

Business jingles of the past at Dayton Rotary

Members and guests of the Rotary Club of Dayton took a trip back more than a century as local historian and former Mayor Caroline Wadzeck presented a fascinating look at the businesses, entrepreneurs and personalities that helped shape early Dayton. The program centered on research Wadzeck conducted using surviving issues of The Daytonite, Dayton's hometown newspaper during the early 20th century. Wadzeck explained that while researching at the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, she came across a January 1920 issue of The Daytonite. On one page was something unusual – a collection of advertisements for 16 Dayton businesses written as clever rhyming jingles. That discovery became the foundation for her presentation.

The jingles did more than advertise groceries, clothing, automobiles, banking services and jewelry. They provided a snapshot of everyday life in Dayton more than 100 years ago and opened the door to discovering the people behind the businesses. "P.H. LeSueur was famous back then for his poetry. It was nothing less than astonishing the way he could churn out his rhymes. He was the one who wrote the jingles for the newspaper to help advertise various businesses," stated Mayor Wadzeck. She researched each business and its owners, tracing their histories through newspapers, census records, directories and other historical sources.

Among the businesses highlighted were Aldrich Dry Goods Store, Dayton State Bank, Fenner Brothers' Meat Market, E.G. Herrington Garage, Friedman's Mercantile, Bozeman Drug Store, Allison & Settig Garage, Heal's Pharmacy, Kline, Goldstein & Company, Loomis Hardware, Merritt's Café, Smith Jewelry, the Cash Store, People's Guaranty State Bank, and The Service Drug Store.

Wadzeck not only reported on the business es-

tablishments, but on many of the owners of the early businesses. One of the most remarkable figures discussed was Dora Bozeman, an entrepreneur whose accomplishments were extraordinary for her era. Bozeman operated a drugstore and was described in the presentation as Texas' first registered female pharmacist. Her varied business and civic interests included operating a hotel and working as an undertaker and embalmer. She also served as a Dayton postmaster and sought elective office in Liberty County. Her drugstore also helped introduce Dayton residents to a new technology – radio. Wadzeck shared how Bozeman purchased an early radio for the store and invited residents to gather and listen to broadcasts.

Another familiar name was Dayton State Bank, established in 1907 through the efforts of future Texas Gov. Ross S. Sterling and W.T. Jamison. Jamison's early days at the bank were a far cry from modern banking. Wadzeck explained that he handled virtually every job himself and even slept inside the bank for a period of time. His career with the institution ultimately spanned approximately 55 years.

The presentation also highlighted Dayton's early connection to the automobile. E.G. Harrington operated one of Dayton's early garages and became known throughout the area for his mechanical abilities. His expertise extended beyond automobiles to the machinery used by area rice farmers. Harrington was also active in civic affairs and served for years on the Dayton City Council.

Wadzeck shared another piece of Dayton transportation history through Smith Jewelry. According to Wiley Smith Sr.'s granddaughter Cynthia Smith (owner of The Liberty Gazette) he developed a reputation for repairing railroad watches, an important responsibility during an era when accurate timekeeping was essential to railroad oper-

ations. Watches were reportedly sent to him from all over the nation to Dayton for repair. Wadzeck shared the jingle for Smith's jewelry:

*For birthdays and weddings throughout the year
You'll find many gift suggestions here.
In silverware, diamonds, watches, and chains,
Cut glass, ivory-ware and pretty rings.
There's presents here for girl and boy
And gifts the old folks will enjoy.
And of course you know it's understood
When it comes to Smith, it must be good!*

The stories also demonstrated how resilient Dayton's business community had to be. Fires, economic changes and changing ownership repeatedly reshaped the downtown business district. Some businesses disappeared after only a few years, while others survived through new owners and new names. In several cases, the names associated with those early establishments remain familiar to longtime Dayton families today.

The advertisements showed that while technology has changed dramatically, the fundamentals of business have not. Dayton merchants in 1920 were promoting customer service, competitive prices, quality merchandise and the importance of advertising – many of the same principles local businesses rely upon today. Wadzeck emphasized that preserving the history is increasingly important. Her research has helped preserve information that might otherwise eventually be lost.

At the conclusion of the informative program. President Robertson announced this week's Rotarian Spotlight winner. Rotarian Livia Callahan was honored for her commitment to the club. Livia is a dedicated educator and community leader who currently serves as Assistant Superintendent of Teaching & Learning for Dayton ISD. Her career in education has cen-



Rotarian Spotlight Honoree Livia Callahan and local historian and former Mayor Caroline Wadzeck

tered on curriculum, instruction, leadership, and helping create opportunities for students to succeed. Livia's commitment to education fits perfectly with Rotary's mission of service. She serves our club on the Youth Services/Ryla Committee, helping us support and encourage the next generation of leaders. President Elizabeth Robertson said, "We are fortunate to have a Rotarian who understands that investing in our young people is an in-

vestment in the future of our entire community. Livia, thank you for your leadership, your commit-

ment to education, and your service to the Rotary Club of Dayton and the Dayton community!"

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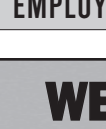
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