

**Rotary Club of Englewood
Spoke August 18, 2020**

Presiding: Jacqueline Gutman

Recorder: Jim Cole

The sad news of the day was that Lisa Wisotsky's father-in law died on this morning and the funeral will be held this afternoon.

Thought for the day: came from Steve Wiessner via a quotation from Henry David Thoreau's On Walden Pond and extolled the virtues of preserving nature.

Rotary Club of the week: From Sue Fetner who began her career in banking in the Springfield area and was taken by her boss/teacher to the Rotary Club of New Springfield on a number of occasions.

Program: Mike Jacobs introduced Jack DeStefano, active in the Gift of Life program who gave a talk on that activity. Historically the program began under the Governorship of Art Scialla; governor from 1986-1987. It started small with a child from Uganda operated upon at a Long Island hospital and has grown since. There are some 80 odd Gift of life programs around the world, most in the United States, and most associated with Rotary clubs. To date some 38,000 children (mostly) have been operated upon for cardiac birth defects. Initially the program involved bringing children from elsewhere in the world to the United States where they would be hosted for a few days prior to their surgery at a rotarian's home before going to a hospital to have surgery performed. Then after a few days in the hospital the child and parent (usually Mom) would come back to that rotarian's home until cleared to return to their native home.

This is a wonderful program and as Joyce Grossbard said we should support it as much as we are able to. Generally around Valentine's Day (think hearts) the Gift of Life Committee puts on a gala featuring the program. Often they have children immediately pre or post op and it's a delight to see these children, especially if they are a few days post op and feeling frisky for the first time in ... forever. For a while the cost to the club was \$5,000, then \$7,000 and now \$6,000. Don't ask me why the change. Suffice it to say that the sum asked doesn't begin to come close to covering the cost of the operation, the pre-op evaluation and the post operative course. It's a loss for the hospital and a demonstration of their altruism. They deserve immense credit! I am sure the entire activity of pre op evaluation, surgical procedure and in hospital care runs in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Pre op evaluation: wherever the child comes from has been evaluated medically by some form of "medicine man" and I don't mean to cast aspersions on those people. The charts from the child's home is evaluated by screeners in our country. Some patients are not candidates for surgery for whatever reason Best to know that before they arrive. At least one host family to my knowledge welcomed with open arms a toddler only to find out in three days of testing and chart review the child did not have a problem fixable with surgery. Not too sick to have surgery; just not a surgical problem. A disappointment for all concerned.

Getting there: as Jack mentioned the families have to negotiate various barriers to get the child and a family member to the States. Visas and other forms can take up to 3 years to obtain.(I recognize that i am using "States" pejoratively but that is where most of the Gift of Life programs are located) The stories the

parents/guardians tell is hair raising; Moms giving up wedding rings to airport personnel so that they and their child may board the plane.

Cost: I was quite happy when GOL started missions to various places to do the surgery. The cost is significantly less; Jack mentioned \$3,000. One of the problems I had with performing the surgery in the US was the spending of money for one life. I wondered how many lives would be saved if that \$5,000 had been spent on clean water. Infant diarrhea is a leading cost of death in many countries.

Doing procedures in a local situation has an immediate demonstration of what is possible. Local surgeons gain insight in how to perform the procedure, and the cost is less. A sick child like one with congenital heart disease is a burden to the family. Mom is busy with the child; siblings are thrown into the breach to help with care and Dad is stressed out with the finances to get help.

Jack's summation the program is "We fix the heart defect and we heal the family."

Happy Dollars: Many sad dollars for Lisa and her family and our condolences go to her and her husband's family. Many for Jack DeStefano's presentation.

Upcoming meeting: Per our most recent discussion of our meetings we are due next week, August 25, to have a dinner meeting. It was not clear as to the time of the meeting but I will contact Lisa (when the dust settles a little) at some point and make that information available

August 25: 6:00 pm School superintendent Bob Kravitz

Sept. 15: Kevin Rietema of the FBI older abuse.