



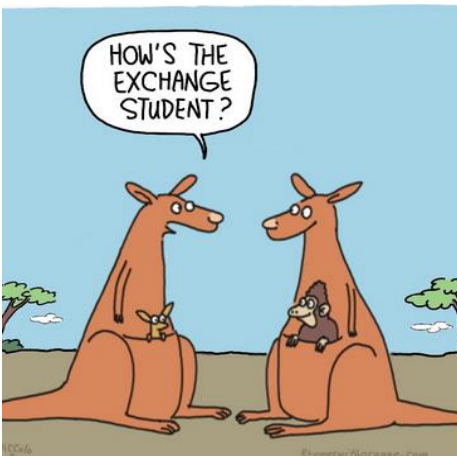
Date of Meeting March 2, 2023

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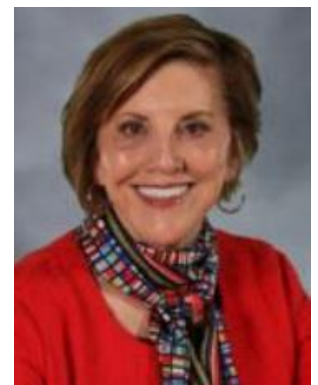
A Tale of Two Families: Redding Refugee Sponsor Circle

The weekly Rotary meeting of March 2nd was brought to you by Team 6 co-captain **Brian Scarr** (co-captain **Steve Clark** was temporarily unavailable). Greeters were **Todd Davis**, **Marc Rincon**, **Steve Clark**, and **Tonja Donoho**, with a belated but welcome appearance by **Martin Flack**. **Brian Scarr** pulled double duty as he also handled tickets sales for the President’s Fund Raiser. **Saeed Hedayattzadeh** was a last-minute fill-in as one Sergeant-at-Arms, while **Martin Flack** was conscripted on the spot as the second, possibly as a result of being late to be a greeter. **Todd Davis** led us in The Pledge of Allegiance, Past President introducing guests was **Art Smithson**, and following a half dozen clever jokes about weather **Mike Mangas** gave the invocation. There were no visiting Rotarians, and the only guest was the day’s speaker, **Nikki Blum**.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



I-House runs from March 25th to April 1st and 4-5 more hosts are desperately needed. Students need only a place to sleep, dinner each night, and rides to and from downtown each morning and afternoon. Please contact **Amelia Ward**.



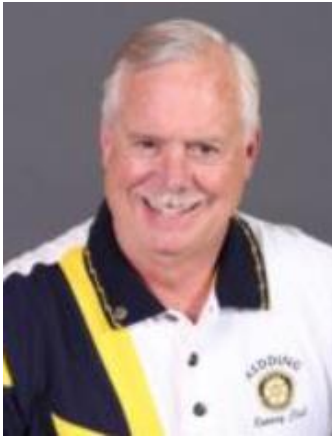
AMELIA WARD



Also on March 25th Keyway is hosting the annual Bowl-a-Thon from 5 to 8 pm at Country Bowl on Bechelli Ln.. This event is being organized by **Jarrold VanLandingham** and **Ken Freigher**. Bowling Teams, Sponsors and Raffle Prizes are still needed.



RECOGNITIONS



73-Year-Old Past President **Tom Semingson** enjoying his prostate biopsy.

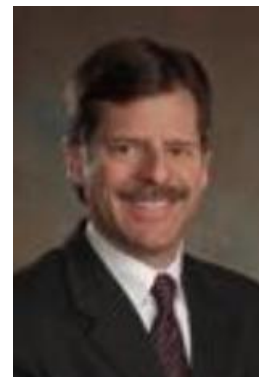
Tom Semingson celebrated his 73rd birthday Thursday with a prostate biopsy. He then confessed to having \$400 in his pocket as he was hoping to retrieve absent **Michelle Nystrom's**

lacquered bat. After a short scuffle with **President Mark** over the \$400, **Tom** agreed to part with \$100.

Next **PP Ed Rullman** took the mic to inquire about **President Mark's** apparent lack of contributions to the club during his Presidency, noting that other past presidents were "slacking" and that he figured at least **Lou Gerard** would have said something by now. **President Mark** suggested perhaps the other past presidents feel sorry for him but **PP Ed** quickly excepted himself form that idea. \$150 to the club later **PP Ed** congratulated **Mark** on a doing a great job while promising to pick on him again in a couple of months.

After a round of applause **Steve Williams** asked for the microphone and volunteered his birthday is later this month, that he will be 63, and in honor of his youth (compared to **Tom's**) he offered to pay \$10 of **Tom's** fine for each year of age difference between them, thus **Tom** left the building with the same \$400 he came in with, which just doesn't seem right somehow.

Steve Williams plus a moustache and minus \$100



Larry Olmstead
United Way
Red Badge Record Holder

Afterwards **President Mark** called on "record holding Red Badge-er" **Larry Olmstead** as he is celebrating 7 years as President and CEO of United Way of Northern California. Since he was being fined already **Larry** leveraged the opportunity to announce the Toast to Equity event on March 1st at the Red Lion. **Larry** proceeded to fine himself \$100 for the unauthorized plug, \$100 for his anniversary, and another \$50 for forgetting his bright red badge last week. Add it all up and that's \$250 to the club. Thanks, **Larry!**

PROGRAM: A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES



Jason Salter
Refugee Sponsor
Philanthropist
Desperately in need of
A new photo for his
Rotary Profile

Jason Salter introduced **Nikki Blum** of the Redding Refugee Sponsor Circle. He began with a short tale about his own journey into refugee sponsorship. After multiple international crisis in Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine, **Jason** felt he was not doing all he could, mentioning the oft vacant guest cottage on their property which he had always wanted to fill with a refugee family; albeit without ever having made an effort to do so. Through pure luck, Jason's instigator-of-all-good-things-in-my-life, Irene, received a phone call about a Ukranian refugee family in need of educational assistance to which she replied, "Do they need a house?"

Over the next two weeks, while moving this family into the guest cottage, **Jason** was subsequently introduced to **Nikki Blum**. **Nikki** is the president of Redding Refugee Sponsorship Circle. **Nikki** studied journalism and worked as an ad copywriter before starting her own small communications company and then retiring in the North State.

Like all of us, **Nikki** was horrified by the ghastly images coming out of Ukraine after the Russian invasion. Realizing her own fortunate circumstances had her in a unique position to help, **Nikki** began by calling all of the Ukranian Orthodox Churches in Northern California and Oregon. Through them she found a group of like-minded individuals here in Redding, hired a non-profit attorney whose Ukranian wife was boarding a plane the following morning to go cook for refugees on the Polish border. Talk about serendipitous events.

The attorney was able to expedite their 501c3 application, and after several months of triumphs and setbacks the Redding Refugee Sponsor Circle was born.



*Redding
Refugee
Sponsor
Circle*

Meanwhile, a couple in Redding, **Steve and Gina Dahl**, had already brought a Ukranian refugee family to America, and one of that family, **Anna**, had a childhood friend, named **Ilona**, still stuck in Kyiv. **Ilona** was married with two daughters, **Rinata** and **Erika** (sic) and at this point had already received a temporary travel authorization to come to America with a financial sponsorship offered by **Steve and Gina Dahl**. **Ilona**, however had not yet made the agonizing decision to leave her husband behind, take her two daughters in tow, and make the frightening trip to an unknown land, putting her



welfare in the hands of unknown people. As a result of her trepidation, **Ilona's** travel visa was due to expire in only a week and a half.

Upon learning of **Ilona's** plight, **Nikki** immediately reached out to **Anna**, arranged a video call with **Ilona**, and with these meager assurances, **Ilona** packed only a few belongings, her two daughters, kissed her husband good-bye, and arrived at San Francisco International airport on December 26th.

The journey since then has been eventful to say the least. Vaccinations, driver's licenses, schooling, working, finding a place to live, language, counseling, even orthodontics, were all challenges to be faced. It is hard to comprehend how daunting is the prospect of

moving to another country, especially when that move is hurried, and compelled by events beyond your control.

Ilona and her two daughters, **Rinata** and **Erika** (spelling?) arriving at SFO on October 26th. A "serendipitous event"

Ilona and her two daughters are now settled into an apartment.

Ilona is hoping to find work soon. Her English is improving. Welcome to America, **Ilona**.

For her part, **Nikki** is now ready to find another Ukrainian refugee family to hopefully rescue from war-torn Ukraine. For our part, we are supportive and hopeful as well.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Randy Smith wanted to know why our immigration system is so dysfunctional. **Nikki** said if she had an answer for that she would run for office.






Mary Brace asked about their medical care. **Nikki** answered that when the three ladies got Social Security cards, they were able to also get Medi-Cal.

Martin Flack inquired about **Nikki's** most rewarding moment. While **Nikki** initially said there were no specific moments more rewarding than others, she did eventually mention two: first seeing **Ilona, Rinata and Erika** at the airport, and second, curiously, was when **President Zelensky** addressed Congress a few weeks back and thanked America for our generous support. She felt as if he was thanking her directly.

Ed Rullman was curious about their work authorization status. **Nikki** replied that exceptions have been made for Ukrainians, the work authorization fee has been waived, and they are eligible to work almost immediately after arriving.

CONCLUSION

President Mark then presented **Nikki** with a bag of Poppy Seeds as a thank you, just don't let **Ilona** eat them before an employment drug screen! Your author then buzzed out of the Operation game while trying to extract the Adam's Apple, and the winner of the wine and goblet basket held ticket number 101. A good time was had by all.

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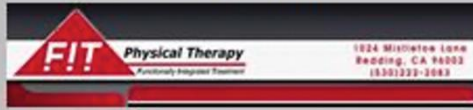


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