

News

Or what they didn't teach you in Civics 101

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News
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Rotary's Four-Way Test, the "ethical standards by which we can separate fact from fiction," apply as appropriately to personal lives as business decisions.

"Through your fellowship and ties to the community, you can teach fellow citizens what we didn't learn in Civics 101," 78th District state House candidate Judy (Fitzpatrick) Truesdell of Niles told Dowagiac's club Thursday noon in her first visit to Elks Lodge 889.

Being mindful of "the things we think, say or do - is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build good will and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?" can help anyone "listen and take into account all concerns, work out compromises that reasonably satisfy the needs of everyone and then communicate what has transpired in the most open and meaningful form.

"Only then will we be able to actively participate as responsible citizens whether it is to assess the value of proposed policies or ballot questions; to judge the effectiveness of leaders and the promises of candidates; or to measure progress in lessening the gaps that exist today between the 'haves' and 'have nots,' " said the businesswoman, who was elected in 2000 and re-elected in 2004 as trustee of Lake Michigan College near Benton Harbor. She is not a Rotarian.



Dogwood Fine Arts Festival Chairman Chuck Ringland introduced Judy Truesdell to Dowagiac Rotary Club Thursday noon.

Her daughter, Meg, owner of Red Shoe Jewelry in downtown Niles, has given them two granddaughters.

Terry and Judy have started three businesses in the past 34 years, including IDI Design Group; the first female-owned business in the Niles area, Tree Play Inc., which produced redwood play structures for children; and, with Meg, Cupcaketree.com.

"Your mission to foster unity, strengthen and expand relationships and communicate collaboratively within the community is what strengthens and maintains the foundation of self-governance and the responsibility of us all," Truesdell said.

"The application of ethical standards set out in the Four-Way Test are the ways by which we insure that 'freedom' remains in good health. It is an excellent best practice that is missing in the debate about our future. And it is the best practice that I want to bring to Lansing and carry home to my neighbors ... without the application of standards by which we can measure the value and benefits of choices made just leads us to stand frozen in a state of inertia, afraid to take chances and defending failed 20th-century solutions."

As a Pontiac native and Eastern Michigan University graduate who has lived in Niles for 40 years and someone "who has both struggled and benefited as a member of society, and as one who has been baptized by the fire of competition" in trying to unseat entrenched Berrien County incumbent Neal Nitz of Baroda as a female Democrat in 2006, "I am committed to doing what it takes to bring our communities and our beloved state back to its days of prosperity," Truesdell said.

Besides being a businesswoman and elected official, Truesdell, the youngest of four children, is a "family partner who has learned the art of cooperation and compromise" in her marriage to Terry.

"I know better than ever our need to get beyond old battles. And while I may stand in danger by bucking existing

economic and social practices, I am, and will remain, forever optimistic about our future and committed to those 'other' basics they forgot to teach us in Civics 101 - the ones that give rights to government and its people, but demand responsibilities of both, starting with: is it the truth? and ending with will it be beneficial to all concerned?"

Truesdell related that the Four-Way Test was developed by Herbert Taylor of Club Aluminum Corp. and introduced 70 years ago in 1938 as the ethical standard for Rotary International membership.

"I think it is significant that you keep it as a proverbial signpost on your door and you repeat it in unison each time you induct a new member," she said. "How wonderful that Taylor applied these ethical standards as a way to bring his company back from bankruptcy and then presented it as a guide for membership into Rotary."

She congratulated Dowagiac Rotary on its recent 88th anniversary.

"You must be proud as a club, being organized only 15 years after the establishment of the first Rotary Club in Chicago by Paul Harris and friends and only two years after the end of World War I. You are well-known for your commitment to the Rotary philosophy of putting 'Service Above Self,' and I am proud to have the honor of talking to you today."

"Your dedication to the greater Dowagiac community is well-known and recognized within the Rotary (District 6360) and beyond. Your partnerships with the school system, United Way organizations and those who work to make our communities better places to live are legendary," Truesdell said.

"From your college-level mentoring and community college scholarship programs to your investment in youth through Rotary Youth Leadership Academy (RYLA), you have truly shown the way.

"Your gift to the community of Rotary Park here in Dowagiac and your financial and physical support to keep it attractive, as well as your signature annual shootout event for youth from all over southwest Michigan is truly remarkable. Amazingly, these are just the activities you do locally! Your club also is world-famous in Rotary International. Your contribution to the eradication of polio throughout the world is well-recognized.

"Your work for world peace and for the image of America has helped break down physical and political barriers to insure children are immunized against dreaded polio and other childhood diseases," she said. "What mom and dad in any country of the world wouldn't be grateful for your work?"

"Your water purification projects in the Dominican Republic and Nigeria have won the envy and respect of health officials worldwide - and most certainly the gratitude of those families who have benefited so greatly."

"As a woman, I also think it is important to note another worthy Rotary fact," Truesdell smiled. "While it took Rotary 80 years, along with a little nudge from the U.S. Supreme Court, to open membership to women, clubs around the country like yours now realize how boring and colorless meetings would be without our added flavor and leadership abilities! After all, just look at this wonderful club with Rana (Lechlitner) as president and Barbara (Groner) as president-elect. And I believe that's in addition to your secretary, membership chair and public relations chair. How you have adapted!"

When Truesdell became a candidate in 2006, "I did so because I felt deeply and passionately about the need for change in southwest Michigan. But what I didn't know then - that I do today - is that the basic understanding of how our government works, which makes up Civics 101, was less essential than the understanding of what our responsibilities were to the government as citizens and how we could contribute to effective self-government ... we need not look any further than right here at your Rotary Club to learn this important lesson."

"When Rotary International set about to eradicate polio and bring clean water to the people of Africa and the Dominican Republic," she said, "it envisioned what could be done in these countries by good people with a little bit of money and a lot of effort. Clearly, Rotary had a vision and was willing to take a risk - one that brought people together, gave them incentive and moved them forward - all for the betterment of humanity."

"If we look at our own society, we have to ask ourselves:

€ Do the policies of the past really allow us to prepare every child in our communities with the education and skills they need to compete in this new economy? Imagine freeing ourselves from unfunded mandates that don't allow for creative learning environments that motivate youth.

€ What if a technical training certificate or a college degree was in reach and relevant for anyone who had the desire

to succeed? Imagine how attractive we would be to a broad variety of new employers, entrepreneurs and investors.

€What if we stopped the wrangling over how health care is provided and worked together to find a compromise resolution within the realm of reason for everyone? Imagine how we could free up our businesses to innovate, create jobs and bring prosperity back to our communities."

Truesdell said, "The clock is ticking on these and other serious issues like them that will define our future and that of our children. Somewhere between budget-breaking entitlements and total self-reliance of individuals, there are opportunities to bridge the gap. We must come to recognize our collective civic responsibilities and stop defending the same old same old. And the Rotary can help by doing what you and other clubs do so well - service above self and all that it means."

"When all is said and done," she said, "you set an example for all service organizations - and for all of us individually. You are what we all should have learned in Civics 101 but didn't."