



Founded 1894

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The Owl Club

NOTICE

Tuesday 19th May 2026: Notice of meeting #1382

Dear Fellow Owls

The 1382nd meeting of The Owl Club, preceded by dinner, will be held on Tuesday 19th May 2026, 6:00 pm for 6:45 pm start, in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove Club.

Chairman: **President Owl Nigel Gwynne-Evans**

Guest speaker: **Brett McDougall** on the topic of:

“Meeting of Minds: Rhodes, Baker and the Question of a South African Architecture.”

“In parallel to a successful corporate career, Brett McDougall has explored his passion for built heritage in the work he has done with the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation and Muizenberg Heritage. In Johannesburg he led the restoration of Hilson Bridge (Johannesburg’s oldest suburban bridge) and the Orange Grove Waterfall, and was a recipient of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation Honorary Lifetime Membership Award. In Muizenberg he has revitalised Muizenberg Heritage’s walking-tour programme, and is currently working on a museum of surfing heritage. In 2022 he published a survey of South Africa’s built landscape with Shaun Gaylard – RSA365 – to critical acclaim.”

Music: **Pedro Espi Sanchis:**

“Indigenous Music, an Interactive Performance.”

“Pedro Espi-Sanchis was born in Spain and grew up in France. In 1972 at the age of nineteen he came to South Africa and was captivated by African music. Pedro has collaborated with many great African musicians in his shows and recordings.”

WPB: **Owl Michael Beckerts** on the topic of:

“Mark Making – the Story of my Artistic Development and its Context within the Owl Club.”

Dinner fee: R380

Dress: Black tie (or similarly elegant attire).

RESERVATIONS & PAYMENTS:

Any Owl who does not have internet access is welcome to telephone the Secretary Bird at 072 1820234 to book a perch.

All other Owls are encouraged to use the Pay’n Perch procedure by paying their (and their guest's) dining fee into the Club’s bank account by EFT and instructing the bank (using the option provided) to send a remittance confirmation email to secretary@owls.org.za, whereupon their perches will be booked.

Besides details of your invited guests (see above), no further emails will be needed from you unless you also have special dietary needs or if you are using a dining credit.

In all cases, bookings will close at 6:00 pm on Sunday 17th May 2026.

All bookings will be acknowledged.



April 2026 Meeting

On Tuesday, 21st April 2026, 67 Owls, 9 guests and 3 performers gathered in the Grill Room, Kelvin Grove, Newlands for the 1381st Meeting of the Owl Club. The proceedings started at 18:45, with Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans welcoming all and Owl Derek Leisegang delivering the Grace. This was followed by a three-course dinner (see page 12 for the menu).

Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans then congratulated the twelve Owls who celebrated their birthdays in April: Geoff Davies, Leon de Wet, Bruce Dietrich, Duncan Greaves, Mickey Lowther, Paul Murray, Brian Robertson, Roger Stewart, Angel Tordesillas, Kit Vaughan, Neil Veitch and Julian Wannell.



Having asked all Owls in attendance to rise and give the traditional toast to the guests, Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans invited the guest speaker, Alec Erwin, to address the assembled Owls and guests on his topic: *Living the South African Story*.

Following the address, the Owl President thanked Alec Erwin for his talk and Owl Julian Wannell introduced the first set of the music programme for the evening, presented by *The Bräthew van Schalkwyk Trio*, consisting of Bräthew van Schalkwyk, Keno Carelse and Joshua Nemaire.

After the first musical interlude, Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans thanked all the musicians for their performance.

Above: Sheila Camerer,
Drawing of Alec Erwin.



Following the bar interval, the assembly returned to enjoy the second set of the music programme. At the conclusion of the performance, the Owl President thanked the performers for their contribution to the evening's entertainment.



After this, Owl Helen Boonzaair presented her WPB, on the topic of *A View from the Arctics: Musings from Five Polar Expeditions*.



Having completed her WPB, Owl President Nigel Gwynne-Evans then thanked Owl Helen, and by way of concluding the meeting, he invited Owls and their guests to raise their glasses in a Toast to the Owl Club and wished all a safe flight home.



Guest Speaker: Alec Erwin: “Living the South African Story”



I guess in my time, I have made a few speeches. I must say, the prospect of this one was one of the more challenging. So I have been reflecting. I am 78, born in 1948. What the hell is this South Africa really? What is it? What did I do in it? What makes me South African? Is there anything really interesting about this country, or are we just a kind of news item that floats around the world, that fights with Trump and occasionally does all sorts of funny things. I have been thinking about it more seriously, and many of us have, I think.

South Africa is a very unusual place for a few reasons. One is, and I am sure you probably have geologists in this room, that it is one of the most ancient parts of our modern planet. We are sitting on the edge of one of the oldest cratons. That is not unimportant, because, as we are discussing, South Africa's mineral resources emanate from that and the immense variety of those resources, the depth of which we still do not fully know, makes this a part of the world that is exceptional. We are not just a piece of land sitting somewhere. This is an extremely ancient geological formation.

Secondly, we are one of the newest nations in the world. South Africa did not exist even in the remotest sense of the word before 1910, when it was somehow legalised in the Union.

It was an area of different peoples and again ancient, because there is no doubt that *Homo sapiens*, in one or other form, emanates from this area. So we are ancient peoples, *Homo sapiens*, and we are very ancient geologically, and we were not a nation until the blink of an eye in recent history.

Ours is a project about a few things, a fascinating project about building a state in a period of interest. Virtually all the world states today did not exist before 1885. A few did such as the great empires of China, Iran and parts of Russia. Europe as a set of existing states is only about 900 years old, even less when you think of some parts. Suddenly, in 1885 a bunch of imperial powers decided to define borders. The whole of Africa and most of Southeast Asia were not organised as the states we know today.

When those boundaries were formed, many indigenous peoples then decided to accept those boundaries as the perimeters or definition of their nation. That is fascinating. There was no need to. If you look at West Africa, it is in chaos. The traditional links in West Africa run east to west, not north to south, determined by a bunch of characters who sat in a conference in Berlin and drew north to south borders. At the same time the world saw the massive rise of industrialisation, globalisation, the formation of major communist economies, and then a whole lot of countries that were simply called developing countries. Some of us, like South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, seemed a little bit more important. Many of you Owls will remember the days when these places used to be called dominions. You were not colonies, you were dominions.

So what is South Africa? Bear with me a little bit as I reflect through my story of moving through this thing that we now call South Africa, and then maybe take a quick peep into the future.



The first important thing in my life was my father. He was a concert violinist and then worked in military intelligence during the Second World War. He came back and was part of a movement called the Torch Commando. This was a bunch of radicalised ex-servicemen who had seen what had happened in the world and did not like what they saw when they came back here. In 1948 he upped sticks and we went towards what is now Zimbabwe.

My parents separated, but I went to visit my dad during the school holidays and I stayed on a building site. He was building houses and I stayed in a caravan. One day someone knocked at the door. An old African man was standing there and, being a typical South African little critter of six or seven years old, I called my dad. I said, "Dad, there is a boy who wants to see you at the door". My dad walked up and saw his foreman there. He was a gentle chap, but he just looked at me and he gave me a gentle cuff on the head. He said to me, "You are the boy, he is the man". That taught me something. I started to learn that humans are humans, and I began working with people across many lines.

I was lucky later on when I went to university. It happened to be an extremely active time in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There were a lot of thinkers, analysts and historians. It was at the University of Natal, not UCT for a change, where I was lucky to have lecturers who taught me to think and particularly that analysis is much more important than bullshit. You have to think about things. You have to understand things. We had wonderful historians, and that is when I began to learn about the South Africa as I thought it was: ancient, the origin of many strands of *Homo sapiens*, rich in minerals, with a diverse history. The genes of the Black population in South Africa stem from Nigeria as much as they do from local Khoi and San. This is a melting pot of humanity, and that got us thinking. We had wonderful political scientists. One of the great ones was Dr Rick Turner, who was sadly assassinated in the early mornings of January, 1978. That got me thinking and led to the next important lesson.

The lesson was that people are people. When you get them to work together positively, they are an immensely powerful force. That is the trade union movement. The history of the trade unions is complex, but trying to persuade a worker to join a union at six o'clock in the morning when they are coming on or off shift is not an easy job, especially if you are doing it in half Zulu and with slow patience. Slowly you build an organisation and it starts to come together.

We learned a lot. When you cooperate and work together with a clear purpose, you generate a sense of discipline and a sense of hope. Putting those things together was good, but you learned another skill. You learned that you do not just get your way by organising or shouting. You get your way by negotiating and dialoguing with those around you. Negotiation is a skill. Sometimes you negotiate with managers who are straight and hard. Other times you negotiate with managers who are some of the most brilliant leaders you meet. You cannot negotiate if you do not attempt to understand the person you are talking to, and you cannot negotiate if you are not prepared to listen and to talk and to discuss.

Those skills that the union movement learned had a lot to do with the fundamentally important choice we took in South Africa to negotiate, not to fight. That was a critical decision. The experience of learning, building, and cooperating included people who later became our presidents. We are talking about humanity, the art of negotiating, the power of collective action when there is hope and direction behind it, and the importance of respect.

One of my best moments was at Marion Hill. We used to have a wonderful bishop, Archbishop Hurley, who allowed the unions to use the church facilities near Durban, and then we would sleep there. We had seminars discussing history, teaching labour law, and doing strategies. After a long session we were walking back to the dormitory in what was really an old monastery, Marion Hill, and the chairman of the shop stewards, as we were walking back, took my hand. I was 22.



He just took my hand and said, let us go to bed. Not in any sexual way, just come, you are tired. It was that contact and respect that an old man was showing me, that taught me lessons. We then began the negotiating process.

We should never underestimate what a profound decision South Africa took. I am stressing this: South Africa took the decision not to kill each other, and we were killing each other. We used to have secret meetings with Inkatha, sitting in the middle of the Durban club, trying to avoid thousands of people dying. We had people saying, No, no, this is not right. We must not go this route. The negotiating process started with dialogue. The number of meetings that were held was massive. We spent hundreds of hours talking, listening and learning. People listened to us and we learned from them. This was not a one-way tirade. This was a two-way dialogue of learning from each other. That ability for South Africa to negotiate in a very difficult situation, given the global divisions of that time, and started the real process of statehood and nationhood in South Africa.

After negotiation we had to learn to govern. Governing is very difficult to put politely. We were naive, all of us, all parties. What I learned from government is that nothing is ever as simple as it seems. A trade system, mining law, and the institutions that underpin a trade system are massive. You need institutions to enforce rules and to do things. Building a state when you have all sorts of contending interests is not an easy task.

We have travelled a long way. We formed a Government of National Unity. For me that is an extremely profound statement about political resilience: when you are not moving forward, you better find a way to move forward no matter how difficult it might be. This is our country. We are a nation that is a blink of an eye in history.

We are massively endowed with resources on a global scale. These days, despite the tragedies of wars around us, we once again become one of the greatest trade routes in the world. What are we going to do about it?

I think we have done some important things. We are entering a new era in the world and it can go a few ways. We have left the age of imperialism. We are now in the age of neo colonialism because former colonies are now as powerful as the colonial powers. We are dealing with countries that recently became states like South Africa. After the Second World War most of the world tried to govern itself by law through the United Nations. Now we have many forces who think that that was weakness and failure. Will those forces predominate, or will the concept of a multipolar, rule governed system for the betterment of all people prevail?

It is a wonderful challenge. We are not a small player in this. We are very much at the centre of this whole dialogue. Citizens make a country, not some leader. The strength of our institutions, the sophistication of our science, arts, and humanities is what makes us something special. If you do not get excited about being in South Africa at the moment, carry on sleeping.

We have possibilities. The world has to change its total production systems. It is moving towards what we can mostly call green manufacturing, and as in the industrial revolution, South Africa is at the centre of that. This time we must not make the mistake of exporting minerals raw. This time we manufacture. This time we must build a country, a nation.

It is not easy having organised unions. Human beings are quite difficult. I think rabbits and elephants would look askance at us. So it is not easy building this nation unless we have analysis to see what the opportunities are. Let us have the courage. Unless we have the courage to come together as a purposeful collective, we will not succeed. Party politics is a minor part of history. Purposeful collectives are what make history.

This is a great group you have here. You are respected citizens. Let us build this country. Let us make a contribution to civilisation. Let us take a divided, unhappy, exploited country and govern it well. Let us make our people safe, happy, and secure.

Gentlemen, ladies, Owls. Thank you.



Musical Notes: The Brãthew van Schalkwyk Trio: Brãthew van Schalkwyk (pianist), Keno Carelse (drummer) and Joshua Nemaire (multi-instrumentalist)



Above: Peter Hyslop, *Drawing of Brãthew van Schalkwyk in Performance.*



Above: From left to right: Keno Carelse, Brãthew van Schalkwyk and Joshua Nemaire.

Jazz pianist, composer, and band leader Brãthew van Schalkwyk started playing on his mother's piano at the tender age of seven and has gone on to play at numerous jazz venues and music festivals across the country. He now holds a BMus degree from the University of Cape Town and in 2023, he won the UNISA National Piano Competition. Brãthew heads the Openwine Sunday Jam Session which has been running consistently for the past 5 years.

The assembled Owls were treated to music drawing upon sounds from the Cape (Kwêla, Goema), with reference to many of Van Schalkwyk's pianistic influences such as Bheki Mseleku, Abdullah Ibrahim, Nduduzo Makhathini, and many others.

The programme for the evening was as follows:

Set One

Exposure

The Sacred Grove

There's Always Home (Never Alone)

Boog

(All compositions by

Brãthew van Schalkwyk)

Set 2

MMZR (Brãthew van Schalkwyk)

One for the Grove

Woza Mntwana (Abdullah Ibrahim)

Brãthew van Schalkwyk – Piano

Brãthew Van Schalkwyk's trio for the evening featured himself on keyboard, Keno Carelse on drums and multi-instrumentalist, Joshua Nemaire.

Joshua Nemaire is a Zimbabwean-born, Cape Town-based jazz musician and multi-instrumentalist. He is active in the South African jazz scene, performing with artists Afrika Mkhize, Mandla Mlangeni, Buddy Wells and currently heads his own project, *Josh Nemaire Experiment*.

Keno Carelse is a South African drummer based in the Western Cape, best known as a member of the jazz fusion group *The Ploemies*. He specialises in South African Jazz, Ghoema and fusion, performing with artists like Etuk Ubong and Kujenga, and has appeared at major events such as the Montreux Jazz Festival.



WPB: Owl Helen Boonzaier: “A View from the Arctics: Musings from Five Polar Expeditions”

In my Matric year of 1955, our Geography teacher told us that in your lifetime, one should visit at least 5 incredible sights and places on our magnificent planet. Look at Mount Everest, see the Galapagos, the magnificent waterfalls, Iguazu Falls, Victoria Falls, Niagara Falls, the Mayan Temples and climb Machu Pichu. My husband and I had done 3, with 2 left, the Arctic and the Antarctic. As I get terrible motion sickness, sea sickness being the worst, my long suffering husband managed to put us off those trips by saying that “we will do the Arctics when you are 65”. Trouble was when I turned 65 he had sadly died and I therefore set out on my own on my first polar trip to the Antarctic.

And I was so seasick I was very sorry I wasn't dead ... the doctor who was summoned to my “deathbed”, took one look and me and vomited all over my duvet! We were on the old *Linblad*, which became the *Explorer* and then sank in the Antarctic with a Canadian group on board. All came to no harm. That trip was 22 years ago when good stabilizers, climate change, environmental impact etc., etc., were not talked about and certainly not implemented. We actually spent a night on the ice that trip in sleeping bags and were told to dig little holes in the ice with our boot to wee into.

On my last trip in November we signed long documents, on correct environmental procedures, were told we could not go to the bathroom as was delicately put to us before embarking on a hike, so not to drink tea or coffee for a few hours before departure! One silly man sat down on the ice and was immediately sent back to the ship!

But to get back to my trips, the bug had bitten and I have completed 5 trips to the Arctics. What a privilege! In the south, penguins, sea lions, walruses and my favourite, magnificent icebergs, mile long enormous ice shelves, and in the North the polar bears, the Northern lights and incredible birdlife at the slightly lower latitudes and meeting black, brown and white bears. Getting to the Arctic Ice Pack has also included commencing trips from Svalbad.



I had no idea at that time of South Africa's involvement and that history is fascinating as we signed the Svalbad Treaty in 1920, when I suppose we were still part of the British Empire. Today we have a small research station in Svalbad involved in climate change studies and atmospheric and polar research. Nothing of course like our stations in the Antarctic.

Environmentally we must all do what we can to preserve the incredible Southern continent of Antarctica. But sitting here this evening, are people far more qualified than I am to give that lecture. I'm sure you are all aware of UCT and Owl Prof Keith MacHutchon who is on *SA Agulhas* expeditions each year. UCT and South African research partners are considered way up on their Cambridge and Stanford counterparts. And of course the *SA Agulhas* finding the *Endurance*!

Which brings me to one of the most emotive moments of my Antarctic trips, going to Elephant Island and then on a subsequent trip, walking along the last part of the route on South Georgia Shackleton took when he and his small team finally got help. His grave is there.



I could go on anecdotally with lots of my experiences like being left on an island for hours. For example, just me and millions of penguins and skuas overhead, diving in to grab hapless babies if mum and dad penguins were not being nimble enough to move baby. But you will all be bored to tears.

Now to perhaps the most exciting experience, getting to the North Pole! A number of you here this evening may have seen *Le Commandant Charcot*, the only French Polar Icebreaker, coming in to Cape Town Harbour and mooring for a few days last month. Well I was lucky enough to have been sailing on her when she reached the North Pole two years ago. The Captain on that expedition had tried twice, not got to 90 degrees, due to ice, weather etc., etc., and had turned back. This time we followed a route due East from Svalbad towards Frank Joseph Land (Russian) and then were fortunate to find a meld (that is what they call a kind of opening, like a passage). The Polar Class 2 exploration ships function in this heavy ice because the ship has a hybrid propulsion system. Not being an expert on propulsion, I cannot tell you any more technically worded explanations! So, the word I was impressed with was, it has axipods in case any of you ask. The ship is operated by a hybrid power plant powered by liquefied natural gas and 5 MWh electric batteries, capable of briefly driving the ship without engines running. That's all the technical stuff I can remember.

But I sure remember the following, 4 days of slowly moving through the melds, staring out at huge magnificently shaped pieces of ice cracking and slowly lifting up into the air, or moving around and crashing into other enormous pieces of ice, as we slowly inched forward. Over the loudspeaker at 9.30 one morning, the captain said "Everyone get up on deck in all your gear, I think we are maybe going to get to 90 degrees north by 11am". He was standing on the bridge controlling the operation and one could palpably feel the underlying emotions which I had not expected at all. He then started counting in his heavy French accent, 85, 86, 89 and then just as the ship came to a complete stop 90 degrees, and the tears rolled down his cheeks! Amazing.

Then a few minutes later from the depths of the ship the helicopter rose containing the Captain and the expedition leader with a table with huge round ice buckets with dozens of bottles of champagne and huge bowls of caviar. Dead silence, then the Captain made a short emotional speech and the expedition leader said, "There are about 100 of you standing on this deck today. Do you realize where you are, you are at 90 degrees north. There is no East and there is no West. Why is it that people fight about it?" Dead silence! And I think I'll be silent now too!



Above: Tony Grogan,
Drawing of Owl Helen Boonzaier.



Members' News

The Role of Sociable Weaver

As he has now returned to full-time teaching, Owl Peter Hyslop is unable to continue in his role as Sociable Weaver due to work commitments, and will be stepping down as Sociable Weaver in July. Owls who are interested in taking over the important duty of compiling and editing the monthly Notice are encouraged to contact the Secretary Bird by email at: secretary@owls.org.za or by mobile phone: 072 1820234.

About Owl David Earl

David Earl is a longstanding Owl, resident in the UK so we see little of him. Here is some news regarding Owl David from the CPO.

Clarinetist Maria du Toit and Maestro Arjan Tien and the CPO recorded three South African clarinet concerts by David Earl, Conrad Asman, and Roelof Temmingh. The CD will be released on the Channel Classics label in Europe on May 15, but Maestro Tien arranged special clearance for South Africa, and a limited number of the CDs will be available from Peter Kramer. Call Peter on 079 833 7617 if you are interested in purchasing the CD.

About Plumage, Name Tags and Special News

Owl Club waistcoats and plumage. Our new stock has arrived and these will be on sale at the meeting.

Name tags. If any Owls have not received or have misplaced their name-tags, please email or send a message to the Secretary-Bird.

If there are any personal or professional achievements, please alert the Secretary Bird.

From Owl Michael Beckurts

Over the past year Owl Michael Beckurts been working in collaboration with the talented ceramicist Karlien van Rooyen. Together they created a body of work that is currently being exhibited at Knysna Fine Art: Karlien created the stoneware vessels and Michael hand painted them. In addition to the collaboration of 8 ceramics, 12 of Michael's watercolours are being exhibited. If you would like to receive a catalogue, you are welcome to contact jake@finearts.co.za

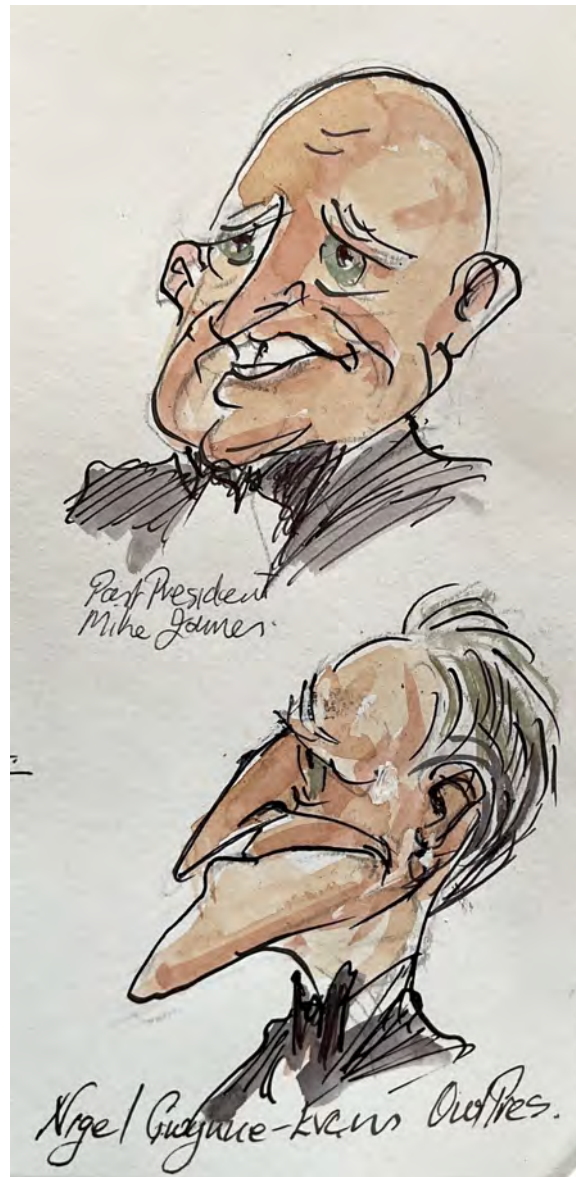
The exhibition, entitled: *Building Mirrors, Carrying Souls*, opened on Saturday, 9 May and runs until 8 June.



Above: Fellow Owl Archie Swanson visited Owl Michael at the exhibition venue.



Seen & Noted at the April Meeting by Tony Grogan



Above: Tony Grogan, *Drawings of Owls, The Brathew van Schalkwyk Trio and Guest Alec Erwin.*



Seen & Noted at the March & April Meetings by Michael Beckurts



Above : Michael Beckurts, *Drawings from Meetings 1380 and 1381.*





The Owl Club
Tuesday 21 April 2026
1381st Owl Club Meeting

President: Owl Nigel Gwynne-Evans

Dinner @ 6.45 pm

Grace: Owl Derek Leisegang

Dinner:

Toast: South Africa: The Owl President

A break for the tables to be cleared

The 1381st Meeting -8 pm following dinner:

Announcements: The Owl President
Owls celebrating their birthdays in April
Talk: Alec Erwin, on Living the South Africa Experience

1st Musical Interlude Bräthew Piano Trio
2nd Musical Interlude Bräthew Piano Trio
WBP Owl Helen Boonzaier Musings form the Arctics



Food for thought:

A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn no other way.
Mark Twain

KG

KEITH GARDNER

The Owl Club
Tuesday 21st April 2026

Starter

Smoked Chicken Salad

Main Course

Seafood (shrimps and half shell mussels) pasta
Served in a creamy sauce topped with parmesan cheese

Dessert

Ice cream
Served with chocolate sauce

The Grace.

As we gather round our tables,
Let us pause for a moment of gratitude.
We give thanks for the abundance before us
for the hands that prepared this fine meal,
for the fellowship we share,
and for the blessings of life, health, and good company.
May this evening nourish both body and spirit,
and may we leave these tables with hearts full of appreciation.

Amen.

Grace by Owl Derek Liesegang.