



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

June 17, 2025

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“Don’t Take Your Eye Off The ‘Joy Ball’” Classical Arts Liberal Arts Education Innovator

by **Marilynn Bowler**

During his introduction of our speaker on Tuesday at Charlotte Rotary Club, Reverend Marty McCarthy, President of Regent School, spoke of Jay Heiler's "calling to educate children to the highest of their God-given potential." Because of Jay's amazing conviction that children deserve the finest education on earth, the incredible organization called GreatHearts Academies became his wish, his plan, his commitment, his accomplishment.

From stalwart Prosecutor of racketeers and organized crime syndicates to Advocate for exceptional educational opportunities for children across America, Jay Heiler shared his passion for the academic organization he founded which exemplifies President Teddy Roosevelt's mandate, "To educate a person in the mind but not in morals is to educate a menace to society." With those words, Jay reminded us that a true education educates the heart along with the mind.

To that end, Jay has created a network of schools which focus on a classical liberal arts education landscape for grades K-12 which sets high academic standards and places importance on in-person learning, communication through discussion, and character development. Jay told us it's his standard to teach students that it's not just knowledge alone, aka: "It's not how much they know, but *how much they know about themselves.*"

GreatHearts has grown from an original roster of one-hundred-thirty students twenty-two years ago ~ holding classes in a church building ~ to an impressive and quite astounding thirty-thousand students in tuition-free charter and private schools in Arizona, Texas, Louisiana, and, very soon, Florida and North Carolina. We are fortunate to welcome the GreatHearts management to the

Bonnie Cone Classical Academy and the Bonnie Cone Leadership Academy in Huntersville in the very near future.

From early elementary through middle and high school, GreatHeart students are introduced to developmental goals, to learning responsibility, to college-prep courses, and to the importance of community helper programs. In fact, Jay said our own Rotary 4-Way Test is a criteria for what GreatHearts teaches.

Using the high school students' senior thesis as an example of what the GreatHearts experience demands. "Each student is asked to write a thesis using at least three book-length sources, guided by a faculty advisor. He/she then defends it before a panel of faculty and peers, and those defenses are attended by classmates who create a shared culture of intellectual engagement and celebration. And in the heart of all of this is a strong culture of friendship ... something adolescents deeply long for."

GreatHearts SAT scores are off the charts, and scholarships at prestigious colleges and universities are abundant.

Jay's comments were astute, timely, thought-provoking, on-target and just plain fascinating.

During Q&A, **Benton Bragg** asked Jay about AI and education. His response: "I believe we, in classical education, must contend with technology --- *thoughtfully*. We should not bury our heads in the sand, but will embrace new technology just as we embraced the telephone and indoor plumbing." He went on to add, "Many educators feel that students must be in a room, face-to-face with teachers and peers, and I understand that argument. At GreatHearts, we ban cell phones and computers in classrooms. We want real facetime ~ human experience." In addition, "We must ensure that technology doesn't replace the essential human work of education." That having been said, "Technology has always helped solve problems. We can't be 'anti-technology.' We can, however, be cautious."

Susan Evans asked, "Is GreatHearts' goal to be an accredited program choice, such as the International Baccalaureate program offered in both private and public schools?" Jay responded, "We've already opened two pilot private schools in Phoenix - Christian classical academies. And we've had conversations with organizations interested in classical education but concerned it might be too rigorous for some students. They've considered creating a classical 'track' within their schools similar to the IB model. But my hesitation with that is why only offer the best education to a select group? Why not make it the path for all students and then work to support those who need help along that path?"

The cause of classical liberal arts education for students of all intellectual and financial means is universal. Making classical liberal arts education the standard will offer every student across America benefits, enrichment, and, as an adult, accomplished in his/her career, his/her family life, and in his/her own heart and soul.

Unfortunately, the quality of the meeting recording is compromised due to internet issues at the venue.