

Rotary  
Club of  
Charlotte



# THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

February 6, 2024

## 2023-2024 Board Members

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Past Pres William Bradley

Secretary John Cantrell

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Exec Sec Christine Cipriano

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## *Johnny Harris ~ Leader Supreme*

by **Marilynn Bowler**

When a roster of "prominent and distinguished business leaders" is compiled, certainly the name of Johnny Harris is on the "short list." Charlotte Rotary bestowed its most acclaimed "Excellence In Leadership Award" to this icon and giant of a businessman before a packed ballroom at our meeting on February 13th.

Introduced eloquently by former NC Governor, Pat McCrory (himself an honorary member of Charlotte Rotary Club) shared many of his own experiences ~ as a business leader and good friend ~ with Johnny Harris during his terms as Mayor of Charlotte and as Governor, and even since then, and of the superb leadership roles our recipient spearheaded in bringing Charlotte to the astoundingly- successful and nationally-recognized city we all celebrate now.

Pat began his intro by saying, "Johnny Harris is not just a 'bio of accomplishments, Johnny Harris is a power phenomena'." Going back to 1984, Pat said, Charlotte was always, "Charlotte, NORTH CAROLINA" because it was constantly confused with Charleston, Charlottesville, and any other "CHAR ..." city in the South. At that time, Johnny Harris was a young leader who was already distinguishing himself as an excellent strategist and marketer ... and, since then, he has taken that keen intelligence to spearheading the making of our airport as a major airline hub; to bringing the world of arts to Charlotte with the development of the Performing Arts Center; to turning Charlotte into a major league sports

"hive" by helping to lure the NBA and the NFL to Charlotte; and to cap it all off, partnering with Arnold Palmer in bringing the PGA to Quail Hollow. "Johnny Harris put Charlotte on the map," Pat said.

He went on to list Johnny's other leadership roles inclusive of luring ACC Football, NCAA tournaments, (along with the astoundingly creative turning of a 'bar scene' into uptown Charlotte's Latta Arcade area for that NCAA tourney to assure NCAA visitors would be lured and would have a 'meaningful' visit to our city during their stay) ... and the list went on and on and on. The roster of Johnny Harris' business leadership roles as listed by Pat was incredibly long ~ and it touched on just a portion of the footprint Johnny has left on Charlotte during the last many decades.

Pat summed up his intro of Johnny Harris with these words, "Johnny Harris has made Charlotte, CHARLOTTE."

The mic was then turned over to Chris Williams, himself a Charlotte treasure and icon, who led us through a fascinating Q&A with our award winner. Seated at the front of the room with just the two men talking - person to person - we were intrigued with that back-and-forth conversation. Johnny told us that over the past fifty years, he has always believed that leadership is important in order to make a change for the better, consistently using the words "connecting" ... connecting WITH each other; connecting FOR economic development; connecting TO Raleigh, Durham, et al; connecting IN ORDER to promote growth. He talked about the importance of development that will appeal to young professionals as well as lure ~ and retain ~ established corporations and high-level businesses. Our mandate is to welcome newcomers as well as to appreciate those who have lived here their whole lives.

When asked what the "next big thing" in Charlotte's "to-do" list is, he cited THE PEARL and emphasis on the continued development of that area as well as for others like it. In addition, Johnny highlights working on diversity within our city's planning along with hosting and promoting events that bring people together. Then he spoke of the importance of planning for the future including finding solutions for those who are disenfranchised and/or have special needs.

In closing, he spoke of commerce, telling us that we're the only country in the world that is not "back to work" following COVID. When 40% of our workers are still not working together in offices but are preferring to work remotely, then eventually, he said, it will affect a slowdown in promotions and an astounding amount of unoccupied office space, particularly uptown.

AND, when making decisions regarding Charlotte's rules and regulations, "Think about what impact your recommendations will have on our city," he told us. "And think about our diverse population and create new ways to address their needs."

"My family moved here many years ago to better themselves and to make our city a better place to live," Johnny said. And we say, "Mission accomplished!"

Charlotte Rotary is proud to present the 2024 Excellence In Leadership Award to the superb Johnny Harris.

A recording of the meeting can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/912715721>  
The program introduction begins at approximately 11 minutes and 15 seconds.