



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

May 27, 2025

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GEORGE SHINN

CHARLOTTE ROTARY CLUB'S NEWEST HONORARY MEMBER - CELEBRATED AND INDUCTED ON MAY 27, 2025

by **Marilynn Bowler**

To call this past Tuesday's meeting "something special" is an understatement.

Flanked by heavy-hitter Charlotte Observer sports columnists Tom Sorensen and Scott Fowler, the man who brought professional sports to Charlotte ~ **George Shinn** ~ spoke poignantly about how he managed to defy the naysayers who all said that "Charlotte's too small a market for pro sports." He not only convinced the NBA owners to vote "YES" for Charlotte but also impressed the NBA Commissioner to state that George's presentation to the League owners was so good that "It was the best presentation I've ever seen or heard."

It was an amazing journey George took during his quest for a pro sports team. From baseball to football to basketball ... he explored each sport for a potential home in Charlotte. From meeting Donald Trump to MLB Commissioner Peter

Uberoff and Yankees owner George Steinbrenner to renowned NBA Commissioner David Stern whose infamous question to George was, "George, where in the hell is Charlotte?" ... George kept striving on behalf of our city. He knew a pro sports team would bring new businesses to town.

When George successfully won the NBA over and Charlotte was named a new team in the NBA, George went right to the top to make the Hornets popular and fun to watch. He recruited Alexander Julian to select the team colors and design the Hornets uniforms, and Muppets originator, Jim Henson, to build the team's mascot. He put together an organization to sell season tickets and win fans, and the Hornets ended up setting attendance records for the League for ten straight years. Spearheaded by NBA/sports marketing guru Carl Scheer, the front office was taught from the start the slogan "Fans First." That criteria was etched in stone from "day one" and continued to dominate game operations and PR throughout the fourteen years the Hornets called Charlotte home.

Encouraged to share his personal stories of behind-the-scenes events going back to the founding of the team in 1988 when ~ in Scott Fowler's opening remarks NASCAR, wrestling (or "RASLIN" as it was pronounced by some) and minor league baseball and hockey teams were what our city offered ~ George talked of Opening Night on November 4th and the stroke he suffered on Nov. 8th. He spoke of his recovery, thanks to the expert treatment he received at then-Carolina Medical Hospital/now Atrium Health for which he remains grateful to the extent that he has made a substantial donation to their cardiac care unit which now includes the George Shinn Stroke Center supporting cardiac research and the training/recruitment of medical physicians specializing in the treatment of stroke victims.

In all actuality and without argument, Muggsy Bogues was (and still is) the most popular Hornets player of all time. Sitting in the audience among George's family on Tuesday, he showed off his famous grin and reminded us of why he is so beloved, so when George asked Muggsy ~ from the stage/platform ~ if he had a question, Muggsy was ready. "Are you comfortable sharing the true story in terms of why we weren't able to keep Alonzo Mourning?" he asked. With his usual candor, George told about the negotiation with Zo's agent and the fact that, simply put, Zo wanted to play for Pat Riley in a *large* market. Regardless of the HUGE/INCREDIBLE money George offered him, which would have made him the highest paid player in the NBA, Zo and his agent declined.

George shared many other stories (most humorously the BBQ deal he made when he talked Alexander Julian into designing the Hornets uniforms). He then sequed into speaking about his recently published book, **FULL COURT FAITH** (Subtitled: How We Can Be Used By God for His Good and Perfect Purpose.") As a surprise to our club, George will donate the entire cost of the 20 books he autographed for the lucky winners of the "under the seat" coupons.

Throughout the past three-plus decades, George Shinn has continued to financially support so many homeless men and women via Charlotte's Rescue Mission; so many senior citizens who reside in assisted living venues; so many victims of the storms in Western North Carolina; so many college students via scholarship funds; so many families who are starving for food and someone who cares; and the list goes on-and-on-and-on. He is a man whose heart and soul seek to make life easier for

others. He is humble, loyal, kind, and a very smart businessman. And, by the way, he's so much fun to be around.

We were blessed and grateful to hear from the real George Shinn on Tuesday.

A recording of the meeting can be found here:

This one is without the slides: <https://vimeo.com/1089087497>

This one is with the slides: <https://vimeo.com/1088183827>

The program's introduction starts at 17 minutes.