



Weekly eWheel for the

# Rotary Club of St. Joseph-Benton Harbor



Michigan, USA • District 6360 • Chartered 1918

## JULY 11, 2016

It's strange now to try to write a snappy intro to our weekly newsletter thinking back to the serenity of our community just hours before the tragedy at the Berrien County Courthouse. It seems that a week does not pass without an occasion for a moment of silence in remembrance of those faced with tragedy. Let us keep all those who suffer in our thoughts and prayers as we, as Rotarians, seek to provide a source of positivity and support for our community.

## A CRAZY TURN OF EVENTS



Longest Yard," he said of the first practice he coached. "There is not going to be enough bourbon in the whole state of Michigan for me to coach this team."

But then something happened. He started to build trust between the players and the coaching staff. "Whatever we say has to be true," he said of working with the young men. From a new weight room – the team never lifted weights before – to lockers that were large enough to hold football equipment, what he said to the team was true. He also told the members who came to the long hot practices in August that other guys who came to the team late wouldn't be allowed to just walk on the field in September and take their starting spots – a common practice in prior years. He kept his word. So, maybe he wasn't as crazy as they first thought.

"That old white dude is crazy," was one Benton Harbor High School football player's reaction after Coach Elliot Uzelac first met with players and told them they would go to the play offs. "When I met them I saw a bunch of kids with no hope, no incentives or confidence. They were just there. It's one of the reasons I took the job. It was helping young men who needed help. I didn't care what color they were."

Uzelac said it wasn't an easy road. "It was ugly! It was like the movie The

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## IMPORTANT DATES

- ❖ 7/18 Meeting: Clint Bosler & Kristen Weir, LOGAN Center Community Resources
- ❖ 7/25 Meeting: Jeff Noel, Friends of the Airport and District Governor Bill Smith
- ❖ 8/1 Meeting: Dennis Bowen, Encore 2016!
- ❖ 8/3: July Board Meeting rescheduled, location TBD
- ❖ 8/8 Meeting: Melinda Graham, Hospice at Home
- ❖ 8/15 Meeting: Interact Dominican Trip Presentation

# Rotary

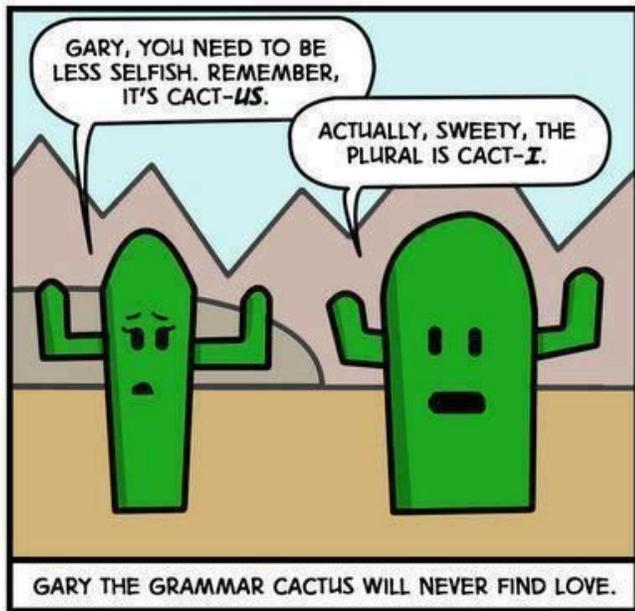


## THE FOUR-WAY TEST

of the things we think, say or do

- 1 Is it **TRUTH**?
- 2 Is it **FAIR** to all concerned?
- 3 Will it build **GOODWILL & BETTER FRIENDSHIPS**?
- 4 Will it be **BENEFICIAL** to all concerned?

## JOKE OF THE WEEK



### VISITING ROTARIANS

Terry Allen, Lakeshore  
Olivia Starks, Benton Harbor-Sunrise

### ROTARIANS WITH GUESTS

Jennifer Cole brought Anna Weber  
Steve Banyon brought Hilda Banyon  
Bill Downey brought Sharon Coleman  
Jackie Huie brought Don Johnson  
Janet Zielke brought Corey Hanson & Mike Ryan



Welcome Rachel Damaske, who has officially joined our ranks! Rachel is a Clinical Informatics Pharmacist for Lakeland Health and enjoys volunteering at The Equestrian Center (TEC). Rachel is sponsored by Whitney Behnke.



### ROTARIANS WITH JULY BIRTHDAYS

7/1 - Tom Sinn  
7/15 - Bill Johnson & Adam Lieberman  
7/20 - Fred Richardson  
7/23 - Allan Westmaas  
7/25 - Al Butzbaugh  
7/27 - Tereck Halsey  
7/30 - Tom Watson  
7/31 - Horace Ward



Congratulations to Jen Cole on the removal, or “ribbonectomy,” of your “new member” ribbon! Jen is sponsored by Rick Villa and has been very active in our club so far. Jen has volunteered at the Track Meet and with Park Cleanup days and has just agreed to be our official Club Photographer!



### ROTARIANS WITH 10+ YEAR CLUB ANNIVERSARIES

13 Years - Fred Upton  
15 Years - Art Cotter  
20 Years - Tom Watson & Al Pscholka  
27 Years - Leslie Miller

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## **CRAZY TURN OF EVENTS (CONTINUED)**

Uzelac's wife, Wendy, also got in on the effort when she and members of the community came together and fed the team. They fed them before practice and the fed them before games. At first the boys would walk in to see the food and step back and take pictures of the full table. The group has continued to feed the team throughout the year when they lift weights during the week.

"It's like everything else in life," Uzelac said. "It's about trust, credibility and accountability."

After establishing trust, all the work they were doing on the practice field started to pay off. Every day they started to get a little better. But, it was clear that he need to go back to the basics and teach the game of football.

They lost their first game against Gull Lake. "It was terrible vs. terrible and we lost," he said. "We got beat and I told them it was my fault. We were going to go back and make some adjustments."

Uzelac made it clear that part of his coaching strategy is that he never felt sorry for the kids. "If you do, they will take it and they will use it as a crutch," he said. "Don't tell me about your problems. Tell me about how you plan to solve your problems and then I will try to help you after school."

The next game was the miracle. It started out badly with the team's golf cart used to carry supplies blowing up outside of the locker room before the game. It was a distraction, and he hates distractions. But they started to really play as a team and won their first game in years. "Kids were sobbing and crying," Uzelac said. "I'm saying 'whoa, we have seven more games to go!' One kid told me he hadn't won a game since seventh grade!"

Then they kept winning and ESPN called, and the Detroit Free Press called and money to support the team started coming in from all around the country. "It shows we have a lot of great people in our country."

The team kept going. They kept practicing, eating and studying. Uzelac set up homework assistance for the team with the goal of getting 50 percent of the team on the honor roll. They ended with 15 of 35 students on the honor roll. Of the five seniors on the team, all five graduated and all five are going on to college. "I'm more happy about that than all of the other stuff," he said.

"I had one student with some real problems at home," Uzelac told the club. "He asked me 'what do I do to get out.' He had two D's, 2 C's and 2 F's in school. I told him to work hard on his academics and get a good work ethic. Now he has a 3.66 GPA. They need direction and someone to believe in them."

The team went on to win their first state playoff game. "I don't know how we did that," Uzelac said shaking his head. Then they suffered what he called a "humiliating defeat" to Zeeland. Their linemen were all over 300 pounds and their skill was great.

Still, Benton Harbor came home to cheers from the community and Good Morning America sent the team to Disney.

Winning on the football field became more than a game. Uzelac said he saw the community come together. "Football was a vehicle to success."

He won't speculate on this year's team. There will be a lot of work to do again but this year, there will be hope in their eyes.

## **WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE E-WHEEL?**

Your weekly email is brought to you by Emily Hosinski, Jennifer Kirsch, Brandi Smith-Gordon and Lisa Cripps-Downey. If you have an announcement, a bit of news you wish to share, or a story you wish to see featured, please write to [emily\\_m\\_hosinski@whirlpool.com](mailto:emily_m_hosinski@whirlpool.com).

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