

PRESENTATION TO ROTARY CLUB, RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA JULY 14, 2006

THE PROGRAM



Jim Young introduced **Lester Ellis**, Founder of *The 1200 Foundation* and **Rosemary Corbin**, Foundation Trustee. Les and Rosemary are both Richmond natives, both grew up “poor” and both were blessed with circumstances and opportunities that allowed for a transition from the widespread poverty of the mid 20th Century to successful lives and well-being today. As most of you know, Rosemary Corbin is a Past Mayor of the City of Richmond. The 1200 Foundation is a non-profit organization committed to helping the working poor move up and out of poverty.

Rosemary Corbin began with an impassioned remembrance of what it was like to grow up poor:

- Never having quite enough.
- Watching your parents struggle every month to pay the bills
- Buying your groceries on credit and hoping you could pay for them later.
- Having your car repossessed.
- Praying that no one got sick or injured or God Forbid, laid-off, because you might become homeless.

Rosemary said that the modern working poor, with exactly the same problems are not so lucky. Rosemary said a lot about why but it can be summed up in the fact that if you work for the current minimum wage, you earn \$14,000/year. The most basic annual expense for a family of four in the Bay Area are estimated at \$47,000/year.

Les Ellis then took the podium. He acknowledged the great works of Rotary, specifically noting the \$800,000,000+ that Rotary has given world wide for the eradication of polio (the Polio Plus Program). He humbly noted that the 1200 Foundation is new and not in that league, yet. “1200” refers to the foundations archetype idea that many small, dependable \$1,200/year (\$100/month) contributions can be gathered and focused (*or as we say in finance, “leveraged”*) into supporting the very best of programs that really work to help the working poor, “make it”.

The 1200 Foundation is a clearing house for social programs and acknowledges that all social outreach efforts are not equal. Ellis held up as examples of very successful programs that are supported and recommended by the 1200 Foundation;

- OPTIC, a business skills and technology training program in Antioch that helps minimum wage women move into the much better paid clerical service work force, and;
- St. Vincent's Day Home, that provides the fundamentals to 230 West Oakland children so they can go to school. Those "fundamentals" include, three square meals a day, decent clothing and a safe supervised place to come home to until your parent(s) gets off their minimum wage job.
- The 1200 Foundation is also in the final analysis of what Les described as a much needed mental health clinic that is being organized at Brookside Hospital in San Pablo.

Les noted that because the 1200 Foundation does not operate programs itself, 95% of all contributions go directly to successful programs it recommends. Because of its efforts to leverage successes, the 1200 Foundation does not help people who can not work and need public assistance to live. That is job for public as the resources needed are very difficult so produce with charitable contribution. Les noted that in the case of the St. Vincent Day Home, Chevron very generously provided an initial contribution of \$200,000, but that it expires in September. *The 1200 Foundation* is working hard to fill the gap created by Chevron's more modest continuing contribution.

And so it goes. But, In a world where much that is new seems violent & destructive, bad for children and bad for the environment, it is great to hear about creative new efforts to continue and expand the best of the American Dream. Thank you and good luck to Lester Ellis and Rosemary Corbin, pillars of the 1200 Foundation. We hope you get many opportunities to tell *The 1200 Foundation* stories around the East Bay Rotary circuit. If you would like more information about the Foundation go to <http://www.1200foundation.org>.

The Foundation accepts any size contribution, if you're so inclined.