



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

August 15, 2023

2023-2024 Board Members

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Past Pres William Bradley

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Membership Terri DeBoo

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*Phil Kirk ~
Educator,
Politician,
“Dude”*

by **Marilynn Bowler**

With a bit of a grin, our speaker today gifted us with a presentation that left us laughing. A man of smarts, savvy, wit, and a boatload of stories to share, Phil Kirk did just that.

His impressive career history includes newspaper reporter, journalism and English teacher, member of the NC Senate (the youngest ever elected), and his terms as Chief of Staff to U.S. Senator Jim Broyhill, NC Governors Jim Holshouser and James Martin. Phil served twice as NC Secretary of Health & Human Resources and in the same role on the NC Board of Community Colleges. Following those prestigious assignments, Phil became Vice President of External Relations at his alma mater, Catawba College. (And did I mention that he was President and CEO of NC Citizens for Business & Industry AND Publisher of North Carolina Magazine for sixteen years?) Then, to top it off, he was elected Chairman of the Public School Forum of NC.

Currently, he serves as a Community Relations Advisor for NC Independent Colleges and Universities.

Having hung his shield for so many years (60+) with a mix of mighty power players along with college and high school youth, how could he NOT have a barrel of funny stories and quotes to tell us?

Phil began his remarks with a not-so-subtle jibe at his good friend, **Bob Freeman**, who was seated not far from him at the Head Table. Reminding

us of the painful injury he suffered from a fall, we were honored to learn that Charlotte Rotary was the first LIVE speaking engagement outside of Raleigh which he's done since that April 24th spill. We applauded.

While he professed to having short-term memory problems when it comes to names and words, we didn't hear or see any such thing. He was at the top of his game delivering funny snippets and quotes from kids of all ages and telling stories about himself to our great amusement. He kissed a pig in a challenge to promote reading and get 25,000 books read in a single district; he sat on a floor with little kids on Dr. Seuss's birthday; he walked a school corridor with former CMS Superintendent/former Charlotte Rotary member Dr. Eric Smith when he was asked by a serious-minded student, "Are you George Washington?"; and he's learned never, never to ask any kids of any age how old they think he is. (Even twenty-five years ago they guessed him to be around 82-83 years old.)

We got a big kick out of the fact that he was presumed to be a "dude" and we chuckled when high schoolers advised him not to "ramble." He was told by that same group that they felt when he counseled them that what he said was, "mostly true" and he was appreciated for "getting us out of class." And ~ Attention, **Ken Poe** ~ Phil was at one time mistaken by a student as being a funeral director.

Amongst the hilarity, did we learn from Phil today? Was he interesting and did he speak seriously on a variety of subjects (including politics)? The answer is a resounding "YES." During the Q&A, **Herb Harriss** asked his opinion on the "No Label Party" and his response was superb. To summarize, "This party could have an excellent chance IF the right person is the nominee." **Carla DuPuy** asked him to confirm to us that he has, indeed, read thirty-five of John Grisham's novels and he did confirm and added, "When I took on the challenge of reading Grisham's novels, I had no idea he'd write so many. And he's still writing them."

He responded to a question regarding the future of independent colleges by saying that he sees them rebounding from the difficult COVID years when financial support was minimalized.

Phil pointed out that there's so much negativity circulating these days that a little laughter and fun is always welcome. He summed up his quite excellent presentation with a quote from a high school student who wrote to him in thanks for speaking to the school. "You told us more than enough," the note said.

Phil Kirk, you've made a name for yourself in politics and education in North Carolina and you've made a name for yourself within our Charlotte Rotary Club membership. Please come back anytime!

A recording of the video can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/854767907>
The speaker's introduction begins at approximately 24:20.