

Rotary
Club of
Charlotte



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

April 4, 2023

2022-2023

Board Members

President William Bradley

Pres Elect Edwin Peacock

Past Pres Carol Hardison

Secretary Kim Brattain

Treasurer Patrick Baker

Exec Sec Christine Cipriano

Directors 2021-2023

Ann Clark

Ellison Clary

Jesse Hite

Warren Kean

Vanessa Stolen

Directors 2022-2024

Will Barnhardt

Glenn Bouley

Margaret Donovan

Laura Little

Mark Norman

Diego Ramon

Robert Shaw

Membership Terri DeBoo

Foundation Joe Morris

Programs Elly Clary



Bill Gill



Joel Ford



Laura Meier



Denise Cubbedge

HIGWIA – How I Got Where I'm At “Their Common Thread Is Service”

by Marilyn Bowler

We had an amazing Ringmaster with us to introduce not only our four HIGWIA speakers but also to school us in the proper reactions to what was fascinating to hear and what should have been left out. Through a series of coached "aahs" and "uh-uhs" silver-spangled and top-hatted Ringmaster **Tony Marciano** got us laughing and in the mood for what turned out to be an incredibly well-presented program featuring **Joel Ford**, **Laura Meier**, **Debbie Cubbedge**, and **Bill Gill**. Tony advised us he had "scoured the earth" to find the best of the best to present their stories to our audience. And they aced it!

JOEL FORD led us from his roots in Belmont, NC through his six years as NC State Senator from Mecklenburg County, to his run for Mayor of Charlotte, to his appointment to the UNC Board of Governors, and subsequently to his current position with Sentinel Risk Advisors. Joel is an advocate for integrity and quality within both business and government which is demonstrated by the impact he's made in both areas of service. Along the way, he said, he's been privileged to make good friends with great people like former Sheriff Irwin Carmichael. Joel is a huge fan of the American Red Cross and is proud to have given them a helping hand for many years. Joel spoke of his commitment - in all he does - to keeping Faith, Family, and Service as his daily mantra.

He smilingly spoke of meeting and marrying Deborah Lane and of their daughter, Trinity who will graduate from high school and enter college in the Fall.

The solution to getting a better government is developing good relationships between members of both political parties. And, he concluded, we need to do a better job ourselves of nurturing working relationships in Raleigh in order to get that much-needed and much sought-after money that is somehow always allocated to other parts of the state.

Now working at Sentinel Risk Advisors, Joel is a man with a mission: to make a positive change on behalf of others.

LAURA MEIER is Southern born and bred. She began life in Orlando, moved with her family to Charleston, and graduated from college in Boone. She spoke eloquently of her journey to becoming a teacher and what then led her to focus on at-risk children ... specifically, those who would probably drop out of high school. She utilized her Masters degree to teach grades 9-12 at CMS alternative school Wesley High which, in itself, demonstrates Laura's amazing patience and skill set. She spoke of the "baggage" that those students carry on their shoulders ... abusive parents, alcohol, and drugs in their homes, kids getting pushed from one foster home to another, and the list goes on. Then she met "Rudy." In spite of his pretty awful surroundings, Rudy got himself to school and had perfect attendance. And, with Laura's support, Rudy graduated high school. When Laura left teaching, she stayed within the at-risk children's world, developing partnerships and mentors for the teens who needed so much help. She told us of a heartbreaking situation where one of her students was the son of a crack addict who was so used to his mother "using" that he said it almost in an off-the-cuff manner. And then we heard the story of little Vanquez who told Laura that Santa didn't come to his house. It was, Laura said, "life-changing" for her. She attributes the book "The Water Is Wide" to driving her to continue to make a difference. That commitment led her to run for - and win - a seat on the County Commission. She feels called to serve and is doing her utmost to meet that challenge. We who live in Mecklenburg County are the fortunate recipients of Laura's quest.

DENISE CUBBEDGE, our new Rotary member of only two weeks, grew up in a milltown and attributes her mother for inspiring her to make something special out of herself. Her Mom earned her high school diploma at age 35 and became an LPN in a nursing home. In Denise's words, "My Mom gave me my "YES YOU CAN" attitude and Denise has taken that and run with it. Her second mentor was her chorus teacher who introduced her to her love for music. She encouraged Denise's potential and steered her toward making a future for herself. As a college graduate, Denise immediately chose to volunteer for the Red Cross which, in turn, led her to her third mentor: Marcia Cole. Marcia showed Denise the importance of the non-profit world and it was then that Denise set that as her life's goal. Working for - and traveling for - the Red Cross has taken her all over the world and through working so hard among disasters she developed GRIT. Her last mentor was the incomparable Anne Spring Close with whom she worked closely

for seven years. Again, what Denise came away with is a passion to live life to serve others. Denise describes herself as "incredibly blessed" ... but it's obvious that many, many others who have experienced Denise's amazing spirit of giving are the ones who are "incredibly blessed."

BILL GILL (self-described as "retired but looking for a new gig so refer to me as a 'Gig seeker'") was our fourth speaker and yet he held our attention to the very end. He's a superb presenter and punctuated his HIGWIA with whimsical phrasing that kept our attention, i.e.: He referred to his "first wife" in his intro but in winding up explained that his first wife is STILL his wife. Bill is in Charlotte because he CHOSE to stay in Charlotte rather than move away once his father died. While working a full-time job, he quickly became involved in a myriad of community service projects for which he performed so well that he was consistently recruited to serve as Chair or President or Manager. Citing his work with the Jaycees, it was Bill and George W. Brown who kick-started the Jaycees and he has remained loyal to their efforts ever since. We were treated to a slide showing a roster of some of Charlotte's most successful charitable organizations and Bill was involved in a leadership role at each one. To cite a few: Bill partnered with our own Charlotte Rotary member, Jim Barnhardt, in building the swim facility for the Mecklenburg Aquatic Club training at Charlotte Latin. He worked closely with the superb Joan Zimmerman for WBTV's Boys Town Auction to raise funds. He chaired the Mobile Health Outreach mammography group project which targets underinsured and underserved women. He was instrumental in working on the Wells Fargo Championship. He coached football as a volunteer at Providence Day School. He started Toys For Tots in Charlotte with his good friend Glenn Mowrey. All of these and more, Bill told us, have benefitted his client base while they've also aided those who need help. He feels compelled to create a business team that is safe, comfortable and a place where the vision includes long-term success for the staff. Bill's motto: Hire good people and pay them well ~ That way they can focus on their job and not be distracted by stress. Treat the staff as "family." Bill's last slide captured his outlook: "Think Outside The Box But Stay Within Your Skill Set." Perfect. (And, by the way, Bill, there will be no "retirement" for you. You're too engaged in serving others to stay home and knit.)

No wonder HIGWIA is always a favorite program!

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/815130408>
The program introduction begins at 18:50 minutes.