

Fun at the Pow Wow Parade, thank you everyone, for your help!!



SEMINOLE SMOKE SIGNALS



ROTARY 2018-2019

Club Number 4289

March 13, 2019

PRAYER FOR TODAY: Lord, keep us mindful of the humanity we share with all people. Amen

PROGRAM THIS WEEK: “Officer Friendly”, Deputy Tom Festa, Seminole Community Police Officer

PROGRAM NEXT WEEK: Presentation brought to us by CJ Morris

PROGRAM LAST WEEK: Heather Lennie, Free Reading Program

Upcoming Events:

- March 27th Phil Crow
- April 3rd George Donovan
- April 10th Dr. Jesse Coraggio, Founding Partner, EdPros Consulting Group
- April 18th **Annual Golf Tournament**, held at the Seminole Lakes Country Club
Need prize donations, goodie bag items, and volunteers please see or call Phil Crow
- April 17th Hayward Hartman
- April 24th Hank Houser

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		

Putting power in hands of women

Stephanie Woollard went from Down Under to the top of the world to find out if one person can make a difference. The clacking of sewing machines fills the sunlit room until word spreads that the bus has arrived. At that, a dozen women clad in pink kurtas file into the courtyard of the [Seven Women Center](#) in Kathmandu, Nepal. They smile widely as a group of Australian women led by a tall blonde enters through the iron gate.

The Seven Women Center provides a respite from the discrimination and violence many Nepali women face in their personal lives.

Stephanie Woollard bends down to let Sandhya Khadgi, the center's bookkeeper and literacy trainer, put a dot of red powder on her forehead and a red flower petal atop her head in a gesture of welcome. Woollard has arrived with a group of Rotary members and friends to tour the center that she founded and whose goal is to improve the lives of women in Nepal.

When Woollard, now 34 and a member of the [Rotary Club of Melbourne](#), first met Khadgi, Woollard was a 22-year-old tour guide with a passion for social justice and a knack for connecting with people. After leading a tour group to Kathmandu in 2006, she stayed an extra week to explore the city's winding streets and hidden passageways, as tangled as the electrical wires above them. She soon made friends with shopkeepers, who invited her to tea as she asked them about their lives.

"I'm a very curious person," she says.

One day, Woollard noticed a woman with dwarfism lugging two heavy bags into a makeshift tin shed constructed of three walls and a roof. It had no door; on impulse, Woollard followed the woman inside. Another woman who spoke some English told Woollard that seven disabled women lived in the shed, eking out a living selling soaps and candles. In Nepal, many people consider a disability to be karmic payback for a sin committed in a past life. One of the women had fallen out of a tree as a child and had never been treated for her injuries; another had hurt her leg and, because her family didn't have money for treatment, had to have it amputated. Khadgi — who was one of the women Woollard met that day — was born with a jaw deformity that she covered with a mask in public.

"When Stephanie walked into the tin shed, I felt so nervous around someone from outside the Nepali community," Khadgi says. "In the community, because of the deformity I have, I am shunned." But she had a feeling Woollard was different.

The women view Anita Kerr, left, as a mother.

The experience haunted Woollard. She called home and asked her mother what to do. "Can one person make a difference?" she wondered aloud.

She decided to use her last AU\$200 to find out.

Through the connections she had made in Nepal, Woollard hired two people to teach the seven women to knit handbags, gloves, and hats. By the time she flew home, they had crafted 12 items, which she stuffed into her suitcase to sell to friends in Australia. Meanwhile, the women kept on knitting, and Woollard looked for an outlet to sell their work.

A student at La Trobe University in Melbourne at the time, Woollard joined a group focused on fighting human trafficking and asked the members to host a booth on campus to sell the Nepali women's products. But sales didn't go the way she expected. She began to realize that people saw only the items, not the women behind them. So she started speaking to groups around campus to drum up interest in the group she now called Seven Women; soon sales reached \$800 per week. The proceeds went back to



Nepal where they were invested into more training so the women could make higher quality goods. Soon they were getting orders from fair-trade outlets across Australia.

The enterprise went through some growing pains. When products weren't consistent in size, Woollard realized the women had to learn how to use a ruler. The need to read and fill out order sheets turned into literacy lessons. Trying to find products that would appeal to the Australian market, Woollard searched the internet for images and, on trips to Nepal, made patterns on her hotel room floor using material from a wholesale market in Kathmandu. She and the women worked together to come up with designs that would suit both their skill level and the market's demand. She wanted it to be their business, not hers.

"All of those things that went wrong, she turned into learning experiences. She's creative in that way," says Bob Fels, a Rotarian from Melbourne. "She got her hands dirty. She was practical. She was driven by wanting to help people. She was prepared to put herself out."

In Kathmandu — which ranks fifth among the world's most polluted cities — blaring horns and choking dust fill the air and the crowded streets. The Seven Women Center provides a respite from all that, as well as from the discrimination and violence many Nepali women face in their personal lives. "When Steph comes here to visit, we're excited," says Anita Kerr, president of Seven Women. "There are always new things happening. We are growing, and the women are changing. They have more confidence."

On this July day, the visiting Rotarians' first stop is the sewing room, where a half-dozen women sit at the machines. They are only a few of the women who work with the center; most are based at home so they can fit in their sewing or knitting between taking care of children and other household duties. The women have just completed a large order that they've been working on for months for a French company, a new customer. Now they're starting on a 10,000-piece order for friendship bracelets for a local tour company.

Kerr introduces the women and briefly tells their stories. A 17-year-old girl who used to wash dishes 16 hours a day until her hands were raw now lives at the center, where she receives an education as well as a stipend that she can send home to her parents. Eventually, she wants to own a tailor shop. Another woman is a single mother who wouldn't give up her daughter, even though girls are seen as a burden in Nepali society. A third makes a three-hour round-trip bus ride to the center every day because it's a place where she feels safe and happy after her abusive husband left her for another woman. "I feel like it is my home," she says.

A banner hanging on the wall of the sewing room depicts the life cycle of a butterfly: It's the metaphor the women use to describe how their lives have changed because of Seven Women. They were caterpillars when they arrived, and the center is the cocoon that shelters them while they receive training in skills that include hospitality, literacy, and finances. When they're earning money, they're butterflies, able to leave poverty, violence, and oppression behind. And once their metamorphosis is complete, they can share their skills with others — teaching women back in their villages how to read and write, continuing to work with Seven Women, or opening their own shops and businesses.

