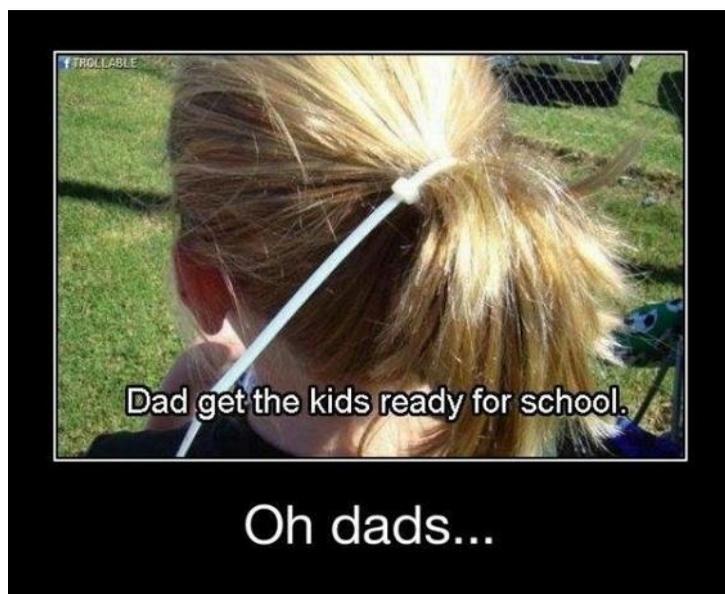


Meet Our Speaker: **Melinda Perry**

Melinda Perry has a decade of housing industry and executive level leadership experience. Throughout her career, she has held various positions, starting from the ground up, which has given her keen insight into how an organization functions. Her areas of expertise include operations management, process improvement, and strategic planning and communication. Melinda is currently the Chief Operating Officer for RCS Pinellas, a nonprofit addressing hunger, homelessness, and domestic violence. She is responsible for the overall operation of the program branches and related support services. Melinda is a licensed real estate agent and graduated cum laude from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science degree in Telecommunications.



Rotary Club of Seminole Officers 2018-2019:

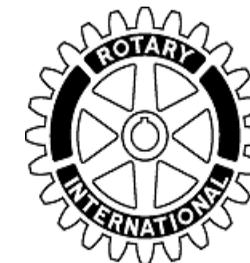
President	Ginger Hayes	Sergeant at Arms	Frank Tanzella
President Elect	Jen Reynolds	Bulletin Editor	Jeff Graves/Ruth Berry
Secretary	Lorie Whitney	Past President	CJ Morris
Treasurer	Mike McQuilkin		

District 6950 Website - www.rotary6950.org
Seminole Rotary Website - www.seminolerotary.org
Rotary Club of Seminole P.O. Box 3313 • Seminole, FL 33775-3313



ROTARY 2018-2019

SEMINOLE SMOKE SIGNALS



Club Number 4289

January 23, 2019

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, thank You for the wise words of others that help me be a better person. Amen.

PROGRAM THIS WEEK: Melinda Perry,
Chief Operating Officer for RCS Pinellas

PROGRAM NEXT WEEK: Phyllis Stockfisch,
Pictures of India

PROGRAM LAST WEEK: Phylis Boksen, Raymond James,
TOUR of the building at Carillon

Upcoming Events:

Feb. 6th	Linda Bass
Feb. 9th	Casino Night 7:00pm-10:00pm, Seminole Lakes Country Club
Feb. 13th	Lorie Whitney
Feb. 20th	Ruth Berry
Feb. 27th	Claude McMullen

AFTER THE STORM

A year after Hurricane Maria tore through Puerto Rico, local Rotary members continue to rebuild homes and lives

Eladio Montalvo faced a stark choice: risk drowning in his one-story home or climb through a window into the house next door. It was under construction but had a second floor where he could escape the rising floodwaters. He boosted his dog through and scrambled in after him. The two huddled inside an upstairs bathroom for 22 hours while Hurricane Maria raged over Puerto Rico. With 155 mph winds and torrential rains, Maria was the strongest hurricane to hit the island in more than 80 years.

After the storm, Montalvo went out to see what was left of the home he had lived in since 1958. The walls were standing, but the water inside had risen chest-high. Everything was destroyed. Without any family nearby, he had nowhere to go. He moved into his car.

“But after the storm came the calm,” he says. “Good people came.”

Faustino Rivera pats Montalvo affectionately on the shoulder. It’s September 2018, a year since Hurricane Maria, and Rivera and several other members of the Rotary Club of Mayagüez have stopped by to visit. Montalvo lives in a fishing town called El Maní outside the city of Mayagüez on the island’s west coast. He invites his guests inside to see the progress he has made adding a shower to his bathroom. There’s a pile of tiles that he plans to lay soon, and he has started painting the walls a light shade of blue. The home is neatly but sparsely furnished: a bed, a TV, and a few plastic bins, including one labeled *camisas* that has shirts and shorts tucked inside.

“He’s become my friend,” says Rotarian Orlando Carlo, who checks in on Montalvo almost every week.

The Mayagüez club paid \$4,200 for the materials Montalvo used to add a second story to his home. Made of concrete, outfitted with hurricane shutters, and built high enough off the ground to avoid flooding, the new addition contains a small kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. Montalvo did much of the work himself, calling on friends and neighbors skilled in construction when he needed help.

To find people like Montalvo who needed help but didn’t qualify for reconstruction aid from the U.S. government’s Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Mayagüez club members worked with community leaders and screened each family. “We are trying to help those who really need help,” Carlo explains. “Those who can’t get it from anyone else.”

By the time Carlo met him, Montalvo had been living in his car for nearly six months. A local church leader introduced the two, hoping Rotarians could help Montalvo find permanent housing. “I could tell immediately that he was severely dehydrated from staying out in the sun and sleeping in his car,” Carlo says. “He seemed stunned and needed guidance on how to start rebuilding. We assured him we were there to help him.”

After the hurricane, Carlo was also living alone. His wife had gone to stay in Florida while he remained behind to run his construction business. But the lack of electricity and reliable communication meant his work projects were stalled, so he mostly spent his days volunteering. “It gave me a lot of time to help,” he says. His home survived the storm, but the shortage of gasoline meant he had to plan his trips carefully. He rationed bottled water and food, eating what he calls a “hurricane diet” of canned pasta or sausage and rice.

“We didn’t have power back until the end of October,” says Christa von Hillebrandt-Andrade, president of the Mayagüez club. “We could use one bucket of water per day. My teenage daughter learned that water is the No. 1 thing you need. She could live without electricity and even without her cellphone, but not without water.”

Antonio Morales spreads a message of hope and resilience to at-risk youth through theater. His project, Teatro Por Amor, is now supported by a Rotary global grant. “I like coming here because it’s an escape from my life,” says 16-year-old Annie, above left. Student Kelvin Tirado, right, sits next to actress Anoushka Medina, who runs the Sanjurjo Teatro Por Amor group.

Mayagüez is home to 75,000 people and to the island’s second-oldest Rotary club after San Juan. In the past, the club carried out smaller projects, but the massive devastation caused by Maria motivated members to do more to help their neighbors, especially the very poor.



“I’ve been a Rotarian for 40 years, and I’ve never seen so much help come from other Rotary clubs,” Carlo says. After Hurricane Maria, clubs across the United States wired the Rotary Club of Mayagüez about \$50,000 directly; more than half of that money came from the Rotary Club of La Jolla Golden Triangle in California and a group of clubs in New York. As club treasurer, Rivera keeps track of every receipt and sends updates back to the donor clubs. A year after Maria, the club had helped 22 families repair their homes, mostly replacing roofs that were blown off by the hurricane.

Scanning the horizon from a hillside neighborhood nicknamed Felices Días — “Happy Days” — Carlo points out a less-than-happy sight: the many blue FEMA tarps that still stand in for permanent roofs. “There is still a lot of need here. This is not over,” he says. “But we are willing to continue to help as long as it takes.”

And for Montalvo’s part, he has remained optimistic in spite of all he went through. “Hurricane Maria gave me more than she took,” he says.

When Ken McGrath became president of the Rotary Club of San Juan in July 2017, he thought his most arduous task would be planning the celebration of the club’s centennial in 2018. Three months after he took office, Hurricane Maria hit.

“While Maria was a major disaster,” McGrath says, “it had the beneficial effect of invigorating our club to show those in need the real meaning of Rotary.”

By the time he was able to get an internet connection and check his email, McGrath had received 200 messages from clubs around the world offering to help. Rotarians in Puerto Rico started distributing food and water every Saturday. Working with other clubs, they coordinated the distribution of 300,000 pouches of baby food. They even put dog food out for animals that had been left behind.

Once the immediate needs were under control, they started to think about long-term relief.

“So much of the damage isn’t only to the infrastructure; it’s to the spirit,” says John Richardson, a member of the San Juan club and a past district governor. To address mental health after the hurricane, fellow member Bob Bolte suggested the club do something unconventional: apply for a grant to support youth theater.

Bolte had met Antonio Morales in 1995 when the San Juan club installed a library in the housing project where Morales grew up. He was impressed to see that Morales, who was just 14 at the time, was running a theater group for other kids living in his tough neighborhood.

“Theater saved my life,” says Morales, now a 37-year-old actor and director. “My father was a drug lord. My mother was a victim of domestic violence.”

Even though his father had forbidden him to pursue acting, Morales persuaded his mother to secretly take him to an audition at the public performing arts school. “Everything I learned at school, I brought back to the projects,” he says.

Eventually his theater group became an unlikely alternative to gangs in his neighborhood. “When boys reach a certain age, it’s very easy for them to join the drug gangs,” Morales says. “We told them, ‘Come join our club, not them.’ Even the leaders of the gangs supported me. They didn’t want their little brothers to follow in their footsteps.”

After the hurricane, Morales, who now runs the San Juan Drama Company and stars in a TV series called *No Me Compara*, started visiting housing projects with other actors to spread a message of hope and resilience to young people. “People were desperate. They were bored. They were depressed,” he says. “We decided to go into these communities to give love. We didn’t have aid kits, food, or water to give — but we had our theater experience. So we said, ‘Let’s go and make these people happy.’” With schools closed and the power out, teens turned out in droves.

When Bolte learned what Morales was doing, he suggested Rotary could help. “These theater groups provide almost a second family to a lot of the kids,” Bolte says. “I wanted to help him do this on a wider scale, across multiple neighborhoods.” A \$99,700 global grant has allowed Morales to expand the project to four theater groups so far and to pay a stipend to the facilitators of each group. Funding for the grant came from Bob Murray, a former San Juan club member who now lives in Arizona, where he’s a member of the Rotary Club of Scottsdale. In December 2017, Murray gave \$1 million to The Rotary Foundation for the recovery effort.