



ROTA-BITS



SERVICE ABOVE SELF

VOL. 13, NO. 9 * SEPTEMBER 1, 2011 * EDITOR: * DOUG GROSE*

September is New Generations Month in the Rotary International Calendar.

LAST MEETING Reported by Bob Zyromski

Sgt.-at-arms: Fred Lariccia

Prayer: Bill Robertson, grateful for our meeting with its fellowship, plus a heartfelt plea for the safety of our military forces.

Guests/visitors: Rotarian Earl Sonnemaker, who brought us a flag from his Vancouver, WA club. (And who, reluctantly, admitted that his daughter lived in, of all places, MENTOR!); Bob Fritts, pal of Lee Quinones, both friends of Raymond James.

Rotabuck: Our West-guest Earl pulled 295 (Bill Robertson evidently rewarded for his piety – if you can believe that). With Joker in hand, to muster another card-pull Mr. Bill regaled us with a classic businessman-in-a-bar joke about 20-year-old scotch. (To which, if your humble scribe were to reveal the punch line, would only leave himself open to charges of yellow journalism.)

WFD: Rick Cooper pronounced “impress.” Though there was some disputed discussion about the actual quantity of Words in the past newsletter issue.

Announcements: Long-panted Prez Wayne offered kudos to Mz. Nancy for her grand hostessness last Thursday. Members concurred with grateful approbation.

Mr. President noted that yesterday our exchange student Becca Steele began winging her way to South Korea for a year's study and travel and culture-sop-

ping. Follow her blog throughout her Far East adventure. Her parents will join us occasionally, assuredly with colorful updates.

Friday at 4:30 commences another happy hour (or is it REALLY HAPPY hour?), this week at Mentor's own Longo's “social room.”

Amy Kapostasy and Tom Weiss are two new board recruits voted in to replace Doug Anderson and Dave Noble.

That Bread Guy reminded us that the order deadline is September 2nd.. And that the 9/19 woodworking date should be duly “put in the back of your noggin.”

Bob Zyromski reported that Greg Markell – former Rotarian, ADAMHS Board PR guru, Four-way Speech Contest judge, singer/songwriter, etc., etc., etc., and all-around good pal to many of us – is holding his own in Metro General follow life-saving surgery on a brain aneurism. It'll be a long haul, and heartfelt prayers and wishes are in order – and much appreciated by his family.

Special Recognition: Prez Brodnan set up an unexpected Rotarian award presentation with descriptives “unselfish,” “committed,” “unflappable,” and more. And noted the awardee is characterized by a “What do you need next?” approach. The person is the epitome of Service Above Self. So, long known for trustworthiness and a good handshake, Fred Lariccia then received the “Above and Beyond” award for faithful service as Sergeant-at-Arms and in so many other programs.



Fred Lariccia receives the Above and Beyond award for his untold years as Sergeant at Arms, while maintaining a full member's load of regular Rotarian duties in many of our major projects. Photo by Dan Welker.

Ted Hieronymus and his brother Lee from the Hieronymus Family Fund -- with no desire for public acclaim -- have donated \$2,500 to our Mentor Rotary Foundation strictly for scholarships. And we must certainly recognize their beneficence.

Program: Karen Bowersox and Downs Designs

Karen Bowersox's story is not only that of a humanitarian grandmother, but also of a savvy marketer – as in: find someone's problem, and fix it. Well, her six-year-old Down syndrome granddaughter Maggie's ill-fitting clothes were the problem. So Grandma decided to fix it. Big time.

After noticing that everyone else with Down Syndrome had the same issue with apparel – simply because of body proportions different from the rest of humanity – Bowersox founded Downs Designs and has created an ever-ex-

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE ROTARY CLUB OF MENTOR, OHIO

panding clothing line for those with the condition.

Is that perfect niche marketing, or what?



Karen Bowersox tells Mentor Rotarians the story of how she started her company, Downs Designs. Photo by Dan Welker.

The 62-year-old has two daughters and 11 grand-kids. Up until last November she managed her husband's medical practice. She's also a health coach, workout regular, picture-taker, gardener and frequent visitor to her mother.

Formerly she owned Kare-N-Kleen with 250 regular customers, 25 women employees and a seven-car fleet. "I can tell you that I am a very busy woman who loves to be in charge and own her own business."

In August 2009, her life took a major turn. Watching her daughter dress Maggie – rolling up bothersome sleeves and pant legs – Bowersox realized what a unique body shape a person with Down has. As she explained, "Then my daughter looked up at me and said, 'Mom, you're a business woman, if you want to start a really good business, why don't you make clothes for people with Down syndrome?'"

She laughed at the thought. What did she know about clothes? And where

would she find time to start another business?

"But my business brain kicked into high gear because I couldn't stop thinking about this idea. I began researching people with Down syndrome. I looked at hundreds of pictures and noticed many similarities in their body structure."

Her medico husband explained that Down folks have short femurs (or thigh bones) and short humerus bones (the upper arm bone) which make their arms and legs much shorter. The elbows and knees also bend at a different place. They often have thicker necks, large tummies and very small, slanting shoulders. Those with Down syndrome have low muscle tone, so holding in their tummies is often difficult. Very often they have thyroid issues which affect their weight, as well.

Bowersox noted that one of her models has a 50" waist but only has a 20" inseam. He's forced to wear a double or triple X shirt to get around his middle but it literally falls off his body everywhere else. His pants are way too long and never fit in the appropriate places. So Bowersox realized simply altering clothes would never work.

She knew nothing about designing clothes. A Cleveland design school referred her to a young design grad, Jillian Jankovsky. Jillian turned out the perfect match. She was looking for a job with meaning and purpose. Bowersox was happy to have someone available to start working right away.

Jillian told her she would need models to design these clothes and through the Upside of Down's, the intrepid entrepreneur was able to connect with about six different adults with Down syndrome who were willing to help out.

So the fitting process began. Because of this overwhelming task of designing a line of clothing that does not exist anywhere in the world, she

decided to start with just jeans. After all, everyone needs a great pair of jeans. Jillian's second project was to design a tee shirt. And they called their special sizing "Down Sizing."

During the fitting process, designers used muslin fabric to make pants for testing. During the next six or seven months Jillian made more than 85 pairs of these muslin pants. The two spent weeks visiting models' homes testing pants samples. To create the tee shirts, Jillian used a knitted fabric for the fittings.

Since jeans are not fabricated in the U.S., "Made in America" wasn't an option. The website Alibaba, which pairs up business folks with manufacturers worldwide, provoked numerous inquiries. After frustrating responses picturing mostly skinny jeans, Bowersox found Andy Yen, a young straight-arrow Chinese businessman who fortunately wrote and spoke English very well.

The two soon became very good friends. Yen, the honorable general manager in Xintang Town, the jeans capital of the world, taught Bowersox countless facets about manufacturing jeans.

"He taught me much about the ways of the Chinese and I tried to teach him about our country as well, although I think he knew more about America and our history than most Americans." In August 2010 Bowersox and her designer with the expertise in fabrics met Andy Yen in Guangzhou, a city of 20 million.

Touring the jeans factory, the two spent time with its production manager choosing fabric, buttons, thread colors, rivets and every detail of their jeans. The plant had an extensive showroom for men's, women's and children's denim wear with a variety of jeans styles.

With Yen as interpreter and prospect screener, the team rejected the first tee shirt manufacturer interviewed, and then found a compatible match. As an aside, Bowersox noted that friend Andy now has started his own jeans factory. Visiting in May, she was excited to see his new plant.

Bowersox then provided a pictorial chronicle of the jeans-making process: Cutting table for pattern pieces, sewing, the "wash" (chemical treatment) and stress processes, and more. And through the continuing saga, "Andy continues to watch over us, and helps us with the ways of the Chinese manufacturers. He has become a big part of the Downs Designs family."

In January 2011, Bowersox hired her second designer, Cara Junker, who brings another dimension of design and creativity to the endeavor. Cara and Jillian share and discuss the problems and challenges of creating this unique line of clothing.

But, in business, inevitably nothing goes smoothly, right? The first shipment of jeans arrived in Mentor in January – with serious problems. The team had made a huge mistake with the men's jeans. After determining there was no fix, they scrapped them all. The women's jeans had a small problem with the size of the pockets, but otherwise were absolutely fantastic. The shirts too had some design issues, but were acceptable.

It was also at this point that Bowersox realized that adults were not going to be her ultimate target market. Most adults in their 40's with Down syndrome have parents who are most likely in their 80's or not alive any longer. They may be living in group homes and on a limited income. Chances of their finding Down Designs' online store are almost nonexistent.

But the younger families, who are used to online shopping, will become good customers. Most important, as they grow up wearing clothes that fit properly, they will be the adults who will buy Downs Designs' clothes over time.

With the overwhelming demand for kids' sizes, Jillian and Cara are now focused on new jeans and tees for kids ages two through six, and seven through 17. "My designers and I have also been to several of the large conferences around the country and the response has all been the same. People

are so happy and grateful that someone is finally trying to solve the clothing problems of their children."

In October, Bowersox for the third time is headed to China to pick fabrics for up-and-coming clothing designs. The designers are working on dress shirts, blouses, casual dress pants and pajamas. "I can't wait to see my friend Andy and experience once again the culture of the beautiful, hardworking people of China."

Downs Designs has a Facebook page with more than 1,200 people on it from more than 20 different countries. On this page the team shares its progress, takes suggestions and talks with mothers about the challenges of finding clothes for their children. Facebook has been a significant medium to involve everyone in the company and its product development.

"I promise them that their clothing challenges will become a thing of the past. Our plans for marketing are very simple. We are developing an affiliates program to share with all the Down syndrome organizations. What we'll do is give them a coupon code to give their members so every time their members order anything from Downs Designs for the rest of their lives, the organization can receive 5% of the sale. As Downs Designs grows and adds more and more clothes to our line, these organizations can make thousands and thousands of dollars, which I'm sure are badly needed.

"One day Downs Designs will be a worldwide organization and Mentor will be its distribution center and corporate headquarters. We will employ many people and also people with Down syndrome. I plan to make our company a great place to work and to give back to our community.

"I'm so honored and proud to be building a business that has so much purpose. Not everyone has an opportunity in their lifetime to achieve so much for so many."

During the Q&A, Bowersox emphasized the attitude of parents of Down kids: "What we want for our kids is what all other kids have." She noted that today Down kids are so much more functional and integrated into society than they ever were previously.

Downs Designs continues to look for young models for fittings, what with the endless shapes and sizes of people involved. Bowersox stressed that on one style, designers created 85 muslin samples before making the basic decisions on its final look.

ODDS AND ENDS

Before the meeting was officially graveled to a close, in typical self-abnegating fashion, honoree Fred Lariccia rose to his feet and noted that, though grateful for his award, "The club doesn't run without everybody putting in his two cents . . . or three cents."

Bread Day functional note: Bread money goes only to Bob Sustar, orders to Fred.

HELP WANTED

Volunteers needed for the IBIM 5 Mile Run/ 2 Mile Walk. Sunday, September 18th from 7am to 10am. Opportunities available for later risers at 8 am. Contact Ron Traub at Traub@cityofmentor.com or (440) 974-5736.

JOCOE'S JOURNAL

While taking a routine vandalism report at an elementary school, I was interrupted by a little girl about six-years-old. While looking up and down at my uniform, she asked, "Are you a cop?"

"Yes," I answered and continued writing the report.

"My mother said if I ever needed help, I should ask the police. Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right," I told her.

"Well, then," she said as she extended her foot toward me, "would you please tie my shoe?"

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 1 Rotary Cameroon ENT Project presentation/Scott Nelson

September 7 Board Meeting
September 8 The Power of Sound, presented by Radio Lake County
September 11 Bread Baking Day
September 12 Bread Distribution Day.
September 18 IBIM Run
September 19 Woodworking at Broadmoor School
September 30 Clambake at MHYC.
October 2: Be the Match Bone Marrow testing at Mentor Medical Campus.

BIRTHDAYS

September 8 – Bob Ledenican
September 9 – Neil Sawicki
September 17 – Vince Granito
September 18 – Doug Grose
September 29 – Vicki Curtis
If I have missed anyone, please call 974-2494 or email d.grose@sbcglobal.net

THE 4-WAY TEST

Of the things we think, say or do...
Is it the Truth?
Is it Fair to all concerned?
Will it build Goodwill and Better Friendships?
Will it be Beneficial to all concerned?

OFFICERS

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2011\2012

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WHERE WE MEET

LaMalfa Center,
5783 Heisley Road,
Mentor, Ohio
Thursday at 12 Noon
OUR MAILING ADDRESS Mentor
PO Box 1177
Mentor, OH 44061-1177

OUR WEB SITE

www.mentor-rotary.org/

MEETING MAKE-UPS

Following are a few nearby Rotary Club meeting sites and times for makeups;

MONDAY

Willoughby at Gavi's, 12:00 PM

TUESDAY

Painesville at Hellreigel's Inn at 12:00 Noon.

WEDNESDAY

Burton-Middlefield at Punderson State Park Lodge, Newbury, 7:00PM
Cleveland East at Nighttown Restaurant 12387 Cedar Road Cleveland Hts. At Noon.

THURSDAY

Cleveland at Windows on the River in the Flats, Bridge View Room, Third Floor, Windows on the River, Powerhouse. Nautica Entertainment Complex, 2000 Sycamore at 12:00

FRIDAY

Chagrin Highlands (Beachwood area): at Bar Louie, 24337 Cedar Rd., Lyndhurst, OH at 12:00 Noon.
