ROTARY CLUB OF MENDOCINO

NOTES OF THE TOWN MEETING

HELD ON JANUARY 30, 2025

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The meeting was centered on a talk by and with Bernie Norvell, previously Mayor of Fort Bragg and newly elected County Supervisor. It was attended by about 60 persons, including about 42 townspeople and 18 Rotarians. Ted Williams, County Supervisor for District 5, attended as did a reporter for the Beacon. It was an all hands on deck event, with many of our club members pitching in the help set up, conduct the meeting and clean up afterwards. The meeting, held in Preston Hall, was called to order at 12:00. Rotarians attending included President Margaret, President-elect Trevor, Treasurer Brandt and Secretary Jeff, as well as members Ray, Michael, Susan C, Matt D, Gary, Pam, Cathy, Susan K, Ladonna, Rick, Matt O, Donna, Toby and Leona, a total of 18 members, our highest total for the Rotary year.

OPEN

Margaret opened the meeting and Toby led the pledge, after which Trevor took over as MC.

SPEAKER

Bernie’s talk was well-informed, clearly presented, carefully nuanced and much appreciated. He began with a review of the situation in the County and Fort Bragg leading up to the creation of the CRU, or Care Response Unit, of the Fort Bragg Police Department. A study of homelessness, drug addiction and mental illness and related problems in the incorporated cities of the County had been done for the Board of Supervisors by a Dr. Robert Marbut. Police Captain Tom O’neal had recognized the potential value of the study and collaborated with the Mayor to create the CRU, which began as a unit within the Police Department with two staff. When a police officer encountered a situation which seemed to be solvable without an arrest he/she would bring in staff of the CRU to meet the person involved, understand his/her needs and help the person get help as might be necessary. When the program began about 75 percent of police time was spent on the homeless and other such persons, whereas today that number had been reduced to 25%. The number of arrests was down, and calls from merchants and others had declined markedly. The CRU had recently received a grant that would let it expand its coverage to include the nearby towns from Newport to Mendocino. The County is now considering a third-generation program called CORE (Community Outreach, Response and Engagement) for other areas of the County, an effort being led by Sheriff Matt Kendall and Behavioral Health Director Megan Van Zant. A lively discussion followed, centered on concepts of how to help a homeless person—with providing housing first or providing help for other problems such as drug addiction, mental illness, lack of health care, etc as a necessary supporting effort. The support that is offered is often fragmented and difficult to access. We talked about how in California the State insists that the person needing help make his/her own decisions, while in many cases person may not be competent.

We talked about possible methods of supporting the efforts being made toward CORE. Bernie said the program was not expected to required additional funding. It would however require Board support, and an ability to monitor not just case numbers and costs but progress made. About 72% of the homeless are age 55 and older, which was a surprise to some of us. As was first mentioned by Ted Williams a while ago, it would be important for interested persons to follow Board discussions, encourage Board members to monitor and support the CORE and CRU programs and encourage the Board to hold meetings on the Coast. We could also consider organizing excursions to Board meetings.

OUR CLUB

This was an all hands on deck affair. Congrats to President Margaret and Jeff for conceiving it, and getting it advertised in the Beacon, on KOZT and with flyers prepared by Margaret. A big thank you to Trevor for serving as MC, and to LaDonna for providing cookies, coffee and water. Many many thanks to Cathy Karabensh, Susan Ciminyotti and Susan Keller for manning the Rotary table, and to Toby and Michael Brown for serving as greeters. An last but not least to Toby, Trevor, Rick, Jeff Margaret and LaDonna for setting up and cleaning up afterwards.

In addition to member’s payments of venue fees, we collected $250 for disaster relief in Vanuatu and $30 for disaster relief in LA. We talked informally about having an event on pollinator day at which we could collect additional monies for disaster relief in both places.

Our next meeting will be a Board meeting, on February 6. It will be followed on February 13 by a talk by Karen Bowers, of the Mendocino Arts Council, and on February 27 by a meeting led by the Interact Club.

CLOSE

The meeting closed promptly at 1:00.

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Prepared by Jeffry Stubbs, Secretary

January 31, 2025