgage, was in the club from 2017 to 2020. Lynne Boney sponsored his membership this time.

Elios Klemo, sponsored by Joe Owen, works at Corning Glass Works. He was a member from 2009 to 2016.



Kate Baillon



Jeremy Gunn



Scott Cislo



Eymani Alston



Austin Griffie with sponsor Mark Ihnat May 20.



Sponsor Elizabeth Redenbaugh with Dan Bruer; Scott Cislo with his sponsor, Dale Lazar. Dan and Scott were inducted May 27.



Sponsor Lynne Boney with Dawn and Scott Betz; Sponser Joe Owen with Elios Klemo. Scott and Elios both rejoined the club on June 24.

Rooting out invasive vines at Rotary Wheel Garden

During a May 10 work day at the Rotary Wheel Garden, a small but determined crew dug deep to eradicate tough, aggressive vines that had invaded the garden's azalea bushes.

Weeding flowerbeds and clearing walkways concluded the day's work. Garden Committee Chair **Terry Smith** noted that the vines grew from massive underground tubers that had to be dug up: "It was a lot of that kind of back-breaking work for about four to five hours." The organic debris made two piles bigger than a car.



Chris Sepich, Terry & Cheryl Smith, and Mark DeLoach were May 10 work crew.



Mark DeLoach shows off monstrous tubers of just one of the greenbriar vines he and others pulled out of the garden's azalea bushes.



Williston Principal Jo McDonnell (far left) and teacher Matthew Sullivan (far right) with Rotarians Paul Lawler, Nancy Bullock, Dori Bishara, Cathy Barlow, Vince Howe, Steve Lester, Michael Gillespie, Howard Loving, Peter Maloff, Steve Yates, and Larry Anderson before faculty lunch June 9.

At Williston, a progress report & a staff luncheon

After classes ended for the summer, our club hosted a teacher-appreciation luncheon for the faculty and staff of Williston Middle School. Rotarian volunteers set up and served a buffet lunch June 9, catered by Chipotle. REV Federal Credit Union donated bottled water.



Rotarians Howard Loving and Nancy Bullock at Williston year-end event.

During the luncheon, the teachers wore “We are Williston” T-shirts that the club paid for. Before the lunch, Principal Jo McDonnell and the school’s gifted-education specialist, Matthew Sullivan, gave Rotarians a presentation on how our funds and support had allowed the creation of clubs for all Williston students. Meeting on Friday mornings, these clubs helped improve last-day-of-the-week attendance by twenty percent. The clubs cover such interests as drama, soccer, art, cooking, tennis, and more.

The student-clubs project and the T-shirts were our primary supports for Williston this year. Our involvement has been limited, at the administration’s preference. We are reviewing how best to support public schools and may take a different focus in the coming year.



Rotarians listen to Principal Jo McDonnell’s presentation on school clubs.

Financial controls to be tightened, treasurer gets bookkeeping aid

A new audit committee has proposed improved financial controls for the club’s treasury, as well as for our charitable foundation. **Albert Sementa**, **Sean Frelke**, and **Stacy Ankrum**, who replaces **Larry Sackett** as the club’s treasurer, are members.

Albert repoted June 24 that the RCDW Foundation had received a state charitable-solicitation license and has set up a more formalized budget process. Each year, the foundation’s board will propose a sum for the club’s board to match up to committee requests and grants.

As for bookkeeping, Stacy will have support from an outside accounting firm, relieving her of much of the busywork that occupied Larry’s time as treasurer.

The audit committee is expected to offer recommendations about how the club manages its finances.



Ally Thornton & Allan Lusk, new PHFs; Lloyd Rothschild, “+4”.

Beaudoin bequest helps New Paul Harris Fellows

The club has added three new Paul Harris Fellows and recognized a new “Plus Four,” for contributions to The Rotary Foundation. Each Paul Harris Fellow award represents Foundation contributions of \$1,000 or more.

The three new fellows benefitted from Recognition Points the late **Mike Beaudoin** had accumulated as a multiple Paul Harris Fellow and Major Donor to the Foundation. He died March 5.

On May 27, **Ally Thornton** and **Allan Lusk** received their PHF medallions, pins and certificates. Also that day, **Lloyd Rothschild** was recognized as a fellow “Plus Four,” representing \$5,000 in gifts to the Foundation.

On June 10, **Alex White** became a fellow, the eighth member this year to have benefitted from Mike’s points.

Alex White sports his new Paul Harris Fellow medallion on June 10.



Speakers offer updates on schools, clubs for youth, hospital’s network, battleship, and business philanthropy



Barnes: NH County schools



Blalock: B&G clubs



McMerty: merged clubs



Bovio: Novant hospital



Smith: Novant medicine



Groat: philanthropy



Martin: Battleship N.C.



Morris: philosophy & life

Updates on institutions—educational, medical, charitable and historical—occupied most of the club’s programs during May and June.

Coping with growth and improving student outcomes in New Hanover County schools was the topic for **Dr. Christopher Barnes**, superintendent, who spoke on May 6.

We did not meet for lunch May 13 because of the Leaders in Service Awards banquet. SEE: *page 1*.

Rotarian **Brian McMerty** and **Dawn-Michele Blalock**, CEO of the combined Boys and Girls Clubs of Southeastern NC, spoke May 20 about the long and challenging task of merging several previously independent Boys and Girls Clubs.

Expanding Novant’s medical services across Southeastern North Carolina was the topic May 27. Speaking were **Ernie Bovio**, CEO of Novant Health NHRMC, and **Dr. Bill Smith**, head of Novant’s Heart and Vascular Institute.

Jay Martin, director of the Battleship North Carolina, spoke June 3 about the ship’s history, its current role as a state war memorial, and work to mitigate flooding in the memorial’s parking lot.

Our June 10 program concerned how corporations decide to direct their charitable dollars. **Kate Groat**, who manages Live Oak Bank’s philanthropic arm, was the speaker.

Instead of a lunch meeting June 17, Rotarians met for dinner on the Battleship North Carolina. Incoming President **David Grandey** and other club officers were inducted. For more, SEE: *page 1*.

Philosophy in daily life and in business was the subject on June 24, when author and former philosophy professor **Tom Morris** spoke.

The club did not meet July 1 because of the Independence Day holiday that week.

Newsletter photos
Robby Collins, John Davis, Dori Bishara, David Grandey, John Meyer, Gabe Rich, and Terry Smith



Ernie Olds reports on the process for grant applications at May 27 meeting.

Club reviewing grant applications

The club’s grants committee is reviewing proposals for district grants, which must be submitted to District 7730 by Aug. 4.

Ernie Olds, chair of the grants committee, explained the process at the May 27 meeting. His committee will review the submissions and recommend three to five of them. The club’s Board will consider those when it meets on July 21.

The District will decide which of those to award, using a formula that considers each club’s total contributions to The Rotary Foundation. District Grants come from funds the foundation returns to districts every year.

Our club’s match comes from our own non-profit RCDW Foundation. That foundation’s money is mostly raised through the Leaders in Service awards.

Last year, Ernie said, our club made grants totalling \$12,500, roughly half of that from District matching funds.

In recent years, our club and foundation Boards have chosen to use our own money to fully fund some projects that were not selected for District funding.

Criteria for approval of District Grant projects include hands-on participation by Rotarian, sustainability over time, and whether they address one of Rotary’s seven areas of focus.

Upcoming programs & events

TUESDAY, JULY 8

Trends in architecture in Wilmington, with Rotarian **Ernie Olds** of Becker Morgan Group, Inc.

TUESDAY, JULY 15

A field trip to the Community Justice Center, 20 N. Fourth St., with Rotarian **Ben David**. Lunch on site.

MONDAY, JULY 21

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

TUESDAY, JULY 22

Strategies in economic development, with **Christina Haley**, executive director, Wilmington Downtown, Inc.

TUESDAY, JULY 29

Building a multi-billion-dollar corporation in Wilmington, with **Pierre Naudé**, CEO of nCino, Inc.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 30

Fifth Wednesday social, 5-6:30 p.m., Covey, 1610 Tiburon Drive. Free snacks, cash bar.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 5

The Coast Guard's mission in our region, with **Capt. Tim List**, commander, USCG Sector North Carolina.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 12

A new wastewater treatment plant, with **Kenneth Waldroup**, CEO of Cape Fear Public Utility Authority.

MONDAY, AUGUST 18

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

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19

Global Grant project in Sierra Leone, with Rotarian **Michael Gillespie** of International Projects Committee.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 26

District governor's official visit, with **Andi Young**, Rotary District 7730 governor for 2025-26.



Accepting District Governor's Award at June 28 District 7730 induction ceremony were Terry Smith (new District treasurer), Cathy Barlow, Tolis Vardakis, Paul Lawler, Tiffany Kitchen, Mollie Shiflet, and Bob Kitchen.

Rotary news briefs

LUV faces new challenges in Africa: An agency this club supports, Lift Up the Vulnerable, continues its work against human trafficking in Sudan and South Sudan, helping refugee children attend school and their parents to become self-supporting. LUV CEO Audrey Moore spoke to the club June 10. She noted that her organization is facing new challenges since the federal government's cancellation of all U.S. Agency for International Development aid programs. Learn more at www.liftupthevulnerable.org.

Help solve severe blood shortage July 17: Local blood banks are running low, affecting scheduled surgeries. To solve this, area Rotary Clubs and other groups are sponsoring a blood drive from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Independence Mall. Previous drives, which have collected more than 2,000 units of blood, were held May 22 and June 29.

Next Fifth Wednesday social set for July 30: All Wilmington-area Rotarians are invited to the informal happy-hour gathering at Covey, 1610 Tiburon Drive. The host venue will provide snacks and a cash bar. Anyone interested in attending should sign up by contacting Cat Marinich by phone or email; for her contact details, see listing in the club *Handbook & Roster*.

Board OKs new dues payment system: At its May 19 meeting, our Board approved a new option to pay club dues by pre-approved drafts against a bank account or credit card. This eliminates the burden on our treasurer of carrying checks to the bank and waiting for them to clear, as well as saving substantial sums on the processing fees needed to run individual credit-card transactions.

Seating roulette mixes up the lunch tables: The June 10 meeting featured our occasional new seating arrangements, by which Rotarians were randomly assigned to tables. Our Member Engagement Committee, chaired by President-Elect Tiffany Kitchen, arranged this to encourage us to get better acquainted with fellow members.

Under 40s socialize: Our Young Rotarians Committee held a social in early June, to help keep younger members engaged with the club. Committee Chair Donna Shiro reported June 10 that as of that date we had 19 members under age 40, even after a couple of Under 40s had important birthdays and aged out of the committee.

Club earns District award, supplies District treasurer: A delegation of our members accepted a 2024-25 District Governor Award at the June 28 induction ceremony for District Governor Andi Young. At that event, outgoing D.G. C.J. Crooks noted that District 7730's 51 clubs had added a net twenty members last year. Past President Paul Lawler noted that this club accounted for all twenty of that number! In other District news: Terry Smith will be district treasurer for 2025-26, and Cathy Barlow is serving a second year as area governor for New Hanover County.

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
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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