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## State representative shares information with Gilchrist County Rotarians; New member welcomed into the club



Pausing for a moment after the meeting are (from left) Rotary Membership Chair Todd Gray, Club President Bob Clemons, State Rep. Chuck Clemons, Rotarian Joanne Halter, Rotarian Rob Rankin and newly inducted Rotarian Scott Akins.

### Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © June 19, 2018 at 10:48 p.m.

**BELL** -- Monday afternoon (June 18) was another banner day for the Gilchrist County Rotary Club as the members welcomed Scott Akins into the club and they heard from the state representative for District 21, which includes all of Gilchrist County, all of Dixie County and part of western Alachua County.



**Rep. Chuck Clemons (left) shakes hands with Gilchrist County Rotary Club President Bob Clemons before the meeting starts. These two gentlemen are first cousins.**

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**Rotary Membership Chair Todd Gray (left) reads the induction decree for newly inducted Rotarian Scott Akins (right-most), as Club President Bob Clemons and Rotarian Joanne Halter are seen in the process.**



**Rotarian Joanne Halter pins newly inducted Rotarian Scott Akins after the new member was inducted Monday afternoon (June 18).**

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**In the two photos above, Holly Creel is seen as she speaks about herself being the Rotarian in the Spotlight for this meeting. Fellow Rotarians have said she brings a special something to the club, adding her spark of positive, happy energy.**

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**Rotarian Rob Rankin introduces the guest speaker for the meeting – Rep. Chuck Clemons.**

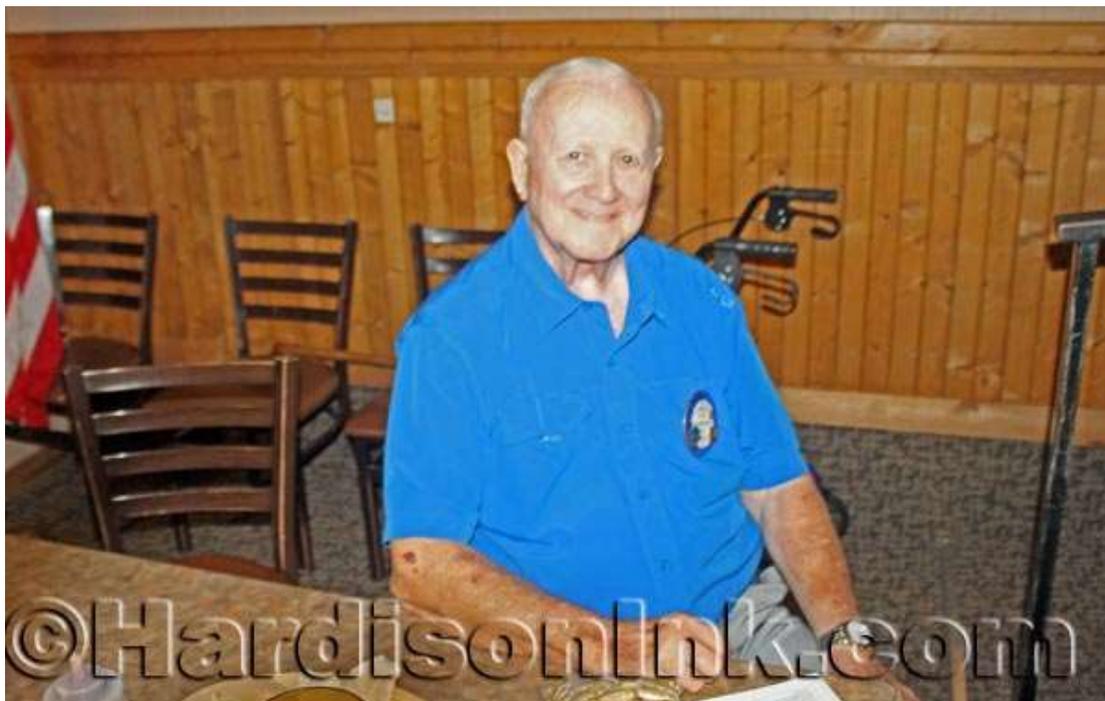


**State Rep. Chuck Clemons tells the Rotarians about the Florida Legislature and his work there on behalf of the people of District 21, and on behalf of the people of Florida.**

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**Club President Bob Clemons gives State Rep. Chuck Clemons a copy of the Rotary Four-Way Test.**



**Gilchrist County Commissioner D. Ray Harrison enjoys the meeting on Monday afternoon. Commissioner Harrison is a longtime friend of Rep. Chuck Clemons.**

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Held in the renowned Akins Bar-B-Q & Grill, 1160 S. Main St. in Bell, the meeting included a wonderful and delicious lunch of coleslaw, baked beans, sliced pork barbecue, garlic toast and drinks, such as sweet iced-tea.

Scott Akins owns Akins Bar-B-Q & Grill with his wife Kim Akins. Scott Akins became the most recent member of the Rotary Club of Gilchrist County.

Gilchrist County Rotary Club Membership Chair Todd Gray inducted Akins as a new member. Akins was sponsored by Rotarian Joanne Halter, who pinned him after the induction ceremony. Gray is a principal in Gray Construction Services as well as being a member of the Gilchrist County Board of County Commissioners.

Rotarian Rob Rankin hosted the meeting and introduced his guest speaker, State Rep. Charles Wesley "Chuck" Clemons Sr. (R-Newberry).

Rankin is the Gilchrist County superintendent of schools, as well as being a member of this Rotary Club. Among the other county leaders who are in this Rotary Club and were present for this meeting are Gilchrist County Commissioner D. Ray Harrison, Gilchrist County Clerk Todd Newton, and Gilchrist County Property Appraiser Damon C. Leggett.

Holly Creel, R.N., was the Gilchrist County Rotarian in the Spotlight.

Creel joined the Rotary Club in 2015 and oversees the club's public relations and program support.

She is married to Ken Creel, who is the owner of AERSI - Everything Toyota, Lexus and Scion of Gainesville. He has owned it for 40 years, she said.

Holly Creel retired from UF & Shands in 2012 where she had served as a cancer nurse for 15 years, director of nursing and director of operations during her long career in medicine and administration.

She has one daughter, three grandchildren and two dogs. She enjoys her family and reading, gardening, making yard art and being on the beautiful rivers in Gilchrist County. Creel grew up in Hollywood (Florida).

The gathering included opportunities for lighthearted banter as well as for all of the members and guests gaining a perspective of the Florida Legislature from keynote speaker State Rep. Clemons Sr.

Among his high points so far in the House are his efforts to help people keep money that is theirs, help college students enjoy their right to freedom of speech and to work to defend small business owners from huge corporations.

Rep. Clemons shared some insight into the actual mechanics of politics in Tallahassee as well. He was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2016 and is seeking reelection in 2018. His wife of 16 years is Jane Clemons. They have four children Shayna, Charlie, Travis and Weston, and three grandchildren.

Clemons grew up raised on a chicken farm in High Springs. He served on the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners from 1996 to 2000. He is currently Vice President of Advancement and Communication at Santa Fe College (formerly known as Santa Fe Community College).

As he opened his speech, Rep. Clemons especially noted County Commissioner Harrison as being his friend and of Harrison's many decades of service above self in Gilchrist County.

Being a former county commissioner, Clemons spoke about the difference between political power as a county commissioner versus as a state representative. On a five-member commission, one person and two others can create policy or enact local

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legislation, he said.

In the Florida House of Representatives, there are 120 people. There are 40 state senators, he added.

And even if a bill passes both state legislative bodies, the legislator must convince the governor that “it is a good policy” for the people of Florida.

Clemons shared a few stories about his role over the past two sessions.

His first year in the House, Clemons worked on a bill to do away with a government program.

That first year, Rep. Clemons worked with Chief Financial Officer Jeff Atwater on a bill to change the process where since 2006, mortgage foreclosures paid 12 percent to certain trustees in the state as part of the settlement.

Clemons’ Bill passed that year in the House 114-0. Democrats and Republicans voted in favor of it.

One senator was able to block this bill from being heard in the third committee in the Florida Senate that year, Clemons said. After making it that far, the bill died before the whole Senate could hear it and vote in favor or against it.

This bill would have helped more people to get more of their money back into their pockets after being foreclosed upon, he said. The strategy to win passage of bill, he said, includes knowing where to insert pressure.

In this instance, it just took one state senator to kill the bill.

Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis took office in 2017. Rep. Clemons went to him during that session and explained about the work he had done with CFO Atwater. Patronis agreed to help in this effort for that session.

Again, the Florida House voted unanimously in favor of the bill, Clemons said.

The bill passed in the Florida Senate this time, he added.

People can now get 100 percent of their money back through <https://www.fltreasurehunt.org/>, which takes no commission, Clemons said.

Clemons said the Speaker of the House lets other members know how the leadership would like certain votes to go. If a state representative feels inclined to go against those wishes, he or she should let the Speaker know in advance, Clemons said he was told.

There was one bill where Target and Walmart wanted to sell alcohol inside the stores, he said.

Since 1934, Florida law required a separate business to be built for sales of alcoholic beverages (other than beer and wine), he said.

Those two entities are big business, he said, adding that he will stand up for small business instead. Some small business interests contacted him about the impact of this bill passing.

He heard business owners saying everything they own is tied up in a business that would be crippled if the law changed.

By voting against what the Speaker wanted, Clemons saw a couple of his bills slowed down.

“That’s politics,” he said. “So, you’ve got to learn to never negate what your core values and beliefs are.”

He said he intends to always vote his conscience – no matter who is against it.

The annual pay for representatives and senators is \$29,000, he said.

He already accepts a check from the state of Florida, as an administrator at Santa Fe College. He went to the college president and told him that if he is elected, he wanted to

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lower his pay from the college dollar-for-dollar.

No one in the Florida Legislature who worked for any other college or university has done that before, Rep. Clemons said.

“My view was that I already work for the people,” Clemons said, “and I’m not going to take that money and double dip.”

Rep. Clemons said his wife was not in agreement with him, but she allowed him to take the reduced pay.

Three-thousand, two-hundred and fifteen bills were filed to be heard by the Florida House. Of those, 200 passed, Clemons said.

Of the six bills each representative is allowed to introduce each year, Clemons said three or four of his have passed. Therefore, his 50-plus percentile of passage is far better than the average.

He credits his success with taking good issues and knowing about the politics, other than the instance where he went against the grain on the alcohol sales limitations revision proposal.

Among his bills that he can take pride in is one that will take “dirty plastics out of the waste stream” and recycle it into fuel oil, carbon black and hydrocarbon gas. This is called Pyrolysis.

Clemons said dirty plastics take up 20 percent of the space in landfills. This is millions of dollars to be saved at landfills.

Campus free speech is another issue he successfully fought to defend. There was an effort to restrict free speech to a “free speech zone,” Clemons said, on college campuses in Florida.

“No!” he said. “The whole college is a free speech zone.”

Rep. Clemons worked with Rep. Bob Rommel (R-Naples, Dist. 106) and they had the bill passed so that the colleges could not use the student code of conduct “... to punish people because of their different thoughts and beliefs.”

He recited a poem for children from ages ago “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt you.”

“You could say things without reprisal,” Clemons said. “They didn’t hit or scar you up. They just had a different view. And that was Okay. It is still Okay! So, I was happy to champion that.”

Florida is one of only nine states that is addressing the muzzling of free speech in the United States of America, he added.

He went on to speak about another success story for the people of Florida.

When Clemons was in FFA, he learned the Motto, and those 12 words changed his life, he said.

National FFA Organization motto

Learning to Do,  
Doing to Learn,  
Earning to Live,  
Living to Serve

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There are 18,000 FFA members in Florida schools now, he said. Through an appropriation bill that he and other leaders worked on for two years, that 18,000 number will go to 60,000 FFA members in Florida.

“FFA is not only the most premiere leadership organization,” Rep. Clemons said, “but

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they help you as a whole person – from record-keeping, bookkeeping, career stepladder.

“You can always tell when the FFA is in the Capital,” he said. “I’m going to give you a little behind the legislative curtain. I didn’t have to do a lot of testimony on the New Generation Education Bill. You put the state (FFA) officers in front of the committee – and you turn them loose.”

Clemons said that legislators agreed that these are the best and brightest young men and women in the state.

“FFA is what’s right with America today,” Clemons said. “You can look across the news and see all of the things that are wrong with America. Let me tell you, there are no ‘snowflakes’ in the FFA.”

By this, according to information in the Urban Dictionary, Clemons is referring to "A snowflake," which is a term for someone that thinks he or she is unique and special, but he or she really is not special.

The term gained popularity after the movie "Fight Club" from the quote “You are not special. You're not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You're the same decaying organic matter as everything else.”

It began being used extensively as a putdown for someone, usually on the political left, who is easily offended or felt they needed a "safe space" away from the harsh realities of the world, but now has morphed into a general putdown for anyone that complains about any subject, according to the urban dictionary.

The representative shared insight about other bills where he was involved and helped listeners to have a better understanding of how state lawmakers and policy-creators reach the conclusions they reach.

The Gilchrist County Rotary Club is scheduled to next meet on June 25 at the Woman's Club in Trenton. This will be the last meeting with Bob Clemons as the club president. Aaron Haynes is the president-elect. With the addition of Scott Akins, the Rotary Club of Gilchrist County has 39 members, and Monnye Brown as an honorary member.