

Rotary Club of Altadena

# Sparks

OFF THE ROTARY WHEEL  
AN AWARD-WINNING NEWSLETTER



July 30, 2015

## This Week

**It's a Mystery  
Come to the Meeting  
and find out**

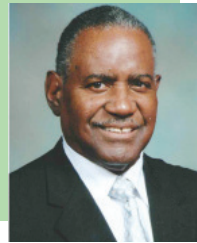
**Program Host:  
Kimmit Haggins**

Sometimes it happens this way: our program chair has everything arranged and a commitment from the invited speaker to show up on Thursday. And then, for reasons sometimes expressed and sometimes not, the speaker says that he/she can't make it.

So what is our program host to do? First tell the newsletter editor so she isn't waiting for information that doesn't come, then — and only then — scour his/her contact list to find someone else. That's where we are, folks, as I put *Sparks* to bed, the speaker who had been scheduled for our July 30 program can no longer keep his/her appointment.

As soon as a new speaker has been found and information has been handed off, you will be notified by e-blast so you can inform your guests about the program they will hear.

Kimmit has been bringing us very interesting programs, so this one is bound to be of note also. ○



## Quietly Quick

by Steve Cunningham, *President*

### Financial Crisis Inquiry

In January 2006, the Pew Research Center released a poll that found an even divide in perception: about 46 percent of the respondents (Americans) believed that rich people obtained their wealth because they were "fortunate enough to be from wealthy families or have the right connections," while 43 percent thought they were wealthy "because of their own hard work, ambition, or education." The same poll found that 58 percent of Democrats say that "wealth is mainly due to family money or knowing the right people." An identical proportion of Republicans say that "wealth is mainly a consequence of hard work, ambition or having the necessary education to get a head."

One change has occurred recently that may affect the future evolution of ideas and beliefs and reinforces the problems posed by the confirmatory bias noted earlier: the rise and proliferation of the internet has made it easier for individuals to create their own *communities* — groups that share the same information. In the past, most Americans would have had a shared experience of watching the national TV news on CBS, ABC, or NBC. But now there exists a plethora of cable channels,

some appealing to the left, some to the right. An individual who wants to be reinforced in his/her conservative views can turn to Fox News, while the person who wants to be reinforced in his/her liberal views can turn to one of the other networks. In either case, the views to which he/she is exposed have been preselected to conform to previously held beliefs. This conformity risks further polarization of beliefs about inequality, etc. In addition, this polarized has obvious implications about the ability of our society to deal with the problems associated with these polarized beliefs.

People are trapped in *Information Cocoons*, shielded from information at odds with their preconceptions. To further illustrate this polarization, research results on the death penalty were shown

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## Greeters

July 30

**Tom McCurry**

August 06

**Dennis Mehringer**

August 13

**David Smith**

# Program Review

## American Health Care . . .

### *A Prescription for Improvement*



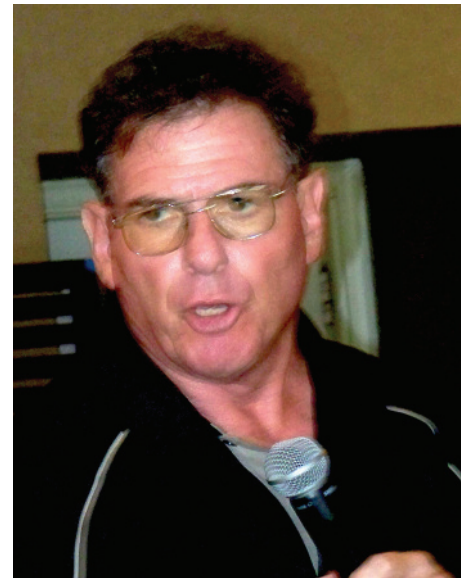
Every once in a while, Altadena Rotary has a speaker who addresses an issue of national importance. Last week at our regular meeting we heard from David Birman, MD who shared his thoughts on the US health care system.

Dr. Birman has been practicing medi-

cine for over thirty years. He attended undergraduate college at nearby Occidental College, graduating in 1979 with a degree in biology. After graduation from college, he received his certification as a physician assistant in surgery and primary care from USC. That training and experience led him to pursue his goal of becoming a doctor, ultimately receiving his MD from the Universidad Tecnológica de Santiago in the Dominican Republic in 1986.

Birman has dedicated his career to patient care and efforts to improve the delivery of medical care to patients. He is currently the Founder and President of a company named Physician Directed Health Care (PDHC). PDHC has developed a program of physician-to-physician clinical process management engineering. He believes that

- Physicians in any specialty need to identify new approaches to improve their effectiveness in patient care.
- Traditional medical education and training create barriers to effective care.
- The system is made worse by doctors



having to practice their profession in a way forced on them by the payers of their service: primarily insurance companies.


Birman strongly believes that the sole criteria for medical care is to meet the individual patient's needs ... that that is the primary objective of medical practice. He further believes that the physician is the most important factor in health care delivery, and, as such, Birman counsels and advises physicians to leverage their skills to create what is best for their patients,

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***Congratulations***




***Birthdays***



07/08 - Regina Wilson  
07/27 - Tony Hill



***Anniversaries***



07/01 - Bill & Ruth Reeder  
07/15 - Craig & Susan Cox

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**Rotary Club of Altadena - #7183**

Chartered: February 14, 1949  
P.O. Box 414, Altadena, CA 91003  
www.altadenarotary.com  
Meets: Thursday, 12:10p  
Altadena Town & Country Club  
2990 Country Club Drive • Altadena, CA  
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Tom McCurry ..... Asst. Vocational  
Craig Cox ..... Membership

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Photography ..... Jacque Foreman

**July**  
**No Designation**

*Program Chair, Kimmit Haggins*  
July 30 - To be Announced

**August**  
**Membership & Extension**

*Program Chair, To be Announced*  
August 06 - To be Announced  
August 13 - To be Announced

## The Politics of Inequality



I know our perceptions are affected by *framing*, and thus it's not surprising that much of the political talk today is about inequality. Fairness — like beauty — is at

least partly in the eyes of the beholder, and those at the top want to be sure that the inequality in the United States today is framed in ways that make it appear *fair*, or at least *acceptable*. If it is perceived to be unfair, not only may that hurt productivity in the workplace, but it might lead to legislation that would attempt to temper it.

In the battle over public policy, what are the real politics of special interests and fairness? In my years in television, I never heard an industry supplicant looking for a subsidy ask for it simply because it would enrich his coffers. Instead, the supplicants expressed their requests in the language of fairness — the benefits that would be conferred on others (more jobs, high tax payments, etc.).

The same goes for the policies that have shaped the growing inequality in the country — both those that have contributed to the inequality in market income and those that have weakened the role of government in bringing down the level of inequality. The battle about *framing* first centers on how we see the level of

inequality — how large is it, what are its causes, how can it be justified?

Corporate CEOs — especially those in the financial sector — have thus tried to persuade others (and themselves) that high pay can be justified as a result of an individual's larger contribution to society, and that it is necessary to motivate him to continue making those contributions. That is why it is called incentive pay. But the inequality crisis showed to everyone what economic research had long revealed: the argument was a sham. As we noted in past years, what was called incentive pay was anything but that. Pay was high, but pay remained high even when performance was low. Only the name changed to *retention pay*.

If the problems of those at the bottom are mainly of their own making and if those collecting welfare checks are really living *high* on the rest of society (as *welfare deadbeats* and *welfare queens*), as the campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s suggested, then there is little or no twinge of guilt in failing to provide assistance to them. If those at the top receive high income because they have contributed so much

to our society — i.e., their pay is but a fraction of their social contribution — then their pay seems justified, especially if their contributions were the result of hard work rather than just luck. Other ideas — like the importance of incentives and incentive pay — suggest that there would be a high price to pay for reducing inequality. Still others (trickle-down economists) suggest that high inequality is not really that bad, since all are better off than they would be in a world without such a high level of inequality.

On the other side of this political battle are countering beliefs — fundamental beliefs in the value of equality, and in the analyses presented in earlier years that find that the high level of inequality in the United States today increases instability, reduces productivity, and undermines democracy, and that much of this inequality arises in ways that are unrelated to social contributions, but that it comes from the ability to exercise market power — the ability to exploit consumers through monopoly power or to exploit poor and uneducated borrowers through practices that, if not illegal, ought to be. ○

> > **NEXT BOARD MEETING** < <

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 04, at 6:30p**  
**260 S. Los Robles, Pasadena**  
**3rd Floor Conference Room**



## Quietly

Continued from p. 1

to two groups of people: pro- and anti-capital punishment. It was found that people tended to hold that the research that agreed with their original views had been better conducted and was more convincing than research that conflicted with their original views, and they tended to have a stronger position after reading the research that supported their position.

The administration and the banks tried to shape perception about the bailout by arguing that, in fact, the money had been fully repaid. Most Americans have remained outraged at the bailout.

In February 2012, the administration, recognizing that its housing programs had so far failed to do much to stem the flood of foreclosures, let alone to resuscitate the housing market, proposed a multi-billion-dollar program for homeowner refinancing.

There was another possible reason for the reluctance to help homeowners with their mortgages: The more money that goes to homeowners, the less there would be for the banks. ○

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## Program

Continued from p.2

i.e., an autonomous physician changes the alignment of the various third parties through pro-active clinical strategies.

The physician, the hospital and the insurance company should be focused on patient wellness. All parties should be on the same side of the table. When medicine is practiced this way, superior patient care is achieved with dramatic reductions in total costs.

Dr. Birman provided very interesting comments and observations about the current state of the US health care system. His prescription for improvement gave the Rotarians much to consider and ponder.

Boyd Hudson ○

## Form & Line by Jacque Foreman

This week I'm bringing you fascinating information from a different source: *An Uncommon History of Common Things* by Bethanne Patrick and John Thompson. This is a book that I gave Bruce for last Christmas. I did warn him that I would probably be grabbing it of his bookshelf for creating filler for *Sparks'* pages.

\* \* \*

I'm going to start with *Aluminum Foil*. How many of you used to or still call it *Tin Foil*? There is a reason for that that I didn't know.

Before aluminum foil was possible, sheets of tinfoil served many of the same purposes in food preservation as *aluminum foil* does today. And that is why the name *tinfoil* has become synonymous with *aluminum foil*. I never knew why my mother insisted on calling this product made of aluminum *tinfoil*.

As you know, in spite of plastic wrap, reusable plastic containers, sandwich bags, and resealable plastic bags, aluminum foil remains a favorite for storing and wrapping food. So most kitchens still contain at least one reliable roll of aluminum foil.

The reason is simple. Aluminum foil blocks light, water and bacteria, which means it blocks bad tastes and odors. It can also be folded, and crumpled to almost any shaped container or food chunk. Then it can be uncrumpled, unfolded, and washed for later use. This same malleability that makes it so long-lasting and useful also makes it easy to recycle.

Now for a bit of history. What made aluminum foil possible were two scientific discoveries: the ability to extract aluminum from aluminum oxide and the ability to turn it into a thin, flexible, and impermeable sheet.

Charles Martin Hall developed the method for extracting aluminum from

## The Uncommon History of Common Things

aluminum oxide in 1889 — just a few years after he graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio. Concurrently, a Frenchman named Paul-Louis-Toussaint Heroult was developing the same method independently. Today it's known as the *Hall-Heroult method*.

Here in the US, we remember Hall because he and financier Alfred E. Hunt founded the Pittsburgh Reduction Company, which became the Aluminum Company of America (or Alcoa).

Extracting aluminum was only the first step. Turning it into a thin, flexible impermeable sheet was the next. Enter J.G. Nether & Sons of Schaffhausen, Switzerland who invented an *Endless Rolling* process.

The rest is history. Once consumers saw how convenient and easy it was to use aluminum foil, they were hooked and still are.

\* \* \*

*We have a bit of room, so let's turn to tea and tea bags.*

Tea has been cultivated for thousands of years in India, but is now drunk all over the world. There is an apocryphal story about how the Chinese found tea that involves Emperor Shennong's hygienic belief in boiled water and a few leaves of a plant falling into his cup around 2737BC.

Buddhist monks brought tea from China to Japan a century or so later, where the tea ceremony was developed. It took about eight centuries more for tea to catch on in the west where it was introduced by Dutch traders.

Tea bags were invented by Thomas Sullivan of Poughkeepsie, NY, when he began sending out samples of his tea inventory in small, silk muslin pouches. It wasn't long before clients asked for these tea bags. ○



All FREE Concerts start at 7:00 PM in the Amphitheater at Farnsworth Park.  
 568 East Mt. Curve Ave., Altadena, CA 91001 for information: 626-798-6335  
 Visit: <http://www.altadenasheriffs.blogspot.com>

### 19th Annual Summer Concert Series Schedule - 2015

Downbeat Express (Big Band with Jennifer Gates)	Saturday, July 11th
The Brian Hughes Band (Ultimate Jazz)	Saturday, July 18th
The Manning Brothers & Friends (Irish Music & Dance)	Saturday, July 25th
The Mighty Burnt Bacon (Stax Style Soul Band)	Saturday, August 1st
Upstream (Reggae, Calypso, Soca & Steel Drum Music)	Saturday, August 8th
Kings of 88 (The Ultimate Tribute to Piano Rock)	Saturday, August 15th
Whiskey Hayride (Country Music and Much More)	Saturday, August 22nd
Floyd & The Flyboys (R & B Soul & Funk)	Saturday August 29th

**And... For Our Grand Finale... Saturday, Sept. 12th**  
**Back by Popular Demand...Sgt. Pepper in their tribute to the Beatles!**

*Presented by United Support Group & SSGA*

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Of Altadena



Georgia Rutherford  
In Memory of  
Don Rutherford

