

Rotary
Club of
Charlotte



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

August 27, 2024

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David Erdman, Watergate: 51 Years Later – An Insider's View

by **Bill Barte**

Charlotte Rotary member, **David Erdman**, has regaled our club with all types of topics in the course of his history within the club. Due to the illness of our scheduled speaker, George Shinn, Erdman stepped up to share his experience as a participant in the famed Watergate investigation that occurred in Washington, DC, in 1973.

David acknowledged that there were three separate audiences for his presentation. "Those that remember living through Watergate, those that knew that it happened long ago, and those that have heard of it" he stated.

The presentation began with an ode to the impact of computers, music, and being from North Carolina, which helped with his placement within the historic Watergate investigation committee. However, it was seeking a larger city than his hometown of Bridgeton, NC, and his college town of Durham, NC, that led him to Georgetown Law School in Washington, DC, after he graduated from Duke University with an Engineering Degree.

Attendees eagerly learned that the plush complex named Watergate came from a required water lock or gate on the C&O Canal in Washington. This lock helped control the depth of the water and enabled transportation into the river. This "water lock" is where Watergate was developed in the 1960s.

Erdman was only a second-year law student in June of 1972 when burglars broke into the Watergate building to remove eavesdropping devices that had previously been planted in the Democratic National Committee office. At the time, Erdman was politically active and had just served as the second youngest delegate ever for North Carolina at the Democratic National Convention.

The break-in and subsequent investigation by unanimous consent by the Senate activated his interest which led him to actively follow the “bird dog” journalist, Woodward & Bernstein and their anonymous informant at the time, Mark Felt (Deputy Director of the FBI and nicknamed “Deep Throat”).

However, it was the appointment of Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr. (D-NC) and his Capital Hill staff member Rufus Edmisten that helped propel Erdman into an investigator. The latter were bonded by a love of music with Edmisten singing “Honky Tonk Angel” as Erdman played the guitar. When Edmisten became Deputy Chief Counsel for the Senate Watergate Committee, Erdman’s place in the investigation was elevated because of his familiarity with computers. The only computer on Capitol Hill was in the basement of the Library of Congress and, although antiquated by today’s standards, it greatly helped in the research of people and their testimony before the Committee.

David spoke about researching Carmine Bellino with “Americans for Agnew” to the “mastermind of dirty tricks”, Donald Segretti, whom he was able to see testify before the Committee on October 3, 1973.

He finished the look-back into the historic moment recalling his respect for Special Prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, the wonder of the savage treatment of presidential candidate and war hero, Senator George McGovern, and the termination of Attorney General Elliot Richardson and more in the “Saturday Night Massacre”.

Erdman fondly mentioned the Watergate-related people that he has met over the years. Reporters Carl Bernstein, Bob Woodward, Connie Chung, and Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI). Plus, the reunions with the Watergate staff including the reunion held this year.

The “three different” audiences for the presentation were all treated to Mr. Erdman’s ability to bring the past alive with engaged energy and a personal and impactful look at this moment in our nation’s history.
