

Rotary

SEPTEMBER 2025

MAGAZINE

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SERVICE WITH A SMILE

Meet Francesco
Arezzo, your new
RI president

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THE GREATEST CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE GLOBAL HERO WHO CHANGED THE COURSE OF HISTORY

HISTORIC
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AN EVENING WITH PRESIDENT

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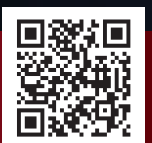
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Peace through education

When I stepped into the role of Rotary International president, the moment came swiftly and unexpectedly. It got me thinking how the world can change in an instant, and how Rotary has the power to be a steady force for good in that change. This month, Rotary's Basic Education and Literacy Month, we have a clear call to action: to strengthen the foundation of learning in every community we serve.

Millions of people worldwide remain unable to read. Millions of children lack access to basic education. And yet, we know the solution: sustainable, inclusive, and equitable education, especially for girls and marginalized youths. Literacy is more than the ability to read and write. It is the key to human dignity, economic mobility, and peace. Every book opened, every classroom supported, and every teacher trained becomes a building block of peace.

This year, our message is *Unite for Good*. "Unite" speaks to the strength we find in each other. When we unite our talents and resources — not only among our clubs but across partners, organizations, and communities — we expand our reach. And when we do so consistently over time, we create lasting change. Rotary service cannot be measured only in annual goals. Our work in education must extend beyond a single year. Literacy projects take time to take root, grow, and bear fruit.

Now is the time to think boldly and creatively. New types of clubs can help us engage educators, students, and advocates in new ways. Let us use this month to welcome new members with a passion for education and empower existing ones to lead service projects that reflect local needs. Whether you're building libraries, distributing textbooks, or mentoring students, your actions matter.

Education is also peacebuilding. Every scholarship we provide, every early childhood program we support, every adult literacy class we fund is an act of peace. And Rotary has been building peace in this way for more than a century.

Let us not forget that the fight for literacy is not only about access, it's about equity. It is about ensuring every learner, regardless of background, has the opportunity to reach their potential. And it is about standing together — across borders, languages, and generations — to say that education is a right, not a privilege.

Let's *Unite for Good* by committing to literacy that lasts. Let's dream of a world where every child learns to read. And then, as people of action, let's work together to make that dream a reality.

Together, we can change lives, starting with the power of education. Together, we *Unite for Good*.

FRANCESCO AREZZO

President, Rotary International



WELCOME



YOU ARE HERE: Ragusa, Sicily

GREETING: Salutamu

A CITY REBORN: Destroyed by a catastrophic earthquake in 1693, the hilltop city of Ragusa in southeastern Sicily underwent a sweeping artistic and architectural renewal during its reconstruction. Rebuilt in the Baroque style of the 17th century, the city's old town, known as Ragusa Ibla, is on the UNESCO World Heritage List together with seven other cities in the Val di Noto region rebuilt after the quake. Largely unchanged since then, the city's cobblestone passageways wind past Baroque cathedrals, opulent palaces, and sun-drenched plazas.

SPLIT IN TWO: After the earthquake, a new town, Ragusa Superiore, was built above the old city. The two are connected by a set of stairways that offer spectacular views of cathedral towers and terracotta-tiled rooftops.

THE CLUB: Chartered in 1956, the Rotary Club of Ragusa is the oldest in the city. Its members include RI President Francesco Arezzo, whose family has for generations owned a farm producing olive oil.

Rotary

MAGAZINE

September 2025

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COVER

On the cover: The Rotary world has rallied quickly around Francesco Arezzo as RI's leader. Photograph by Monika Lozinska



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Level the field

She brought women's soccer to Palestine. Now Honey Thaljieh is advancing equity in sports on a global pitch.

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Photography by Samar Hazboun

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On the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, a tale, spun by a Rotarian, of a besieged city and its heroic healing angels

By Geoffrey Johnson

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Yehliu Geopark,
known for its unique
rock formations,
outside Taipei

STAFF CORNER

Marco Nicosia

International Office Manager – Europe & Africa

I was born in Basel in northwestern Switzerland, which borders France and Germany. My father came from Italy and my mother migrated here from Spain, so I grew up with three languages.

In high school, a teacher of mine spoke 13 languages. He inspired me. Besides German, Italian, and French, which are Switzerland's national languages, I now speak Spanish and English.

I wanted a career with an international focus. Switzerland has an education system that combines professional training and academic studies. While studying to be a certified forward agent at Swiss Business School, I worked for a large global freight forward company, planning and organizing contracts with rail companies in Europe.

In the late 1980s, I became the first in the company to own a PC. Soon, with each branch office acquiring computers, the company made me the PC network manager to coordinate IT operations in offices in Switzerland, Austria, and Liechtenstein. I learned on the job, and my language skills enabled me to read and translate English training manuals.

Like all Swiss nationals, I took time off to perform mandatory military service. I was assigned to the army sector that engaged in rescue operations. Rather than destroying lives in combat, I was trained to save lives from natural disasters.

I joined Rotary's Europe and Africa office in 1996 as an IT manager. My initial assignment was to fix the Y2K bug, which people worried could potentially cause computer malfunctions when the year 2000 began. Starting in 2002, I undertook a six-year quasi-management rotation program, serving as interim managers of finance, the Foundation, and Club and District Support. The experience served me well when I became the



Marco Nicosia and his son, Gino, are loyal fans of Switzerland's storied Football Club Basel.

office manager in 2010. Meanwhile, I earned two diplomas, in leadership and management and advanced economics.

Our office was founded in 1925 with two staff members supporting 27 clubs across eight countries in Europe and Africa. One hundred years later, 46 staff members, who represent 22 different nationalities and speak 27 languages, provide support to 11,780 clubs in 114 countries across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

In 2011, I joined the Rotary Club of Zurich so I could better understand Rotary from the perspective of a member. Nine years later, my friend and I started the Rotary Club of Zurich Circle International. "Circle" refers to a district near Zurich Airport, which is home to many international businesses. We now have 48 members and a few on the waiting list.

Our club created two Rotary airport lounges at the Zurich airport. Rotary members can access the lounges with a donation of 30 Swiss francs — about \$38 — to the polio campaign. The Rotary lounges are located inside the lounges for business and first-class travelers. (You'll see a Rotary flag at the door, and an agent will direct you from there.) In addition, the club has sponsored heart surgeries for children in Beirut and clean water projects in Bethlehem in the West Bank. ■

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The editors welcome comments on items published in the magazine but reserve the right to edit for style and length. Published letters do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or Rotary International leadership, nor do the editors take responsibility for errors of fact that may be expressed by the writers.

Letters to the editor



A LIFE WELL LIVED

After the June issue went to press, the photographer of the People of Action winner in the Photo Awards sent us this note about one of his photo's subjects (above, at right):

I thought you would want to know that Moris Tallaj, past district governor and member of the Rotary Club of Santiago de los Caballeros [in the Dominican Republic], passed away on Monday [5 May] at the age of 102. A number of members of my club, the Rotary Club of Dublin-Worthington, worked with Moris as he helped nurture the relationship between our two clubs over the past 25 years. He was a good man, a good Rotarian, and an example of a life well lived. His enduring smile and positive attitude will be missed.

John Butterfield, Worthington, Ohio

BUSINESS CASE

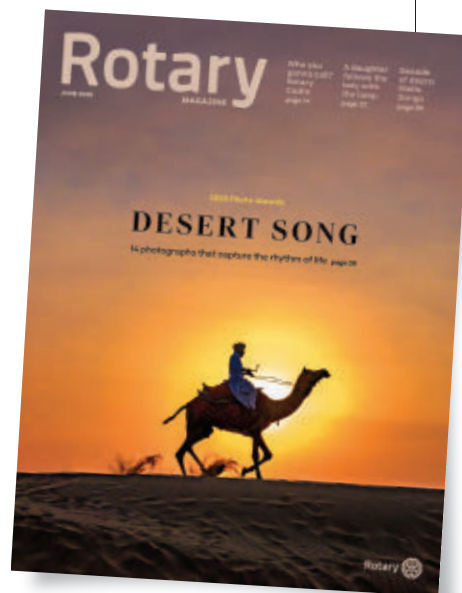
Mary Beth Gahan's excellent article "A profitable path" in the May issue, about the Rotary Club of Fort Worth's outstanding Minority Business Awards program, reminded me of the club's 2023 white paper on the program. This white paper is a key reference in the 17th edition of an organizational behavior textbook that I cowrote, in the section on codes of conduct and ethics.

The Fort Worth club used the awards program and The Four-Way Test, which has been in our textbook since its first edition in 1994, to dramatically revitalize itself. Rotary means business, done the ethical way.

Jim C. Quick, Arlington, Texas

LEND AN EAR

The article "The problem that isn't" in



the May issue was a timely reminder that meaningful service begins with listening. It highlighted the importance of community assessments — not just as a procedural step, but as a core Rotary value. As the piece rightly suggests, we must move from doing for communities to doing with them. After all, people support what they help create.

In our own community work, we've seen how true this is. When we take the time to listen — through simple conversations, local surveys, or informal gatherings — the projects become more relevant, better received, and more sustainable. Community members feel valued and become active participants rather than passive recipients. That's the real strength of Rotary.

One approach we've found effective is to partner with trusted local leaders — including teachers, village councilors, and youth groups — who can open doors and encourage honest dialogue. Keeping follow-ups informal and regular also helps maintain trust beyond the project phase. These simple practices have enriched our service and strengthened our community bonds.

Raj Khooblall, Nouvelle France, Mauritius

OVERHEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In May, we showcased a project that restored the Klamath River in the Pacific Northwest, thanks to the efforts of Indigenous leaders, environmental advocates, and a dedicated Rotarian.

By far, my favorite article in Rotary magazine ever! I have the issue open on my coffee table to the photo taken after the dam removal and I can't stop staring at its brilliance. It's breathtaking, powerful, and deeply inspiring. A stunning reminder of what's possible when communities lead with heart and persistence.

Kayla Truneczek
► via LinkedIn

CONNECT

RESCUE MISSION

I appreciated the article “Waste not” in the April issue, which shed light on the urgent global issue of food waste and its far-reaching impact. As a proud member of the Rotary Club of Goshen, Indiana, I’d like to share how our club is addressing this challenge on a local level through our volunteer work with Cultivate Food Rescue.

Cultivate is a nonprofit food rescue organization in northern Indiana that plays a vital role in recovering unused nutritious food that would otherwise go to waste. By partnering with schools, hospitals, caterers, and food suppliers, Cultivate collects surplus food, repackages it into ready-to-eat frozen meals, and redistributes it to food-insecure families across our community.

The importance of their work cannot be overstated. In Elkhart County alone, thousands of children and families face food insecurity, while perfectly good food is routinely discarded. Cultivate bridges that gap by turning potential waste into life-sustaining meals. In doing so, they help reduce landfill waste, alleviate hunger, and build a more compassionate and sustainable community.

Our Rotary club is proud to support Cultivate through volunteer hours and advocacy. Their mission perfectly aligns with Rotary's commitment to Service Above Self and addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty. We hope other clubs will be inspired to take action in their own communities.

Doug Stanley, Syracuse, Indiana

TRAVEL PERKS

My wife and I were coming down in the elevator of a hotel in Porto Venere, the gateway to the Cinque Terre coast of Italy, when a gentleman and his wife entered. On the lapel of his blazer was the familiar Rotary pin. In halting Italian

and English, we conversed about our home clubs — his in Carrara, Italy, and mine in Phoenix. At the front desk, when he overheard my request to the clerk to recommend a restaurant for dinner, he spoke to her about a nearby establishment. She conveyed to us his suggestion, including that it was a local favorite and that using his name would guarantee us a good table and excellent service. Yes, it was one of the best meals we had in Italy!

Dianne McDonald, how could you even contemplate, let alone advocate, the elimination of actual travel just to minimize the individual effect on the environment ["Travel without moving," Letters to the editor, April]? The bottom line is that the rewards of actual travel — adventure; the exposure to new people and their customs; the tastes, smells, colors, and quirks of a place — far outweigh any negative environmental impact.

Stephan Goldston, Phoenix

PICK OUT THE POLITICS

I want to applaud you for much of the content in *Rotary* magazine. The stories of help to people who desperately need a helping hand are great. However, I have been displeased by the political content included in several articles in almost every issue.

I have been a Rotary member for about a decade, and I have always been told that *Rotary* is not a political publication. In my opinion, this content greatly detracts from what I believe you are trying to accomplish and has resulted in me throwing the magazine in the trash before completely reading it on several occasions.

I, and I am sure many other Rotarians, would appreciate better screening of the articles submitted for publication. Articles that reflect the political agenda of either side should be discarded or rewritten to exclude any ideological slant.

Robert Bates, Fredericksburg, Texas



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magazine**

Magazine highlights

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Podcasts



ON THE PODCAST

On a recent episode of *Rotary Voices*, broadcast journalist Jerome McDonnell gathers insights about membership from Rotary staffers Nick Taylor, a Club and District Support supervisor, and Brianne Haxton, senior manager in Membership Development. Listen at on.rotary.org/podcast.



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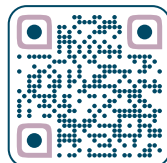
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THE SPECIALIST

The fortitude to fly

A museum tells the story of women who became WWII pilots

When I was a teacher, I taught my students all about World War II. We talked about the Tuskegee Airmen and the Navajo Code Talkers, but I'd never heard of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs. Their story was buried after the war. It was only after I moved to Sweetwater, Texas, where most of them were trained, that I first heard of them. When the opening for director of the National WASP WWII Museum came up, a board member asked me to apply.

When the United States entered World War II, it didn't have enough airplanes or pilots. Some women who had their pilot's license said they could help. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, they had been told no, but then their help became a necessity. The military could not recruit and train men fast enough.

Lisa Taylor
Rotary Club of
Sweetwater,
Texas

Executive
director, National
WASP WWII
Museum

The military was convinced women didn't have the physical or mental fortitude to fly big bombers and quick pursuit planes, so the WASPs began as an experimental program. After two years, as the war was winding down, men were coming home who wanted those jobs, and the program was disbanded.

Of the 25,000 women who applied, 1,830 were accepted and more than 1,100 served. Their passing rate was the same as for men. They served at 120 bases across the country and flew every type of airplane that the Army Air Forces had, all 78 of them. They proved it could be done right.

We had about 35 WASPs still living when I started over six years ago. Now we're down to three. I thought, What is the significance of this museum beyond the WASPs? I started getting to know women who are military pilots today. It really surprised me that they face a lot of the same issues as the WASPs. The WASPs didn't have uniforms that fit them. They wore flight suits and hand-me-downs from the men. Fast forward, women are just now getting uniforms that fit.

Sometimes WASP families visit the museum because their mom is gone and they're on this journey to figure out who she was. I'll tell them stories about their mom and about the program. And they'll tell me stories about her from a completely different point of view. It's like this jigsaw puzzle that we're building together. ■



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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The most valuable currency

Neighbors are helping neighbors with a time-tested idea: the time bank

In a quiet corner of Northern California, among the misty orchards and rolling vineyards that power the region's rich agricultural economy, a curious kind of wealth is quietly accumulating. It doesn't shine like gold or flow like cash. It's not tracked on Wall Street or stored in Swiss vaults. But for those who trade in it, it may be the most precious currency of all: time.

When Michael Fels and his partner, Jesada "Wee" Simla, wanted to learn how to make butter-laced croissants, they didn't turn to online videos or enroll in a pricey cooking class. Instead, they posted a request on their local time bank in the city of Sebastopol, 50 miles north of San Francisco. Soon, a retired professional chef invited them into his kitchen, where they spent an afternoon rolling dough and laughing together, an experience that yielded more than just pastries. "He really was a master chef," Fels recalls, smiling as he flips through photos from the day of flour-dusted smiles, crispy crescents, joy captured in crumb and crust.

This, Fels explains, is what a time bank is all about. "You give an hour of your time and earn an hour in return," he says. "And sometimes, what you get back is so much more."

Time banks operate on a premise that feels both old-fashioned and quietly revolutionary: that everyone has something to offer and that everyone's time and skills are valued equally. In this benevolent economy, an hour spent fixing a neighbor's

faucet is worth the same as an hour of tax prep or Thai cooking.

In brief, a time bank does with time what other banks do with money: It stores and trades it. People receive credits — typically measured in hours — when they provide a service to another time bank member. Those cashing in credits for a service have their account debited. Through an online platform, registered users can offer and request services and log their credits and debits.

Money isn't exchanged, though members might agree to cover expenses such as supplies or gas money. The system is flexible, allowing people to offer as much or as little time as they want and even the option to donate their credit hours to a friend or a community pot.

Thousands of time banks with several hundred thousand members have been established in at least 48 countries, stretching from the rural villages of Senegal to bustling cities in Japan, from China, New Zealand, Malaysia, Argentina, and Brazil to countries throughout Europe with millions of hours exchanged. In the United States alone, more than 500 local networks are helping more than 40,000 members reimagine what it means to belong, to be needed, and to give back. Some time banks specialize in clearly defined missions, such as a focus on support for parents of children with disabilities or to provide eldercare and hospice services to fill a need other organizations can't address. There are even time banks that aim to reduce recidivism for juvenile deten-

Interested in joining or starting a time bank? Visit timebanks.org.



Clockwise from top: Rotarian Michael Fels (right) and his partner, Jesada “Wee” Simla, learn to make croissants through their local time bank; time bank members volunteer at a repair café.

tion and help with social reentry for people leaving prison, on the belief that it may support their well-being and strengthen their relationships and social ties to their community.

In Sebastopol, a town of just over 7,000 people, the local time bank boasts 300 members. Fels, an author and playwright, offers his expertise in editing, and his partner, Simla, who hails from Thailand, volunteers rolling authentic Thai spring rolls. Others exchange rides to the airport, plumbing repairs, or a few hours of company on a lonely afternoon.

For Fels, the president of the Rotary Club of Sebastopol Sunrise, his engagement with Rotary and the time bank go hand in hand: “The idea of both is to bring the community closer together.” His Rotary club

focuses on community service, and in a recent survey, more than half of its 40 members overwhelmingly noted community service as the most important aspect of their membership. “We might help a member with some house repairs they can’t manage on their own,” Fels says, offering an example of where the time bank and Rotary overlap.

He learned about the time bank through his friend David Gill, Sebastopol’s time bank coordinator and unofficial time tycoon. Gill has 384 hours in his “savings” account, “but I haven’t recorded any of my hours since 2022,” he says. “I probably need to record another 750!” Gill likes to offer his expertise with computer programming, editing, and financial planning. In return, he

Time banks explained

What are time banks?

Time banking is a system of exchange or bartering of services, such as babysitting, basic home repairs, or rides to the store. Time, rather than money, is the unit of account.

How do they work?

Time bank members earn an hour of credit for every hour they spend helping someone. The person receiving the service has their account debited by an equal amount. All skills are valued equally. An hour spent fixing a neighbor’s faucet is worth the same as an hour of tax prep or Thai cooking.

Is there a physical bank?

No. Registered members use an online platform to offer and request services and to log their credits and debits. No money is exchanged, though members will often cover expenses such as supplies or gas money. The system is flexible, allowing participants to offer as much or as little time as they want and even the option to donate their credit hours to a friend or a community pot.

Do they have other benefits?

Participants say the reciprocal giving has led to friendships and social connections along with a greater sense that everyone has meaningful experience and skills to offer.

asks for help when he needs a ride to the airport or to transport heavy furniture. “Steve who lives on the next block drove me and my partner to the Santa Rosa airport. Ken fixed the ice maker in our refrigerator, and Elaine did some electrical work,” he says, rattling off a few of the many examples.

If he had called professional repair and taxi services, the expenses would have been significant. However, the interest, so to speak, goes beyond the value of a mere transaction. The time banks are building social capital. “I’ve made wonderful friends I wouldn’t have met otherwise, and we now invite each other to our garden parties,” says Gill. “It’s about being a part of the community. You can’t put a price on that.”

Gill came to the time bank like most neighbors: through a whisper, a flyer, a friend. The semiretired health care administrator immediately thought it was a great idea and started helping out with coordination, and before long, he became the heartbeat of the operation. Now, he banks his hours with the quiet confidence of someone who knows their value — not in dollars, but in something deeper: “I think this might be the richest I’ve ever felt.”

Many time banks are volunteer community projects, but the one in Sebastopol is funded by the city and operates under the nonprofit status of the Community Cultural Center. Some cities find that support for time banks more than pays for itself in the services their members provide for populations like older adults. Time bank members in St. Gallen, Switzerland, for example, regularly help older residents run errands, shop for groceries, get to the doctor, or simply find company — all of which can ease demand on government-funded services.



BY THE NUMBERS

48

Countries that have time banks

500,000+

Time bank members around the world

\$29

Average value of a volunteer hour in the U.S. in 2022

Time bankers beautify the library grounds for the California city of Sebastopol. The idea of time as a bankable currency goes back several centuries.

After all, time is money. “Every volunteer hour [in the U.S.] is valued around \$29,” explains Krista Wyatt, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit TimeBanks.Org, which helps volunteers establish time banks all around the world. “Now think about the thousands of dollars a city saves when hundreds of citizens serve their community for free.”

The idea of time as a bankable currency goes back several centuries to the labor theories of early economists. In the U.S., civil rights lawyer Edgar Cahn rediscovered the idea of time banks while looking for ways to fight poverty in the

early 1980s after money for social programs dried up.

Today, time banks are like the 2.0 version of what used to happen organically in small communities: Neighbors helped raise barns and children alike. But in an increasingly atomized world, those natural support systems have frayed. Michael Fels sees the time bank as a way to repair them.

And maybe that’s the deepest truth of time banking: It fosters human connection and the quiet transformation of time into care, beauty, and belonging. Given freely, time — like kindness — comes back tenfold. — MICHAELA HAAS

Short takes

The 2027 Rotary Convention will no longer be held in Honolulu because its main convention venue is being renovated.

The deadline to submit breakout session proposals for the 2026 Rotary Convention is 17 October. Learn more at on.rotary.org/breakout-sessions.

A new Rotary Fellowship focused on rum was recognized in June.



PROFILE

When disaster strikes

A Rotaractor in Switzerland spreads the mission of ShelterBox

Vincent Menne
Rotaract
Club of Bern,
Switzerland

One day at a Christmas market in Germany, a few men standing in a gigantic barrel selling mulled wine caught the curious eye of Vincent Menne. A sign with a Rotary logo was attached to the barrel. “Rotary? Is that a wine brand?” Menne asked. The men laughed and explained that they were raising money for polio eradication. One year later, Menne was standing in that same barrel selling wine to raise money for ShelterBox, Rotary’s project partner in disaster relief.

“ShelterBox has been around for 25 years. We’ve helped over 3 million people in over 100 countries,” says Menne, a law student who represents Rotaract on the board for ShelterBox Switzerland, connecting other Rotaractors with the nonprofit. “ShelterBox itself is a great organization, but what really enables our work is the partnership with Rotary.”

Menne says Rotary members throughout the world are often the first point of contact for ShelterBox after a disaster, helping to quickly analyze the damage and use their connections to local governments. “It all comes down to having good communication inside of a great team,” he says. “To see that people are motivated helps you get engaged again.”

ShelterBox Switzerland’s role is primarily raising funds to aid other countries faced with disaster. Menne believes Rotary can help ShelterBox reach even more people to increase and distribute this aid.

“Anyone can be struck by disaster, and the people that can give that urgent aid are people that were not hit by disaster, which is just luck,” he says. “Using this fortune to support others is a no-brainer to me.” — JP SWENSON



The Rotary Learning Center has an improved mobile app. Download RotaryLearn, which replaces GoLearn, from your device’s app store.

Nominations for the Alumni Association of the Year Award, which honors chartered associations of former Rotary program participants, are due 15 September. Learn more at rotary.org/awards.

People of action around the globe

By Brad Webber

United States

Prom is an expensive rite of passage, with purchases of gowns, tuxedos, flowers, meals, and transportation. In New York City, the Rotary Club of North Shore (Staten Island) is helping students through its “Cinderella/Cinderella” project. The entire 25-member club solicits new and gently used formal attire, some of which is purchased new by Rotarians. In April, students from across the borough are invited to choose from about 200 free dresses and suits, as well as shoes and accessories, so they’re ready for prom season. The project was started in 2024 by then-President Suzanne Demetrio and is led by members Stephanie Accardo and Regina Boukhvalova. “We believe no student should miss out due to financial hardship,” says Demetrio. “We are giving young people the chance to feel special and confident on one of the biggest nights of their lives.”

\$919

Average spent per student on proms in 2015

Rotary
Club of North Shore
(Staten Island)



Peru

In the western Amazon, the Rotary Club of Iquitos Amazonas organized a seminar in January to educate members of other Rotary clubs about the state of the area’s schools. Two District 4465 leaders, Doris Alván and Fernando Del Aguila, enlisted a well-known educator in the area, Josefa Ríos Gil, to share with Rotarians what they can do to assist educators. In May, the Iquitos Amazonas club finished one related initiative, a district grant-supported teen empowerment project that taught young people to make earrings sold at eco-lodges near Lake Zungarococha. The club also provided school supplies to primary schools in the area.

39%

Share of Peruvian entrepreneurs who are women

Rotary
Club of Iquitos Amazonas



Croatia

The Rotary Club of Zagreb International organizes regular treks for members and friends. The club, says immediate Past President Petra Pungercar, had “noticed our members were not as connected and focused as they once were.” So the group conceived of the hikes as a way to reconnect and motivate members while also raising money for the club’s signature project, a mentoring initiative. Their inaugural hike took members of the country’s only English-speaking club through the Slapnica Valley near Zagreb in October. They walked in Budapest during a trip to Hungary, and in June they strolled beside the Kamačnik River in Croatia’s mountainous Gorski Kotar region. “Relaxed, happy, and laughing, it was an incredible experience,” the club posted on Facebook.



10%

Land designated for national and nature parks in Croatia

Rotary
Club of Zagreb International

17 million

People affected by the 2025 earthquake in Myanmar

Myanmar

After an earthquake of magnitude 7.7 struck Myanmar in March, killing more than 3,700 people and injuring many more, the Rotary Club of Yangon coordinated a relief effort both at home and at the epicenter near Mandalay, about 400 miles away. The club gathered supplies donated by its members, Mandalay Rotarians, and other Rotary clubs in neighboring countries, notably the Rotary Club of Bangkok South in Thailand. In May, a District 3350 delegation to Myanmar brought water purification systems, temporary shelters, and thousands of hot meals. The district committed to providing long-term recovery assistance, including a tube well in Sein Pan, a hard-hit ward in Mandalay. “The project reminded us that Rotary’s strength lies not only in delivering aid but in showing up together across borders with compassion and commitment,” says Thordur Adalsteinsson, a member of the Bangkok club that helped. “The partnership between our club, Rotary Myanmar, and District 3350 brought tangible relief to those in urgent need, but even more importantly, it brought hope and human connection in a time of crisis.”



India

During the early stages of a global grant project to support mothers and their children, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Rotary Club of Hiranandani Estate in Maharashtra state to reimagine the enterprise. Rotarians pivoted to organize vaccination camps, distribute emergency food, and establish basic health care. The three-year effort reached more than 6,000 people across four communities in the city of Navi Mumbai. The club partnered with the Rotary Club of Metropolitan Lubbock, Texas, on the nearly \$50,000 global grant, which also provided 12 industrial sewing machines and offered training in their use. Namrataa Srivastav, project director, lauds the program as a “milestone, opening doors for future collaborations between Rotary and prestigious social service institutions.”

26,076

Home visits by community health workers in the Navi Mumbai project

Rotary
Club of Hiranandani Estate



Rotary
Club of Yangon

GOODWILL

How to resist an infodemic

We need to build resilience against the viral spread of misinformation. Here's how.

By Jessica Malaty Rivera

In the last five years, the world has had a crash course in public health. A flurry of scientific jargon-filled headlines has caused a fair amount of confusion, panic, and fear. This dynamic is not new, and, in fact, it has a name in epidemiology: infodemic.

Epidemiology asks us where, when, why, and to whom a disease is spreading, and how it affects population health. Infodemiology asks those same questions but about the information that is spreading, and how it affects population decision making.

Think of it this way: Infodemics are to infodemiology as epidemics are to epidemiology.

Infodemics don't necessarily mean an outbreak of all bad information. Sometimes, it's just too much information, making it difficult for people to find the facts from trusted sources. This is acutely true in the world of vaccines.

Vaccine misinformation — which has shattered trust, stalled vaccination campaigns, resulted in the reemergence of previously eliminated diseases, and threatened global health security — is moving faster and farther because of our digital information ecosystems. As we look to the future, building infodemic resilience must be a top priority for public health systems, policymakers, and communities alike.

What is infodemic resilience?

Infodemic resilience refers to a society's capacity to withstand, identify, and respond to false or misleading health information, especially during public health emergencies. It's not just about fact-checking or debunking false claims — it's about building critical thinking, trust, and communication infrastructures that can filter out noise and amplify credible voices. In the context of vaccines, this means protecting people from dangerous misinformation that leads to vaccine hesitancy, refusal, and, ultimately, preventable illness and death.

The high cost of vaccine misinformation

The consequences of unchecked vaccine misinformation are both immediate and long term. We've seen measles and pertussis outbreaks in communities with low vaccine uptake, resistance to COVID-19 vaccines despite overwhelming scientific evidence, and a resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases in areas where misinformation thrives.

These outcomes don't just affect individuals — they weaken herd immunity (vaccination rates to reduce transmission), overwhelm health care systems, and lead to avoidable loss of life. Moreover, they disproportionately affect marginalized communities and those who are immunocompromised or medically fragile. Misinformation, when left unchallenged, becomes a form of health inequity.

Why we need to act now

The digital ecosystem is evolving quickly. Social media platforms have made it easy for misleading content to go viral within seconds. Algorithms often favor emotionally charged content — fear, outrage, or conspiracy — over nuanced, evidence-based information. While tech companies bear responsibility, we can't rely solely on content moderation. We need proactive, not just reactive, science communication. Resilience isn't built in a crisis — it's built before the next one hits. With future pandemics likely and ongoing public health campaigns for routine immunizations, our ability to respond effectively depends on how well we can communicate and foster trust. Here are some strategies to help build infodemic resilience:

1. Invest in health and data literacy

Public health messaging needs to go beyond the "what." It must also explain the "why." People are more likely to trust information when they can understand it and how it affects them.

2. Partner with trusted messengers

Local leaders, health care workers, faith leaders, and even influencers can be powerful allies in promoting accurate vaccine information. People trust people far more than institutions. Training and equipping these voices can dramatically expand the reach of public health messaging.

3. Prioritize transparent and compassionate communication

Ridiculing those who believe misinformation rarely changes minds. We need empathetic communication that validates concerns, addresses fears, and provides clear, consistent facts without judgment.

4. Policy support and global collaboration

Rotary, Shot at Life, UNICEF, WHO, and other global bodies have laid the groundwork to address current challenges and protect against future infodemics through public engagement, raising awareness, and encouraging governments to adopt policies that promote transparency and encourage collaboration between public health institutions and tech platforms.

Infodemic resilience isn't just the responsibility of public health professionals — it's a societal challenge. Parents, educators, journalists, scientists, tech workers, and community leaders all play a role in shaping the information environment. Vaccines save lives, but only if people trust them. That trust depends on the stories people hear, the information they access, and the communities they live in. By building infodemic resilience, we create a stronger, healthier, and more informed society — one that can face the next health crisis not with confusion, but with confidence. ■

Jessica Malaty Rivera is an infectious disease epidemiologist and award-winning science communicator. Find her on Instagram @jessicamalatyrivera and Substack @makingsciencemakesense.

**Together,
we end polio**



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POLIO DAY
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out of the gate

With just two weeks' notice, Francesco Arezzo confidently takes the reins of Rotary

By Etelka Lehoczky

Photograph by Monika Lozinska

In the short walk between Francesco Arezzo's makeshift office in the BMO Centre at the Rotary International Convention in Calgary and a patio outside it, enthusiastic Rotarians stop him no fewer than a dozen times.

With a warm smile, Italy's Arezzo thanks two sergeants-at-arms from India, hugs and jokes with a past RI director, and poses for a selfie with a group of Rotarians from Korea.

It's the day before the start of the convention, and while all Rotary presidents draw well-wishers, there's another reason why everybody is clamoring to meet Arezzo and his wife, Anna Maria Arezzo-Criscione: He'd been selected to be the 2025-26 Rotary president less than a week earlier.

On the night of 14 June, Arezzo, a member of the Rotary Club of Ragusa in Sicily, was sitting with his Rotary friends at his district conference when he learned of his new role. Rotary's Board of Directors had reached the decision at a special session after the unexpected resignation of Mário César Martins de Camargo due to personal reasons and business obligations at home in Brazil.

Since the news hadn't been officially announced, Arezzo couldn't tell anyone. But soon, he noticed phones coming out all over the room. "When the news arrived on social media at about 11 p.m., we were in the middle of the gala dinner," he says. "You can imagine more than 400 Rotarians all finding out on their phones. It was quite an unforgettable moment. All of a sudden, they all lined up to kiss me and offer their congratulations."

Two days later, he was on a plane to Canada to accept his role in front of the convention's 16,000 attendees from some 140 countries. "I didn't even have time to have a haircut," he says, pointing to his robust head of gray hair.

But, he says, he was ready for this moment. Having been part of Rotary for more than three decades, Arezzo has served as RI director and chair of the 2023 Melbourne Convention Committee, among other leadership roles. He had applied for the RI president's role in 2023 and was short-listed.



The Rotary world rallied around him. His touching personal stories, his humble nature, and the unadorned but powerful messages in his acceptance speech won him ebullient applause and a standing ovation.

While Arezzo was in great demand at the convention, we caught up with him in the hallway during breaks, inside a minibus en route to a Rotary event, and at his makeshift office to find out more about the new president. Read on for the key takeaways.



“Rotary faced an emergency and I’m ready to step up. I’m very lucky to have the opportunity.”



Clockwise from left: RI President Francesco Arezzo and his wife, Anna Maria Arezzo-Criscione, at the 2025 Rotary International Convention in Calgary, Canada, in June; a holiday photo with grandchildren Francesco and Anna Maria and (standing, from left) daughter Elena, son-in-law Magnus, and daughter Raffaella; aide to the president John de Giorgio (right, with partner Monique Chambers) has worked closely with Arezzo through Rotary since 2009. “Francesco is the right president because he is a force for unity and stability, representing strong Rotary values while also being open to the innovation that Rotary must apply,” he says.





Left: At the convention in Calgary, Arezzo mingles with Rotary members from Taipei, where the 2026 convention will be held. **Below:** Arezzo spoke about the presidential message, *Unite for Good*. “It is an extraordinary message in its simplicity, brevity, and impact,” he said. He outlined two ways to unite: across space — involving both members and partners in service — and across time. “A project that lasts one year will rarely be transformational,” he said.

“You don’t ‘go to’ Rotary like you go to the cinema, where you sit and watch other people doing something. Rotary is something you do.”

He has two daughters — and two grandchildren with familiar names.

The elder one, who’s 3 years old, has my name: Francesco. The younger one is a year old, and she has my wife’s name. I love playing with them in my living room. They are so happy with me that they won’t let go of me when I leave.

While I feel sad about not being able to stay with them, I have to make a choice. I either have to refuse to be president or I must part with them temporarily. It is only for one year. I’m willing to make a small sacrifice. Rotary faced an emergency and I’m ready to step up. I’m very lucky to have the opportunity.

Orthodontics is about more than teeth.

I’ve been a practicing orthodontist for 46 years now. I work mainly with young people, and it’s very important to try to understand them before beginning treatment. If you don’t understand them, it’s impossible to treat them — you have to win their cooperation. Forging those relationships is one of the best aspects of my job. Sometimes I know things about them that their parents don’t. A relationship so deep is the beginning of a good treatment.

His family has produced olive oil for more than a century.

I am the last of a long line of olive producers, I fear, because my daughters are not interested in this field. A good olive oil has to be spicy, and it has to be bitter. It has to have great chemical qualities — the acidity must be very low, lower than 1 percent. To do this, you have to collect the olives very early. That means you have a small quantity but high quality. The olives in the oils you find at the supermarket are collected very late, which results in a huge quantity but a very low quality. To produce good olive oil, it is a question of passion.

He wasn’t keen on becoming his club’s president.

When my club first proposed that I become president, I didn’t want to accept. I had a stutter, so I was terrified of speaking to my club. But it wasn’t so bad. Then they invited me to be a district governor, and again, I didn’t want to accept. But once more, they convinced me.

Rotary has changed me. If the young professional who was afraid to speak to

PHOTOGRAPHS: (WITH MEMBERS) ED ZIRKLE; (STAGE) CHRISTOPHE VISEUX

his club because of the risk of making a fool of himself can now get up on a stage and speak, in a language which is not his own, to an audience of thousands, well, I owe it all to the Rotarians I have met in my life and who have always supported me and surrounded me with their affection.

But he thinks club presidents are key.

We have to improve our communication with club presidents, because they're on the front lines of dealing with members. While we do a wonderful job of instructing district governors in the importance of membership, district governors in many cases speak

with a club president only two or three times a year. So, there are too many club presidents who don't have any idea why our membership goals are so important.

One of his top priorities is peacebuilding.

When I was a district governor, I organized a Rotary Youth Leadership Awards event for districts bordering the Mediterranean Sea: Italy, France, Spain, North Africa, Greece, Turkey. The challenge was bringing together Turkish and Italian young people, because they looked at one another as very different. The first day was tense; it was clear that they didn't feel

comfortable with each other. But after a few days, they began to discover that they had the same interests and the same dreams.

When the last day came, they sang John Lennon's "Imagine" together and performed a skit they'd written about the cultural differences between their countries. It was one of the most beautiful things I can remember.

If you think about how many young people we send around the world through Rotary Youth Exchange, through scholarships, and through Rotary Peace Centers, it's like a peace machine. We need a peace machine at this moment, when the world seems to be moving away from peace.

He's been listening to opera since he was young.

It was normal to hear opera in my family's home. But Ragusa is a small town, and there was no lyric theater there. When I went to university in Padua, there was the theater nearby in Venice and I began to go. It was really very beautiful. A composer I like a lot is Vincenzo Bellini. He was born in Sicily; he's from Catania. He died very, very young. He only did a few operas, but they are all very high quality. *Norma*, for example, is wonderful. So is *The Capulets and the Montagues*. And of course, there are many other great composers — Puccini, Verdi, Mozart. It's hard to pick one.

He has plans for overcoming his late start.

Usually, the president has a year to study problems, a second year to create a plan, and a third year, while serving as president, to act. I'm very conscious that I'm beginning late. I hope to work very closely with President-elect SangKoo Yun. I think we can create a two-year plan that will be really effective. Rotary isn't a scooter that can change direction quickly. It's like a big cruise ship: If you want to make a turn, you have to begin many kilometers in advance.

He thinks Rotary is an action verb.

When I speak to Rotarians, I always tell them to change the verbs they use. You don't "go to" Rotary like you go to the cinema, where you sit and watch other people doing something. Rotary is something you do. You have to participate. And then you begin to grow. ■



A scenic view of a city skyline, likely New York City, seen from a rocky overlook. In the foreground, large, dark, textured rocks are visible. A young man in a light-colored shirt and dark pants stands on a paved path, looking out over the city. Other people are partially visible in the background. The city skyline is filled with numerous skyscrapers, and the water of the harbor is visible in the distance. The sky is hazy, and the overall atmosphere is serene. Tree branches with green leaves frame the top and left sides of the image.

2026 CONVENTION

THE QUERY QUEST

By Diana Schoberg



Why go to Taipei
for the 2026
Rotary International
Convention?
Question asked;
question happily
answered

Photograph by An Rong Xu

THE BEST PART

about the red-eye flight to Taipei is that the most magnificent host will welcome you when you arrive: the sun. On the drive from the airport to my hotel, the city's illustrious landmarks become monumental inkblots when backlit by that blazing orb. As I cruise past rice paddies and riverfront paths, the palatial Grand Hotel, once a haven for foreign dignitaries, salutes me as if I too were visiting royalty, while in the distance, what appears to be an impossibly lofty pagoda — Taipei 101, formerly the world's tallest building — grandly ascends toward tangerine skies.

I've come to Taipei to discover for myself why Rotary members should travel to Taiwan's capital for the 2026 Rotary International Convention. After reviving myself with a visit to the myriad pools in the steam room and sauna at the Regent Taipei hotel, my quarters in the trendy Zhongshan neighborhood for the next few days, I set out to answer that question.

I begin by punching "coffee" into the map app on my phone. Half a dozen cafés within blocks of my hotel pop up. Taiwan is known for its oolong teas so I wasn't sure how easy it would be to find a good cup of coffee, but it turns out Taipei has a thriving coffee culture; even the ubiquitous 7-Elevens serve good coffee, as several of my new Rotary friends tell me later. I choose the Libo café and walk over. The friendly barista helps me choose a drink and giggles right along with me as I tentatively test out a thank you: *xiè xiè* (pronounced shieh shieh).

In Zhongshan, among all the cafés, boutiques, and thrift stores, you will find a bounty of luxury shopping. I should have known: My hotel is on a plaza called Fashion Square. "Many years ago, Zhongshan North Road was supposed to be the Champs-Élysées of Taipei," Pauline Leung, secretary general of

the convention's Host Organization Committee, tells me a short while later over a lunch of beef noodle soup. "It was the major street where all the prestigious shops were." The city has since expanded eastward, as has the city center, but the neighborhood has retained its chic reputation.

After lunch, I head out with Leung and other Rotary members for an afternoon of sightseeing. Our first stop is Liberty Square, a popular spot for concerts, festivals, and, in the morning, tai chi. Step outside the National Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, named after Taiwan's late leader, and take in the sweeping view of the massive plaza below. Symmetrical garden beds line either side, with red flowers planted in a curved design. Cypress trees with bottlebrush branches stand like sentinels along the border. From this vantage point, the National Theater is to your left, the National Concert Hall to your right. Both venues, which, with their yellow glazed-tile roofs and red columns, are masterful examples of Chinese palace architecture, will be home to host committee events for the Rotary Convention 13-17 June. "This is a must that all visitors should come see," insists Leung.

As we walk across the plaza, Leung extols Taipei's charms but expresses regret that it's a place not many people from the West have seen. "It's so different from places that you usually would go," she says. "It's just a jewel" — and the Rotary Convention will provide the perfect opportunity for newcomers to admire that precious gem.

Frank Ching-Huei Horng, a Rotary Foundation trustee, has joined me and Leung, and he explains that what keeps him returning to the convention year after year is the opportunity to meet with Rotary members from all over the world. "Maybe we can find some projects to

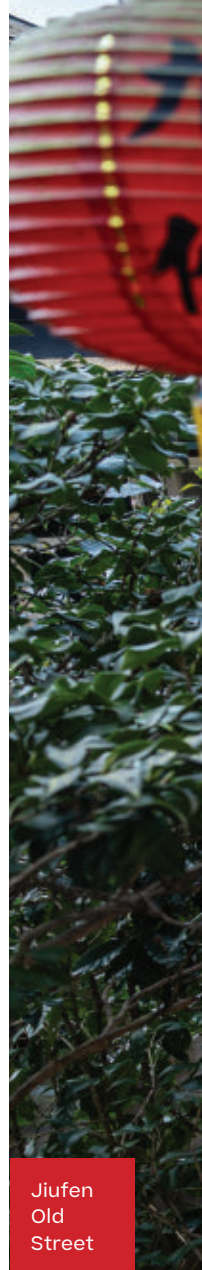
work together," he says. "I love that." Horng has made friends with Rotarians from Japan and Korea, and at every convention they search each other out to take photos and have dinner. Their face-to-face meetings may have only an annual cadence, but friendships made at the convention are friendships that last.

Later, Past RI President Gary C.K. Huang reminisces about the 40-plus Rotary Conventions he's attended in his nearly 50 years as a member of Rotary. He too cherishes the many opportunities to meet so many people of varied cultures and customs. "People will love Rotary more because of this type of cultural exchange," he says. "That is the special character of Rotary."

Taipei lies in a basin surrounded by mountains whose hazy outlines make you feel like you've landed in a painting. The city grew along the Tamsui River and its tributaries, which encircle much of the city center. The rivers brought Chinese settlers and European explorers. The island became a colony of Japan in 1895, which it remained through the end of World War II.

You can experience this historical tapestry as you stroll along Dihua Street. Situated in the Dadaocheng neighborhood, it is the oldest of Taipei's vibrant "old streets." Chinese settlers arrived here in the mid-1800s and built the earliest trading shops on the street, which runs north-south near the Tamsui River. These older, red brick buildings intermingle with structures from the Japanese colonial era.

The street is closed to vehicles on the weekends, so on the day I visit, Dihua is full of families and tourists milling around, eating, and shopping at stores that sell everything from traditional Chinese medicines to fabrics to soaps,



Jiufen
Old
Street

TAIPEI TRAVEL TIPS

If you can find the time, hike Taipei's Elephant Mountain (Xiangshan), where the payoff is a panoramic view of the city as seen on the previous pages.



Left: Pauline Leung (left), secretary general of the convention's Host Organization Committee, and Frank Ching-Huei Horng, a Rotary Foundation trustee, walk along Dihua Street. **Right:** Yi Lo (left), of the Rotary Club of Taipei Huapeng, and Chi-Min Cheng, of the Rotary Club of Wu Jie, sample food in Jiufen.

bags, and countless other goods. The sound of a woman singing floats above the crowd, but it's soon drowned out by the thump of a drumbeat and a crash of cymbals as a parade for a nearby temple snakes through the throng.

We make stops to visit the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum, which displays traditional and modern Taiwanese hand puppets and marionettes, and the Dadaocheng Visitor Center, where, by appointment, you can don the traditional clothing and hats lining the room for photo shoots. Even without the costumes, rooms seemingly made for selfies beckon, including one filled with multicolored lanterns where I couldn't resist the urge to pull out my camera.

Dinner is at Du Hsiao Yueh, a Dihua restaurant known for its danzai noodles in a prawn broth with a rich minced pork topping. Ping Lee, another of my new Rotary friends, says that one of the best parts about attending a Rotary Convention is exactly what we're experiencing at this very moment: getting to know a culture from the perspective of a fellow Rotary member. "You get to meet the locals and see how they live," says Lee, the host committee treasurer. "Each city has something different to offer, which makes it very attractive." Taipei, she adds, is known for its friendly people — something visiting Rotary members are sure to experience for themselves.

Savor another of Taiwan's old streets by taking a day trip to Jiufen, a mountain town with stunning views of hills and sea. Turn down an alleyway and you enter a different dimension. Shops line both sides of the narrow brick path, and their overlapping awnings make it feel as if you're walking through a tunnel, albeit one lit by the warm glow of red lanterns. This former gold mining community is home to more than two dozen

teahouses — the Amei Tea House resembles the bathhouse in the Oscar-winning anime movie *Spirited Away* — and we head down a set of stairs to get a closer look at one of the shops.

Local artist Hung Chi-Sheng has converted the town's oldest building into Jiufen Teahouse, a gallery featuring pottery, painting, and, of course, tea. Charcoal embers nestle safely beneath a hefty wooden table, atop which bubbling teapots billow clouds of steam. One of the staff demonstrates the intricacies of brewing tea and then leaves us to steep on our own. More than

an hour passes as we sip tea, chat, and contemplate the shadowy hills receding into the sea. Once again the sun becomes the star attraction, casting a sublime pink light before it finally disappears with a sigh.

At the National Palace Museum, you'll find more than 600,000 pieces of Chinese art and artifacts that span more than 8,000 years, including some 300 items designated as national treasures. You can see scholarly scrolls, elaborately inscribed bronze



National
Palace
Museum



Register by 15 December for a discounted rate. Scan the QR code or visit **convention.rotary.org**.



TAIPEI TRAVEL TIPS

Chun Shui Tang, the teahouse chain that claims to have invented bubble tea, has a branch inside the National Concert Hall that's usually less crowded than others, so pick up a drink while you're there.

cookware, and exhibits that trace the development of porcelain techniques. But the piece of art that everyone covets is a drool-inducing rock resembling a chunk of cooked pork that looks ready to eat. An unnamed craftsman carved *Meat-Shaped Stone* — yes, that's its name — out of a piece of banded jasper, stained the rock various shades of brown that mimic layers of meat and fat, and created dimples on top to resemble pork skin. The result looks like Dongpo pork, a braised pork belly dish.

While the amazingly realis-

tic stone and its tasty, adjacent bok choy companion, *Jadeite Cabbage*, may attract the most attention, Beatrice Hui-Shen Liang made sure to show me her favorite work: *Lofty Mount Lu*, a 6-foot-tall scroll painted in 1467 by Shen Zhou. "I like to show people our Chinese paintings because they're very, very special," says Liang, whose spouse, Kevin Wen-Ta Liao, is a past district governor and the charter president of the Rotary Club of Taipei Min-Kuan. Liang became a volunteer guide at the museum when she returned to her native Taiwan after spending



Jadeite Cabbage (top) and Meat-Shaped Stone are two of the most popular art pieces at the National Palace Museum.

time living in Canada. "I wanted to learn more about our culture," says Liang, who likes to explain the artwork as seen through the artist's eyes. "The museum is a treasure," she concludes, imparting her most important lesson. "It's not a Chinese treasure; it's a world treasure. A heritage."

After I sate my hunger for artifacts, I make my way to the Silks Palace restaurant on the museum grounds to sate my craving for actual food. There, you can order items inspired by pieces in the museum's collection, including, you guessed it, cabbage and Dongpo pork.

It seems my primary occupation — make that, indulgence — while I'm in Taipei is eating. (A story dedicated to Taiwan's epic eats will appear in a future issue of the magazine.) And now, as the day winds down, I'm back at it again, this time at the Ningxia Night Market, where food stalls line a narrow path jammed with people sampling traditional Taiwanese foods, such as stinky tofu and oyster omelets.

It's one of nearly 40 night markets in the city, says Sweetme Shui-Mei Chou, who heads up the Taipei Business District and Industrial Confederation. "Night markets are a very important part of life for locals here in Taiwan and a very popular place to hang out at night," says Chou, a member of the Rotary Club of Taipei Hwa Yueh. Different markets around the city are known for different things, some famous for spicy foods, others for sweets, she explains.

While at the market, I chat with Jackson San-Lien Hsieh, the convention host committee chair and a past RI director and trustee. The hosts, he says, have had a lot of time to prepare for the thousands of Rotary members expected to descend on the city: Taipei's convention team first made its bid in 2014 and was supposed to host the event



Taipei
Metro



in 2021, but the convention went virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For June, the committee has planned extracurricular events that include a run, cycling, symphonic music, and opera. “We have 37,000 Rotary members in Taiwan,” Hsieh says. “We’re excited to welcome Rotarians from all over the world.”

As the night winds down, Hsieh and Chou take me to finish off the long day of sightseeing with a foot massage, a reflexology treatment steeped in Chinese tradition. As I settle comfortably into my chair, my feet and calves are stroked, kneaded, punched, and ... I’d tell you more, but the session was so relaxing, I fell asleep.

Public transit in Taipei is remarkably clean, I’m pleased to notice during my travels the next day. Absolutely no food or beverages are allowed on the Taipei Metro, so take note: Finish that bubble tea before you get on! In addition, people here are expected to take their trash home with them, which is why you will see very few garbage cans on the streets.

Stops on the MRT, as it’s known, are listed in English and Chinese. While that would make it easy for an English speaker like me to navigate the Metro alone, today I have Eric Chiu showing me around the city.

Chiu, 44, runs a lifestyle media company and looks the fashionable part. When the Rotary Club of Taipei Generation Next was founded in 2011 as an alternative for younger people in the city, the club members were on average in their 30s, and Chiu, as the son of a Rotarian, was charter president. “They kind of tricked me into it,” he jokes, “and then 10 years pass by.”

We make a quick stop at Xingtian Temple, one of the most visited temples in Taiwan. Folk beliefs that combine Confucian-

ism, Buddhism, and Taoism are most common in Taiwan, and this temple is devoted to Guan Gong, a deified real-life military general. Chiu joins the masses of people bowing and praying inside the temple, and then we grab lunch and a mango shaved ice for dessert, which turns out to be my own little piece of heaven. Scraped in thin layers as it’s served into a bowl, it looks like a mango orange flower.

Refreshed, we head back to the MRT and make our way to the Taipei Dome, an indoor baseball stadium and concert venue that opened in 2023. It will be home to the opening and closing sessions for the Rotary Convention; other sessions and the House of Friendship will convene at the Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center, a short ride from the dome on the MRT (transit passes are included with your convention registration).

The Taipei Dome’s glistening titanium facade provides an interesting juxtaposition to the neighboring historical Songshan Cultural and Creative Park, a refurbished cigarette-rolling factory that houses the Taiwan Design Museum and a hip collection of galleries and shops. Chiu owns one of them, Everyday Object, which sells coffee, books, household items, games, and more. Within the park you will find a hidden courtyard and fountain, behind which rises the dome and the Taipei skyline. “I think every single individual can find something they would really love about this city,” Chiu says. “That’s the most special thing about Taipei.”

I’ve written a lot about Rotary’s work on water and sanitation, and I live with a tween — or maybe it’s just that, on the inside, I’m still 12 years old. That said, I couldn’t pass up a chance to drop into a restaurant called Modern Toilet once Chiu and I say our goodbyes.



Tucked into the Ximending shopping district, the restaurant uses toilets as stools and serving dishes. My bubble tea was in a miniature urinal, and for dessert I had a big pile of chocolate ice cream in a squat toilet. The novelty of the place, and the yummy photo ops, left me flush (sorry) with joy.

This is it, the moment I’ve been dreading my whole trip. It’s my last day in Taipei, and it’s time to make my way up Taipei 101.

I’m not typically one for elevators and heights — but I’m also not typically one to turn down an adventure. So after some gentle encouragement, promises that

Opposite: Transit passes for the easy-to-navigate Taipei Metro, known as the MRT, will be included with your convention registration; Eric Chiu shows visitors around. **From top:** Mango shaved ice; convention host committee Chair Jackson San-Lien Hsieh enjoys a snack.



someone will hold my hand if I freak out, and a gut-busting serving of xiao long bao (soup dumplings) at Din Tai Fung on the skyscraper's ground floor, I step into the elevator.

As the elevator climbs from the fifth to the 89th floor, a digital sign tells you how fast you're going as well as other statistics. Or so I'm told: I couldn't bear to look. But I barely have time to get nervous before we complete our trip and the doors open; the ride takes only 37 seconds, reaching a top speed of 38 miles, or about 60 kilometers, per hour. This was without question the smoothest elevator ride I've ever taken. I exhale in relief and step out.

I'm glad I conquered my fear. From this height I can see the outlines of Taipei's basin, the mountains rising in the distance. The roofs of the buildings in Liberty Square, the gleaming silver Taipei Dome. It's like a fast-motion review of all the marvelous places I explored, all the wonderful people that I met — which, now that I think about it, are the answer to my question about why Rotary members should travel to Taipei for the 2026 convention.

I also see things I didn't have time to visit. I wish I had more time so I could hike at Yangmingshan National Park, take a gondola to see the tea plantations in Maokong, stay at the Grand Hotel, and shop at more of the night markets. This might be the sunset of my time in Taipei, but the sun will come back, and undoubtedly, so will I. ■

Taipei Rotarians (from left) Chang Sheng Ma, Henry Hsieh, and Past RI President Gary C.K. Huang at Din Tai Fung restaurant.

TAIPEI TRAVEL TIPS

Arrive early if you want to try the soup dumplings at Din Tai Fung inside Taipei 101. We bumped into a Rotarian from Australia who had a lengthy wait for a table the day before.





She brought women's soccer to Palestine. Now **Honey Thaljieh**

**LEVEL
THE
FIELD**



is advancing equity in sports on a global pitch. **By ORLY HALPERN**



**Photography by
SAMAR HAZBOUN**



This is where it began.

THIS PATCH OF CRACKED CEMENT STREWN

with broken glass and gravel, ringed with a beaten-up chain-link fence that can barely contain the errant soccer balls. “It’s the same. Nothing has changed,” says Honey Thaljeh, sweeping her gaze over the lot where she and a handful of young women played soccer more than two decades ago as students at Bethlehem University in the West Bank, the occupied Palestinian territory.

On an overcast day in April, a group of young boys, their shoes crunching over the debris, kick a ball into the goal. Thaljeh remembers how bad it hurt to fall on the unforgiving surface. Still, it’s like home, she says. She tells the boys a photographer will be taking photos of the makeshift pitch. “It’s not a pitch; it’s a prison,” a short 9-year-old named Mohammed answers back. Honey breaks out in her trademark gusty laugh. *Prison*. She has used that same word to describe her own obstacles: Her gender was a prison, her nationality, the social restrictions of Arab society, war, all of it.

But prison or not, for Honey Thaljeh, this patch of ground was a launchpad.



THALJIEH GREW UP IN A TINY ONE-BEDROOM apartment in Bethlehem’s old city, a street away from the Church of the Nativity, which is built over the grotto where tradition holds Jesus was born.

The third of five children in a Palestinian Christian family of modest means, Thaljeh had little to do at home. In the conservative Palestinian society of the 1980s and early 1990s, girls were discouraged from playing outside. She was stir-crazy. “I used to come back from school and watch the boys playing football,” Thaljeh says, sitting on a heavily stuffed old-fashioned sofa in the family’s living room, where her soccer trophies still decorate the shelves. She’s here for the Easter holiday, visiting from Zurich, where she works at the headquarters of FIFA, the

international soccer governing body, and where she’s a member of the Rotary Club of Zurich Circle International.

Here at home, the memories are everywhere, especially of the pull of soccer and of her intuition, already as a kid, that the game could deliver at least a sense of freedom. One day, as a 7-year-old Thaljeh passed the boys, the ball happened to roll in her direction. She started skillfully imitating the dribbling and kicking that she’d seen players do at the World Cup on her family’s black-and-white TV. The boys were shocked. As in many parts of the world, soccer was a male-only domain in Palestinian society. “But when they started to see how good I was with the ball, they started to fight over me and which team I should belong to,” she says. So Thaljeh began joining them, kicking a ball made of wadded-up newspaper around the impossibly narrow alleyways outside her home, often in her bare feet.

Less impressed was her father, who did not want his daughter playing outside with the boys and definitely not playing



soccer. When he returned from a long day of work, he would scold her and force her inside. “I would cry and cry, and then the next day, repeat. Every day, same story. I didn’t give up. *He* gave up!” she says.

Now 70 years old, Micheal Thaljiah looks sheepish when asked about his opposition. Sitting behind the counter of his modest shop near Manger Square where he sells dish-washing liquid and cold drinks alongside Palestinian olive oil and soap, he does his best to explain. “You know, it was Arab society here and it was a little difficult then for a girl to play football, but in the end, she had to play and see her life and the world progress,” he says. The shop is decorated with flags and banknotes from the countries where Thaljiah has played.

So the determined girl kept playing. She wore shorts, breaking another cultural taboo on the modesty of women’s



From top: Honey Thaljiah talks with her mother, Naheda Thaljiah, and flips through a family album during a visit home to Bethlehem from Zurich, where she works at the headquarters of FIFA, the international soccer governing body.

“There was no safety, no freedom anywhere. I grew up with these traumas.”

Israel has occupied the West Bank, the larger of the two Palestinian territories (the other is Gaza), since the 1967 Mideast war.



attire. She'd come home bruised and sometimes bleeding. Her defiant spirit would define her attitude toward future obstacles. And they would be many.



ISRAEL HAS OCCUPIED THE WEST BANK, THE larger of the two Palestinian territories (the other is Gaza), since the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. Today, Palestinian cities and villages are hemmed in by a tortured patchwork of Israeli military checkpoints, tall concrete walls and fences, and Israeli settlements, considered by most of the world to be illegal under international law. For the territory's 3 million Palestinians, trying to get somewhere a short distance away can be a dangerous, hourslong exercise in frustration because of Israeli restrictions on movement throughout the territory.

Multiple uprisings against the occupation have triggered Israeli military crackdowns and years of bloodshed, dashing hopes for Palestinian statehood and independence. “There was no safety, no freedom anywhere,” Thaljieh remembers. “I grew up with these traumas.” During her junior year of high school in 2000, a conflict known as the second intifada, or uprising, broke out. Backed by tanks and helicopters, Israeli forces invaded Palestinian cities and imposed a siege on residents.

The fighting lasted for more than four years. In the streets of Bethlehem, gunbattles raged and, in one of the most dramatic moments of the conflict, a group of Palestinian fighters holed up inside the Church of the Nativity near the Thaljiehs' home. The Israeli military deployed tanks in Manger Square and snipers took positions around the sixth-century church in a standoff that lasted more than a month. During that time, Thaljieh and her family were forced to stay in their home. “We were only allowed out for short periods to buy food,” she says.

Israeli soldiers raided hundreds of homes, including Thaljieh's. In the dead of night, her sister shouted for her to get up. Thaljieh remembers thinking she was having a nightmare until the voices of soldiers coming down the hall got louder. They forced the family into the street in a trauma that still sometimes disturbs her sleep.

Amid the turmoil, Thaljieh was trying to complete normal teenage rituals, including preparing for her final high school exams, known as tawjihi, essential for anyone seeking to go on to a university. It's a nerve-racking affair in the best of times. The

day Thaljieh was to take one of the exams, an Israeli tank crushed the family car that would have gotten her to the testing location. Determined to get there, she flagged down an ambulance and pleaded with the driver, “Please, can you take me?” To her astonishment, as she opened the doors, she discovered other desperate students also hitching a ride to the exam. Despite the odds, Thaljieh finished second in her class and was accepted to Bethlehem University.



THALJIEH STARTED AT THE UNIVERSITY IN 2002, as the conflict rolled on, and was restless. “Nobody was playing football because they were scared of the Israeli soldiers,” she says. She saw an advertisement hanging in the cafeteria recruiting young women interested in football. Samar Araj Mousa, the first woman to direct the university's sports programs, wanted to create a women's football team.

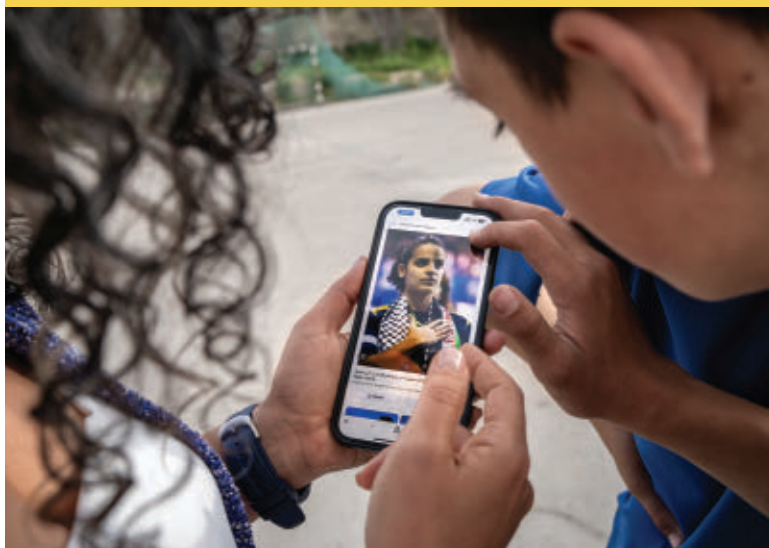
To see if this new student could really play, she sent Thaljieh to the men's soccer coach, Raed Ayyad. In an encounter that echoed her first street matches with the boys in her neighborhood, the man with a long beard looked at her and said, “You play football? Take a ball. Show me.”

“I started dribbling,” Thaljieh says, “and then I shot the ball. It hit the fence and burst. He looked at me and said, ‘Now we can start to play football.’”

But a team of one is not a team. Araj Mousa advertised around other schools and at a home for orphans. One young woman was spotted competing in a men's cycling race and was recruited to join. Thaljieh also tried to persuade women playing on basketball and volleyball teams. But soccer was seen as a man's sport. “They said, ‘No football, we will become masculine,’” Thaljieh recalls. “And I said, ‘Look at me. Nothing changed!’”

Four young women joined. They trained on the concrete court next to the university and played younger boys' clubs since there were no other women's teams. Newspapers and TV stations began telling their story, and soon three more women's teams were established, in the West Bank cities of Ramallah and Jericho and in Gaza. “Their stories were like mine,” Thaljieh says. “They started in the streets somewhere, or in a refugee camp, or in an orphans village.”

The effort grew into an unofficial national women's team of more than a dozen players. In 2005, they traveled on a shoe-



From top: Thaljieh picks up one of the many trophies from her soccer career, and she looks through photos of her playing days, which included seven years as captain of the Palestine women's national team.

string budget to neighboring Jordan to play in their first tournament with a full 11 players on the field per side. “We lost — epically,” Thaljieh says. And they continued to lose. With no money, no league, little equipment, and inadequate infrastructure, they were the ultimate underdogs.

On top of that, Israeli military checkpoints made it difficult for players from different cities to train together. The women could get held up for hours at checkpoints, sometimes late at night. Even those parents who encouraged their daughters to play worried about their safety on the roads, and players began to leave the team.

The women desperately needed support. To get it, they first needed official recognition from the Palestinian Football Association. Only then could they form a professional league and formally compete at the international level. While finishing her bachelor’s degree, Thaljieh and the team’s backer, Araj Mousa, campaigned for recognition, including lobbying officials and appearing for TV interviews.

Later, Thaljieh even got hold of the phone number of the president of the Palestinian Football Association, Jibril Rajoub, a senior figure in the ruling Fatah party and a former top security official. “He was surprised. He said, ‘How did you get my number?’” Thaljieh recalls. “He’s a very powerful man.” Soon after, they met face-to-face at a men’s match at the Khader stadium near Bethlehem, where she sold him on the idea of a national women’s team. “He was very open-minded to the girls playing football, very encouraging, very supportive,” she says. “So it was like a win-win.”



A TURNING POINT CAME IN 2008, WHEN FIFA representatives arrived and officially launched a Palestinian women’s league. It was a dream come true: national and international recognition. Within a year, the national team was playing on a full-size turf field in the West Bank in front of thousands of spectators. “When I started in football, no one wanted to recognize girls playing,” Thaljieh says. “So that was the moment that I said, ‘Wow. I made it happen. It worked.’”

Thaljieh captained the team for a total of seven years until injuries forced her from the playing field. She began developing youth sports programs around the West Bank and realizing the impact she and her teammates could have on children there —

and around the world — who needed to see someone who looked like them to imagine themselves as champions, as leaders.

Thaljeh earned a master's degree in sports management from the FIFA Master program and in 2012 landed an internship and then a job at the organization's Zurich headquarters — completing a remarkable rise from Bethlehem's alleyways to the highest body for soccer in the world. With FIFA, she began working in its women's football development program, which supports 211 member associations with everything from league development and commercial strategy to leadership and coach mentorship. The role opened her eyes to the fact that women's fight for equality in athletics, among other arenas, extended far beyond her homeland.

"I came to Europe and I was shocked that women are not represented," she says. At the time, there were no women on FIFA's top decision-making body. Women's teams, banned in many European countries until the 1970s, still lacked resources, adequate facilities and pay, and were subjected to harassment, sexism, and social stigma. In the United States, the four-time World Cup champion women's national team fought for years to wrest from U.S. Soccer in 2022 a promise to equalize pay with a men's team that has made it to a World Cup quarterfinal only once since finishing third in the inaugural tournament in 1930.

Today, Thaljieh is FIFA public relations manager with focuses on spreading the message that football is for everyone and using the sport as a platform for social change, diplomacy, and inclusion. Initiatives she's been part of have included helping female refugees become involved in the sport and running campaigns to end violence against women. One mission she especially cherishes is delivering new soccer cleats to children in refugee camps and poor communities around the world. She knows how it feels; she didn't get proper playing shoes until she was 21. "I see the happiness on their face," she says. "I feel it. It gives me goose bumps."

Around the world there are signs of change, including the appointment of FIFA's first female secretary general, Fatma Samoura, in 2016. Growth in sponsorships, attendance, and broadcast viewership point to the value of the professional women's game.

And Thaljieh uses her platform to push for inclusivity in football and for women's empowerment, capturing the attention of audiences at TEDx Talks and other high-profile venues. One such talk, at a Rotary club in Zurich, led to an invitation to join the Rotary Club of Zurich Circle International as it was forming in 2020. For the first project she proposed as a member, the club purchased and distributed water fountains to Bethlehem public schools with the help of Rotary members there. The club's charter president, Hermann W. Delliehausen, says Thaljieh has brought energy to the group and a willingness to do things differently. "When she enters the room everyone is focused on her," he says. "She's a very, very, very special person. She's the sunshine of our club."





AS HER VISIT HOME TO BETHLEHEM NEARS AN end, Thaljieh stops by the Diyar Women's Football Club that she's supported for years. Seven teenage girls are passing balls back and forth while their coach watches at the expansive Dar al-Kalima Indoor Sports Hall. Inaugurated in 2014, it's one of the largest indoor sports venues in the West Bank. The squeak of the girls' sneakers, the coach's shouts, and the thud of the balls echo through the high-ceilinged hall.

Thaljieh walks in, dressed in a knit blue blazer and fitted black jeans with her recognizable curly black mane framing her large eyes and big smile. Thaljieh

**"I took
football
as a tool
to fight
oppression,
inequality,
injustice."**



Thaljieh (center) with some of the women and girls of the Diyar Football Club that she supports in Bethlehem.

isn't tall, but here, too, her presence is clearly felt.

Selina Ghneim, a 15-year-old with a long ponytail, pink shoelaces, and a big sore on her left knee, exchanges looks with her friends. Thaljieh approaches the girl, a member of the Palestine national team for women under 20, and gives her shoulders a squeeze. "Do you know who I am?" she asks playfully.

"Yes," the teenager says shyly. "You are Honey Thaljieh."

"What else?"

"You work at FIFA."

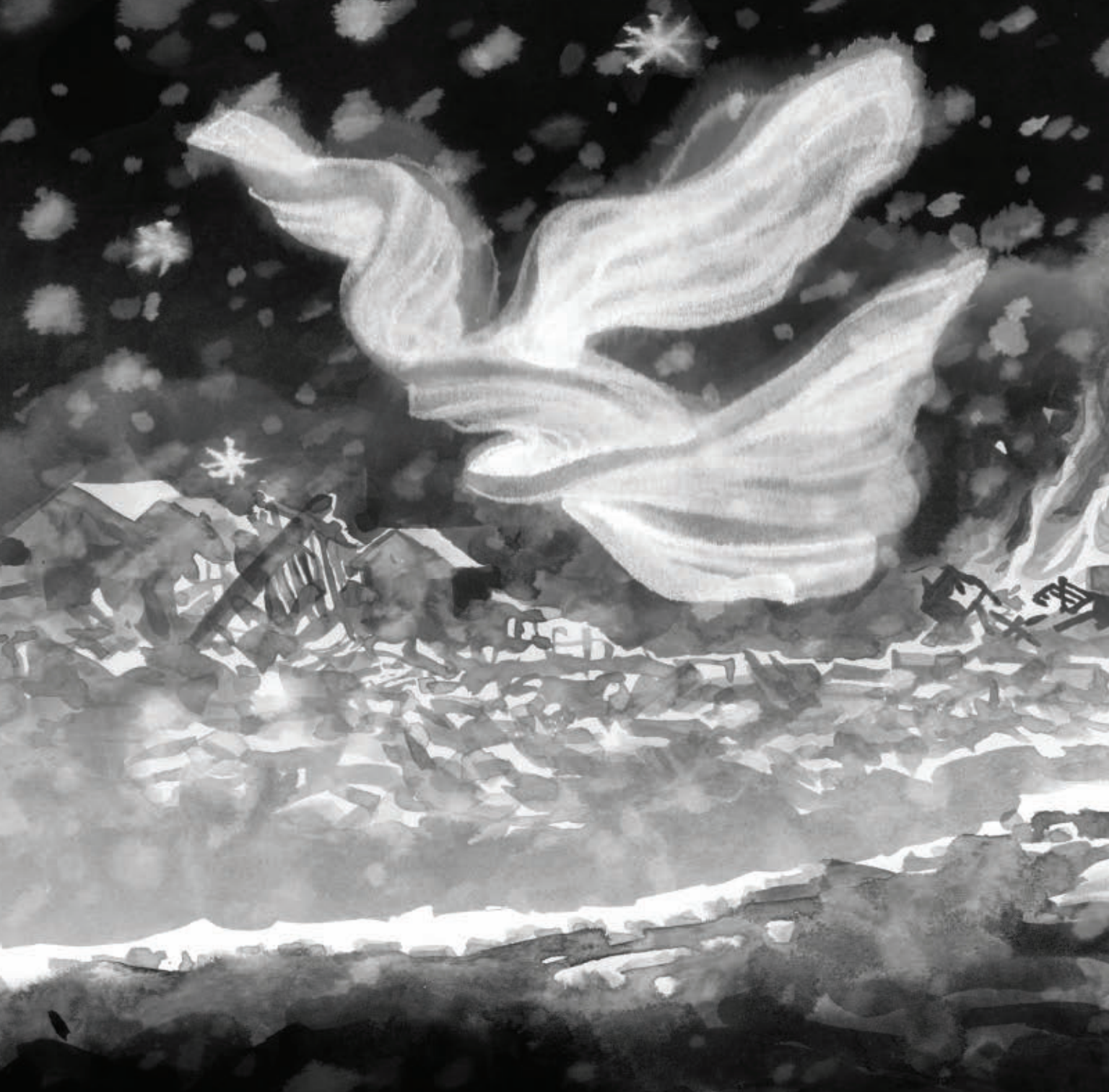
Honey knows who Selina is too. "She made the goal against Jordan," she says.

The teen smiles softly, looking down, simultaneously proud and starstruck. Ten days earlier the U-20 team won the West Asian Football Federation championship, the first international title for a Palestinian national women's team.

Two women, Maha Araj and Sarab Shaer, have come to the hall to see Thaljieh. Two decades earlier, the three played together on the newly formed team at Bethlehem University and later on the national team. Today Araj is the coach of the Diyar club and Shaer is coaching the club's under-15 players. Shaer, who was living in a home for orphans when she started playing soccer, credits Thaljieh with changing her life. "She encouraged me to take courses, to develop myself," she says. "I received a bachelor's degree in sports management. Without her I would never have made such achievements."

The women marvel at the indoor training facility. It's a far cry from their cracked concrete court. From their original group of five players there are today more than 300 girls and women playing in 15 clubs around the West Bank competing locally and internationally. Teams established in Gaza fared far worse under an Israeli blockade of the territory starting in 2007 and the current war. "We don't even know if any of the girls are still alive," Thaljieh says.

Adversity is ever present, and looking back Thaljieh doubts she'd be the person she is today without the hardships and without football, which she regards as an instrument of liberation. "I took football as a tool to fight oppression, inequality, injustice, and poverty, to fight for equality, women's rights, and opportunity. It gave me all the opportunities I needed to bring me where I am today." Now, in her footsteps, countless others can follow. ■



THE ROADS TO BASTOGNE

By Geoffrey Johnson | Illustrations by Matt Huynh

On the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, a tale, spun by a Rotarian, of a besieged city and its heroic healing angels



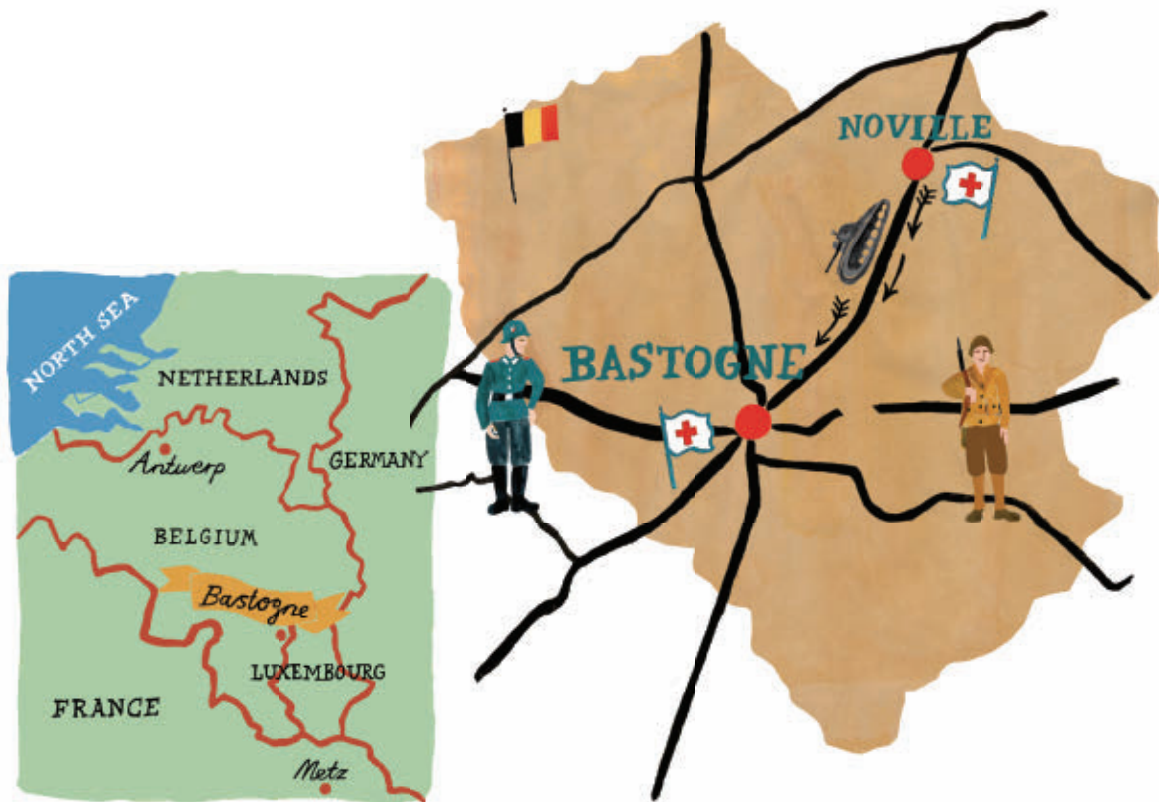
ON A SUNNY WINTER MORNING IN 2002, two men got into a car in Syracuse, New York, and began the 150-mile drive to Albany, the state's capital. Glenn Ivers, 51, was the executive director of the American Lung Association of Central New York; a retired pathologist, 85-year-old Jack Prior was a member of the organization's board of directors. The men had been summoned to Albany to confer with leaders of the lung association's statewide organization. What happened once they got there is of no importance to this tale. It's the conversation in the car that concerns us.

"It was a glorious day," recalls Ivers, cranking up what he calls his memory machine. "Because his eyesight was failing, Dr. Prior was riding shotgun. Once we got past Utica, we were driving alongside the Mohawk River. That's when our conversation turned to World War II."

Ivers described his father's experiences in the South Pacific as a member of the Army Air Corps. Then it was Prior's turn. Talking in a low, raspy voice, he unspooled his tale about a city under siege in Belgium, its only defenders an outnumbered but tenacious bunch of U.S. soldiers. Tending their wounds during that harrowing ordeal

was a single doctor, and that doctor was Jack Prior. He was assisted by two Belgian nurses, Renée Lemaire and Augusta Chiwy. History would remember those women as the Angels of Bastogne.

"Dr. Prior's telling me about his aid station and the bombing and the twist of fate that saved his life," says Ivers. "I started to have these electric currents going up and down my spine. Then he told me about how they found Renée's body in the rubble and wrapped her in the white parachute that was going to be made into her wedding dress and carried her across town to her family's home and delivered her body to her



father. I swear to God, I'm gripping the steering wheel and trying to drive. I was in awe. I'd never heard a story like that in my life."

Before he worked for the lung association, Ivers had directed three successful documentaries. Now he saw before him the subject of his next movie. "Jeez," he said as Prior concluded his story, "I'd love to do something with that. You want to make a documentary film?"

"Yeah," replied Dr. Prior. "I'd love to go back to Bastogne."

Born in Saint Albans, Vermont, on 8 October 1917, John Thompson Prior was a 1943 graduate of the University of Vermont's College of Medicine. From there it was on to Georgia, where he "trained too long" (as Prior wrote in his brief postwar memoir) with the medical battalion of the 10th Armored Division. The division landed in Cherbourg on 23 September 1944 and first saw action in mid-November as Allied forces attacked the fortified city of Metz in eastern France. "My assignment was to help operate a clearing station preparing patients for transit to the nearest evacuation hospital," wrote Prior. "Working in a safe climate, free of artillery and small arms fire, I was ill prepared for the baptism that was soon to follow."

On 14 December, after the surrender of Metz, Prior was detached to aid the 20th

Armored Infantry Battalion. The battalion's surgeon had been evacuated with pneumonia; despite his lack of surgical training, Prior would take his place. Two days later, Hitler launched a surprise counteroffensive through the Ardennes Forest, an engagement that would come to be known as the Battle of the Bulge. Hoping to divide Allied forces and negotiate a favorable end to the war, the Nazis intended to seize Antwerp, the Belgian port that was an essential source of supplies for the Allies. Standing in the Germans' path was the town of Bastogne, the hub of seven major roads. For the Germans, its capture was a strategic necessity.

Early on the morning of 19 December, as part of a combat unit known as Team Desobry (after its commanding officer, Major William Desobry), Prior arrived in Noville, a small crossroads town about 5 miles northeast of Bastogne. Desobry had been ordered to hold the town, despite the overwhelming German force headed his way. Preparing for his baptism by fire, Prior set up his aid station in a Noville pub. "Within two hours of our arrival the little town had turned into a shooting gallery featuring small arms, machine-gun and tank fire on the main thoroughfare," Prior wrote. "The large front window of the pub was an early casualty and it was necessary to crawl on the floor to avoid being hit as we treated our increasing number of casualties."

When its command post was destroyed by enemy fire and Major Desobry severely wounded, the battalion was finally allowed to withdraw to Bastogne. With no way to evacuate the scores of wounded soldiers, Prior announced that he would stay behind with his patients and surrender to the Germans. ("I asked for volunteers to stay with me but the silence was deafening!") A quick-thinking sergeant saved the day, ripping off building doors and tying them to the departing U.S. tanks so they could serve as litters to carry the wounded. After a fierce firefight, the battalion finally arrived in Bastogne. "It was not until after the war that we learned that Team Desobry had stopped the entire Second German Panzer Division which had assumed it was opposing a much stronger force," wrote Prior. "Outnumbered by ten to one, the Noville defenders knocked out thirty-one enemy tanks in two days."

In Bastogne, Prior initially established his aid station inside an unheated garage, but the extreme cold — there was a foot of snow on the ground — forced him to move to a three-story home. Drawn by its Red Cross flag, even civilians flocked to this makeshift hospital; at one point, in the midst of warfare, Prior delivered a baby. But with few medical supplies, things looked dire for Prior's 100-plus wounded soldiers. As he wrote in his memoir, "The patients who had head, chest and abdominal wounds could only

face certain slow death since there was no chance of surgical procedures.”

Into this “cauldron of moral conflict” (Ivers’ phrase) descended Renée Lemaire and Augusta Chiwy, two nurses who had returned to Bastogne to celebrate the Christmas holidays with their families. “I have never learned,” admitted Prior, “who to predict will be a hero!” Or, he might have added, an angel.

For Glenn Ivers, the road to Bastogne went through Africa. “I remember, when I was a little guy, President Kennedy talked about doing what you can for your country,” says Ivers, his memory machine still in high gear as he evokes the most famous line from JFK’s inaugural address: “Ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.”

With those words in mind, and with a degree in English from Colgate University, the Syracuse native signed up for the Kennedy-created Peace Corps in 1973. “When I volunteered,” recalls Ivers, “they said, ‘Where would you like to go?’ Well, I had a second language in Spanish, so I said, ‘Latin America, but anywhere you need me.’” Which is how he ended up in Liberia.

In January 1974, Ivers arrived in Greenville, a city on the Atlantic coast about 150 miles southeast of Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. He spent the next two and half years working with the country’s Ministry of Agriculture to establish co-ops and credit unions among the region’s impoverished fishers and farmers. When his term was up, the 6-foot-6 Ivers traveled across West Africa for four months by train, riverboat, ferry (read: dugout canoe), and, primarily, overcrowded bus. “I’d be sitting on a bench, and I’d have a chicken on my lap, or my feet would be on the goat that someone’s taking somewhere, and I would be smiling at all the people because I couldn’t speak the local language,” he says. “There were delays and unexpected obstacles, but always, unexpected joys.”

Years later, after civil war had undermined the work he’d done as a Peace Corps volunteer, Ivers returned to Liberia. He and other Peace Corps veterans had formed Friends of Liberia, which collaborated with Jimmy Carter on his post-presidential work in that country. In 1997, leading a 40-person delegation, “Carter went in there to monitor a free and fair election, and Friends of Liberia were very active with them,” explains Ivers. “It wasn’t long after that our film team went right through there, and I made my documentary about refugees.”

Featuring the Uganda-born musician Samite Mulondo, *Song of the Refugee* was the last of Ivers’ three documentaries; the first two, *Hope Is a Literate Woman* and *Literacy Changes Lives*, featured, respectively, then-first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and former first lady Barbara Bush. Created by Ivers and cinematographer Scott Shelley, the films were made under the auspices of Laubach Literacy International, where Ivers worked in the 1990s as public information officer.

Ivers never made his fourth documentary. After their road trip to Albany, he and Dr. Prior discussed their prospective film, but only after the central New York lung association merged with the statewide organization did they finally have the time to get the project underway. That’s when Prior’s health started to go downhill. The last time Ivers saw his friend was in 2007 at a Syracuse hospital. “He’d fallen on the ice and his head was heavily bandaged,” says Ivers. “It was a sad goodbye.”

But Prior had returned to Bastogne, in 1994, for a 50th anniversary commemoration of the city’s siege. He used the occasion to present the city with a bronze plaque honoring Renée Lemaire and the 30-plus wounded soldiers killed in 1944 when a German bomb destroyed the 20th Armored Infantry Battalion’s aid station on “the night before Christmas” — the title of Prior’s memoir.

And Ivers, a member of the Rotary Club of Syracuse, finally produced his own account, though it wasn’t a film but a book: *Angels of Bastogne*.

Published in 2022 after years of rigorous research, *Angels of Bastogne* vividly bounces back and forth between those cold, desperate days in 1944 when the Belgian city was under siege and the reunion, 50 years later, among the old men who’d fought there when they were young. It is an amalgam of narrative non-fiction and historical fiction, though Ivers insistently puts the emphasis on the former. He has added, as he acknowledges in the book’s afterword, “depth and dialogue to a story of real people and events.” He’s also created a number of new characters, chief among them the infantrymen Will and Joey (Bill Mauldin’s war-weary cartoon soldiers Willie and Joe meet John Steinbeck’s Lennie and George from *Of Mice and Men*).

Throughout, Ivers faithfully follows the known chain of events, reasonably embellishing as needed to make *Angels of Bastogne* the compelling and emotionally charged book that it is. If, for instance, a full under-

standing of the psyches of and the relationship between Renée Lemaire and Augusta Chiwy (pronounced CHEE-wee) requires concocting a lengthy confessional exchange between the two women, so be it. “I’m not a historian,” says Ivers. “I’m a writer who happens to be working in history.”

The book’s conclusion has two heart-wrenching culminations. The first is the Christmas Eve bombing of the aid station. Momentarily absent so he could retrieve the pen and paper he needed to write a letter for a dying soldier, Prior was not present when the German bomb landed. In the basement when the bomb hit, Lemaire likely died instantly. The blast blew Chiwy through a wall and, miraculously, she survived relatively unscathed. When, 50 years later, Nurse Chiwy and Dr. Prior reunite and bring together the bloodstained fragments each had saved of the white silk parachute that was Renée’s shroud, there won’t be a dry eye in the theater — that is, if Ivers succeeds in making the feature film he now envisions.

Glenn Ivers did get to Bastogne on several occasions, most recently on 12 May 2025, Florence Nightingale’s birthday and International Nurses Day. Accompanied by Dr. Prior’s daughter and granddaughter, he joined retired nurse Carol Banasik — like Ivers, a champion of Chiwy and Lemaire — for a commemorative ceremony at the graves of the Angels of Bastogne. Their host for this event? The Rotary Club of Bastogne, which is now considering opportunities to work with the Rotary Club of Syracuse on water and sanitation projects in Africa.

Near Bastogne, on a blackboard in the village of Champs, a disillusioned German officer left behind a message bemoaning the terrible loss of life in the ongoing Battle of the Bulge. “Let the world never see such a Christmas again,” pleaded the anonymous soldier, concluding with the hope that, from the ruin of so much death, a universal brotherhood might be born.

“There were people in the trenches, in the foxholes, in the front line,” says Ivers, looking back on the world war that ended 80 years ago this month. “They had a uniform on and a gun in their hand, but they were dreaming of something different than all that bloodshed and pain. And the guy who wrote that message on the blackboard? He nailed it, whoever he was.” ■

Web exclusive: For an excerpt from *Angels of Bastogne* and an account of Glenn Ivers’ first roundabout route to that Belgian city, visit [rotary.org/magazine](https://www.rotary.org/magazine).

OUR CLUBS

VIRTUAL VISIT

Skills for life

Rotaract Club of Little River
Current Transitions,
South Carolina

Cleo the two-toed sloth, cute enough to break the internet, was blowing Megan Marrero's mind. She and a small group of fellow Rotaractors were visiting an aquarium in the tourism hub of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and marveling at the slow-moving, upside-down tree-hanging creature. It especially captured Marrero's imagination.

The eight Rotaractors, whose club is based in the nearby town of Little River, are all students in a nonprofit program that provides life skills classes for people with cognitive disorders and intellectual disabilities. During their March outing to the aquarium, they were studying and gathering information about marine life and other animals for presentations to share with other students in the Current Transitions program.

The idea for the club originated with Rotarians from the satellite club of Little River-Sunset Edition who hold their meetings at the Current Transitions building.

Member Mary Hager, a retired occupational therapist and one of the directors of Current Transitions, proposed that some of the students could form a Rotaract club, which was chartered soon after, in 2023. The Rotarians have taken on the role of coaches, guiding the Rotaractors of Little River Current Transitions to find ways to help others and have fun doing it.

The research trip to the aquarium, paid for with a district grant, is a case in point. A few weeks after the visit, the Rotaractors are putting on a presentation to share what they learned with the other students at Current Transitions as a mentorship and leadership development opportunity. Marrero is telling them all about the Linnaeus' species of two-toed sloths, which have coarse fur, long limbs, and curved claws, and are native to the rainforests of Central and South America.

"I like that they move slow," Marrero tells the group. "They are good swimmers." (And they're not nearly as scary as other inhabitants of the aquarium, like the sharks, stingrays, and giant sawfish.) Several students in the room cheer: "Good work, Megan!" and "Nice job, Megan!"

In another presentation, Marrero is called forward to help with a "walking water" science project that demonstrates the phenomenon of capillary action using absorbent strips of cloth to move colored water between cups.

Hager says she was inspired to bring the students into Rotaract by Past District Governor Craig Hill, who helped form the Little River satellite club and an Interact club for high school students. "I'd been listening to Craig talk about what Rota-

INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING

People with intellectual disabilities, like all people, can benefit from meaningful volunteer opportunities that enable them to build skills and confidence, give back to their communities, and make friends. The Arc, a disability rights group, has these tips for making volunteer opportunities inclusive:

Presume the volunteer can competently do the work. People with disabilities are engaged in many kinds of volunteering. They may need to ask for support, so be as clear as possible about the type of work and your expectations.

Always use respectful and inclusive language in your volunteer training. Take some time to learn about disability etiquette.

Plan for success with the volunteers and their supporters. Go over specific tasks, how the volunteers will be trained, and who in your program can act as a mentor.

Ask volunteers what works best for them to overcome challenges. Often, they will already have ideas. If not, brainstorm solutions with the volunteers and their supporters.

Consider the volunteer for a job. Volunteers with disabilities can also be enthusiastic and excellent employees.



The members of the Rotaract Club of Little River Current Transitions develop leadership skills through service. One of the club's Rotarian sponsors and mentors, Mary Hager (center), visits with members (from left) Ginger Sullivan, Megan Marrero, Jeremy Williams, and Nathan Hitz.

ractors do, and I thought that it would be really great for our students," Hager says. "They just fit the program."

Then she set about talking to the parents of students involved in activities designed for them free of charge at Current Transitions. With the parents' permission, Hill introduced Hager's idea to Rotary District 7770.

Hill worked with then-District Governor Bob Gross and Alicia Pijal-Avila, a Club and District Support staff member at RI headquarters, to complete the charter application. The sponsor Rotary club pays the Rotaractors' dues.

It is not the only club that has made efforts to include members with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A new Rotaract club in Fairmont, West Virginia, for instance, includes people with autism and Down syndrome, says Pijal-Avila. Many of the club's members are clients of a disability action center who are mentored by Rotarians.

Meetings of the Little River Current Transitions club would be familiar to most Rotary members, especially those in the American South who appreciate country banter, the lighthearted conversation that punctuates rural life here. Often someone is nominated to deliver a joke of the day. Try this one: What kind of music do balloons hate? Pop! Groans and laughter ensue.

Then there's a report about projects and fundraising. The club's members have been collecting aluminum cans for recycling, and they organized a "Gigantic Yard Sale" of electronics, jewelry, tools, kitchenware, and more on the Current Transitions parking lot over two days in May. Families of students often come to hear presentations on topics as practical as how to use Google Maps to plan a trip. And Rotarians are a dependable audience for this group. "They double the size of the crowd," Hager says.

So what does Megan Marrero like best

about being a Rotaractor (besides hanging out with sloths)? "I like to help my community," she says.

A new member, Kevin Dunbar, agrees and says he especially likes helping out at the North Myrtle Beach Area Historical Museum. What he enjoyed most at the aquarium was "cleaning it up and making it look good."

The Rotaractors also regularly volunteer at an assisted-living center in Little River where they join together with residents in singing, making crafts, and sharing holiday cards.

Their meeting business done, members prepare to close out the gathering the same way many clubs do around the world by reciting The Four-Way Test.

But first Hager draws the name of a member who gets to choose a song of the day. She selects Dunbar's name and he chooses Bon Jovi's "It's My Life." Spirited dancing ensues.

— CAROL FREY

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

You can go home again

Oregon's Rotary Club of Beaverton helped Janet Chvatal realize her dreams. Now she's back to repay the favor.



Her Ambassadorial Scholarship helped prepare Janet Chvatal for her musical career. “I don’t know how I would have done it without Rotary,” says Chvatal, an honorary member of the Rotary Club of Beaverton.

For her eighth birthday, Janet Chvatal had a date with the devil. “My mother took me to my first opera when I was 8 years old,” a grown-up Chvatal explains. “It was Goethe’s *Faust*, the French version by Charles Gounod. It was so intense, with Marguerite taken down to hell and the devils dancing around — and then she sings to the heavens and is released because she’s a pure soul. It was a visual and aural extravaganza, the likes of which I had never seen. All I wanted to do from then on was be involved somehow in the arts.”

Born in Florida, Chvatal grew up in Beaverton, Oregon, and though she fulfilled her hope of a life in the arts, things didn’t go exactly as planned. “I dreamed of being a concert pianist,” she says. “And then I got into high school and discovered that classical pianists have to practice 10 to 12 hours a day. Singers, however, can only practice four to five hours. So I decided, I think I’ll be a singer instead.”

A straight-A student and a self-described “*Streber*” — a German word that Chvatal defines as someone who strives to excel — she strode

resolutely toward her goal. After winning several competitions in high school, she was invited to attend an exclusive vocalization workshop in California along with other top teenagers from around the country. “I was sure that I was going to be a little fish in a big pond,” confesses Chvatal. Instead she turned out to be one of the workshop’s most promising students.

With her sights set on attending a college with a top program for vocal study, Chvatal knew one thing for sure. “I wanted to get out of town as soon as possible,” she says. “I hadn’t yet fully appreciated what

Beaverton had given to me.” That realization would come with time.

In 1986, Chvatal concluded four years of studies at one of those top schools — Boston University College of Fine Arts — which she attended on scholarship and graduated *summa cum laude*. (“My *Streber* instinct was still there.”) While at Boston, she took workshops with the Belgian bass baritone José van Dam and the composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein. Chvatal says they both imparted the same message: “Girl, you must get to Europe!”

What they didn’t say was how she might accomplish that financially. “Between my junior and senior year in college, I began applying for scholarships,” says Chvatal. “I thought about the Fulbright — and then I discovered the Rotary Club of Beaverton.” With help from club member and future district governor Larry Huot (who died in 1998), Chvatal secured a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship. With that, she was able to continue her studies at her school of choice: Die Hochschule fuer Musik und Darstellende Kunst (University of Music and Performing Arts) in Vienna.

“It was a quantum leap into a new world,” Chvatal says. “I was able to continue my dream of honing my talent there. It provided the final stage of learning that I needed to master my craft. I don’t know how I would have done it without Rotary. I’ve been a fan and deep appreciator ever since.”

As a professional singer, Chvatal continued to excel. In 1990, she made her debut in Vienna as Christine Daaé in Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *The Phantom of the Opera*, and she followed that with more leading roles in operas and musical theater, as well as a masterful string of recordings. She also raised two children, Cypress Joseph and Naia Leone, who are both Rotary Youth Leadership Awards grads. (“It changed their lives,” says their mother.)

Today Chvatal lives in Füssen, a German city in the Bavarian Alps watched over by Neuschwanstein Castle, the fairy-tale structure that

inspired *Sleeping Beauty*’s castle in Disneyland. “It’s an extraordinary place to live,” she says, “and I am so blessed to now make my permanent home there.”

But Chvatal hadn’t forgotten Beaverton. “From the moment I learned the term Service Above Self,” she says, “it has remained one of the beautiful, haunting voices inside my mind.” Now she began to wonder how she could “put tools into the hands of children so they could live their dreams and reach their goals.”

In Germany, Chvatal wrote and produced *Der Schwanenprinz*; from that musical sprang a book called, in its English edition, *The Wish Prince*. The enchanting fairy tale encourages children to live their dreams; a 15-page addendum, which highlights “5 Crown Steps,” demonstrates how, with the help of a parent or a trusted friend, children can make those dreams come true. To date, Chvatal has given away about 20,000 copies of her book, including 5,000 that she is presenting to children under the auspices of the Wish Prince Project, an endeavor she launched in 2019 with her old friends, the Rotary Club of Beaverton.

Today, on her return visits to Beaverton, Chvatal visits grade-school classrooms with Rotary members. Clad in a traditional Bavarian dirndl, she goes through the book with the young students; she even sings them her song about the Wish Prince. Finally, she turns to the last pages of her book and relates a lesson from her life. “I tell the students that I wanted to tell a story, but that you never do anything alone,” says Chvatal. “You always need help, and these are the people who helped me reach my dream of writing this book for you.”

First names on the book’s list: three Beaverton Rotarians — Ralph Shoffner, Doug Taylor, and Maureen Wheeler — as well as a shoutout to the whole club, which, by sponsoring Chvatal’s Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship, launched the *Streber*-striving soprano’s career and helped make her dreams come true. — GEOFFREY JOHNSON

Janet Chvatal

- **Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship**, University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, 1987
- ***The Phantom of the Opera***, Vienna debut, 1990
- **The Wish Prince Project**, 2019-present (learn more at letsliveourdreams.com)



From top: Janet Chvatal stars as Christine Daaé in *The Phantom of the Opera*; Chvatal’s book, *The Wish Prince*, helps children fulfill their dreams; joined by Chvatal, happy students pose with their personal copies of *The Wish Prince*.

HANDBOOK

A great read

How a little reading celebration became a state holiday

When John Jorgensen's wife, Sue, died in a car accident in June 1996, he wanted their five young children to remember their mother for the things she was passionate about, "and there were many things," he says. "She was an incredible woman and an incredible educator. Two of the things she cared most about were reading and young children."

Jorgensen, a member of the Rotary Club of Casper in Wyoming, worked with a small group of educators, friends, and librarians to hold a local reading celebration in spring 1999. "It was surprisingly successful and very fun," he says, "so we decided to keep going with that."

More than 25 years later, that little celebration has spread through word of mouth to Rotary clubs in Minnesota, Oregon, and Northern California. In Wyoming, it has ballooned into a statewide literacy celebration called Wyoming Reads that provides books to every first grader in the state. Since the initiative began, nearly 300,000 books have been distributed in total, including just over 150,000 in Wyoming. In 2024, the state Legislature passed a bill making the third Tuesday in May a state holiday, Wyoming Reads Day. "That was quite an honor," Jorgensen says. "It kind of sets in stone that it keeps happening."

Every year, a group of about 25 educators, librarians, and community members get together and select 10 books for Wyoming Reads. First graders in the state get to choose which one they'd like. Then it's time for the celebration, including a rendition of a fairy tale about the "Good Queen Sue," in honor of Jorgensen's late wife.

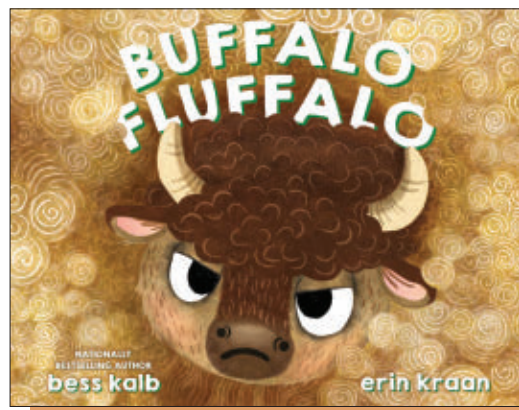
Jorgensen recalls a time several years ago when a teacher came up to him after a Wyoming Reads Day presentation and introduced him to one of her students. The boy couldn't read when he had selected his book that winter. But he asked his teacher if she would stay in at recess and help him learn before the big day. Now that the day had arrived, he wanted to read his brand-new book to Jorgensen.

"If you want to see a crusty old banker with tears streaming down his cheeks, that will do it," he says. "That one story makes 27 years of doing this worthwhile."

For Rotary's Basic Education and Literacy Month, check out last year's book selections.

1

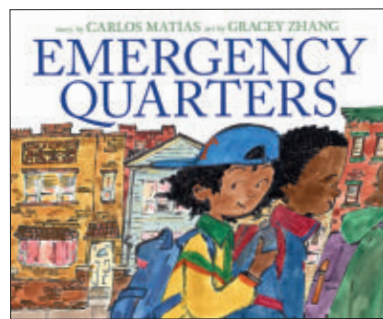
Buffalo Fluffalo by Bess Kalb



"We purchased 3,100 copies of *Buffalo Fluffalo*," Jorgensen says. "It became the most popular book for the year."

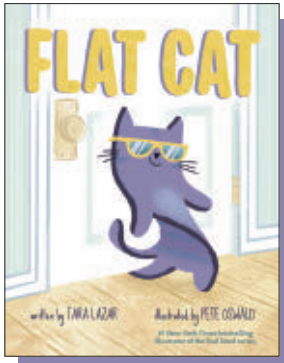
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Emergency Quarters by Carlos Matias



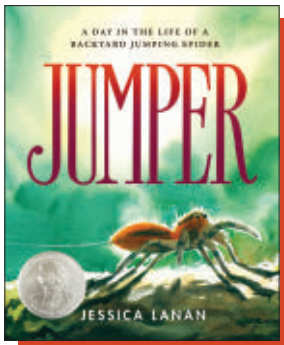
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Flat Cat by Tara Lazar



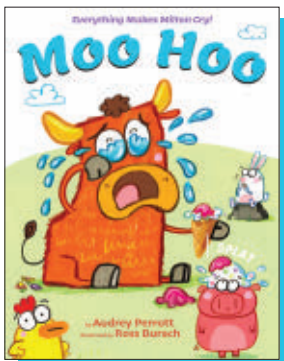
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Jumper: A Day in the Life of a Backyard Jumping Spider by Jessica Lanan



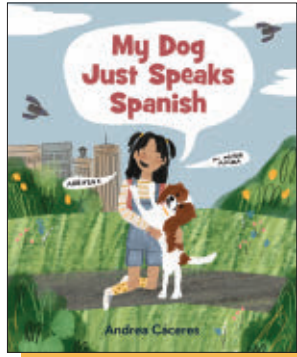
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Moo Hoo by Audrey Perrott



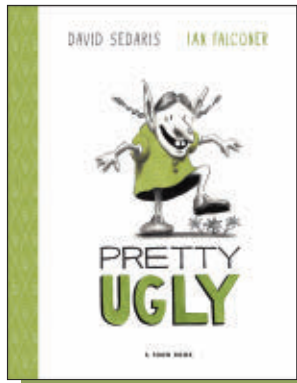
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My Dog Just Speaks Spanish by Andrea Caceres



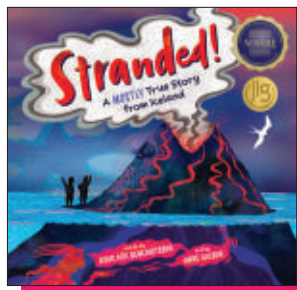
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Pretty Ugly by David Sedaris



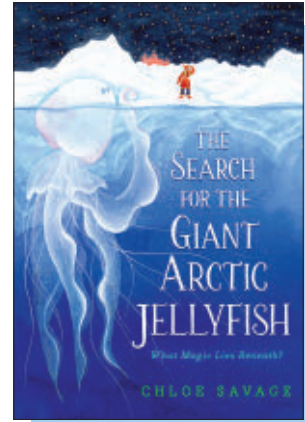
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Stranded! A Mostly True Story From Iceland by Aevor Thór Benediktsson



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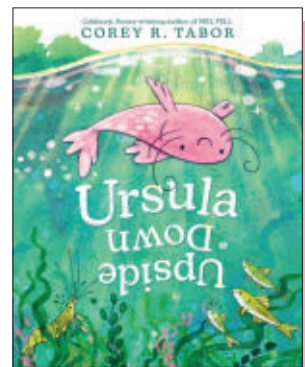
The Search for the Giant Arctic Jellyfish by Chloe Savage



“That was an interesting one,” Jorgensen says. “They’re looking everywhere for the jellyfish and it’s right under them the whole time.”

10

Ursula Upside Down by Corey R. Tabor





TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Literacy as a human right

Education is the most powerful tool

we have for changing the world, and during Basic Education and Literacy Month, I want to remind everyone why our work matters.

Education breaks the cycle of poverty, opens doors to opportunity, and empowers individuals to transform their communities. But education doesn't exist in a vacuum. We must also address peace, health, clean water, economic opportunity, maternal and child health, and the environment.

This is why Rotary has these areas of focus. Lasting change requires a comprehensive approach. When we collaborate across these areas through The Rotary Foundation, we raise up communities sustainably and with dignity.

Today, I have asked **Lynne Paradis** from the Rotary Club of Red Deer, Alberta, to share her passion for literacy:

"I believe that literacy is a human right. When I joined forces with the Rotary Club of San Ignacio, Belize, over a decade ago, we set out to improve reading instruction, but we had no idea how far this journey would take us.

Literacy Alive! has been supported by eight Rotary Foundation global grants since 2011. Using a straightforward approach based on phonics and science, we updated how teachers teach and focused on how

students really learn. We collected data on reading skills improvement over six months.

After demonstrating that teachers had integrated new practices into daily instruction, the project snowballed. The Belize Ministry of Education took notice.

Today, over 1,300 teachers have been trained and more than 20,000 students have benefited. We've achieved over 90 percent success rates, with many students making more than a year's worth of improvement in just five months.

The program is now compulsory in Belize primary schools. What moves me most is hearing teachers say how confident they are that they can change students' lives.

Our greatest success is working ourselves out of a job. When local educators take the lead, we know lasting change is underway."

Lynne's story exemplifies the power of Foundation grants. Through partnerships spanning six Rotary clubs and three countries, Literacy Alive! reminds us how good Rotary is at creating systemic change.

When our members' passion meets Foundation support, we don't just improve individual lives, we change entire communities. By supporting the Foundation, you can put your passion to work this month and every month.

HOLGER KNAACK

Foundation trustee chair

SERVICE ABOVE SELF

THE OBJECT OF ROTARY

The Object of Rotary is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise and, in particular, to encourage and foster:

First The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service;

Second High ethical standards in business and professions, the recognition of the worthiness of all useful occupations, and the dignifying of each Rotarian's occupation as an opportunity to serve society;

Third The application of the ideal of service in each Rotarian's personal, business, and community life;

Fourth The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service.

THE FOUR-WAY TEST

Of the things we think, say or do:

1. Is it the **truth**?
2. Is it **fair** to all concerned?
3. Will it build **goodwill** and **better friendships**?
4. Will it be **beneficial** to all concerned?

ROTARIAN CODE OF CONDUCT

The following code of conduct has been adopted for the use of Rotarians:

As a Rotarian, I will

1. Act with integrity and high ethical standards in my personal and professional life
2. Deal fairly with others and treat them and their occupations with respect
3. Use my professional skills through Rotary to: mentor young people, help those with special needs, and improve people's quality of life in my community and in the world
4. Avoid behavior that reflects adversely on Rotary or other Rotarians
5. Help maintain a harassment-free environment in Rotary meetings, events, and activities, report any suspected harassment, and help ensure non-retaliation to those individuals that report harassment.

CALENDAR

September events

STICK AROUND FOR A ROUND

Event: A Round for the Community
Host: Rotary Club of Salisbury, Maryland
What it benefits: Local nonprofits
Date: 5 September
 For this annual outing to the Green Hill Country Club, people are invited to play a round of golf to help the club stay around to benefit the community. Golfers compete in teams following a best-ball format, in which the lowest score on each hole among a team's members counts as the team's score. Prizes, including those for individual achievements such as longest putt and closest to the hole, are presented at a post-round lunch.

HOT TO GO!

Event: Drive Thru Breakfast
Host: Rotary Club of Fort St. John, British Columbia
What it benefits: Local nonprofits
Date: 11 September
 For the past eight years, the club has prepared an annual takeout breakfast for hundreds of busy people. Drivers can pick up the meals in a grocery-store parking lot, while local businesses can have them delivered. Last year, members sold about 1,600 freshly made egg, ham, and cheese sandwiches, bagged along with apples, granola bars, and other items. The event has raised more than \$170,000 since it began.

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

Event: Wo-Zha-Wa Fall Festival
Host: Rotary Club of Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin
What it benefits: Local and international projects and scholarships
Dates: 12-14 September
 The club sells roast beef sandwiches from a booth at this long-running com-



WET YOUR WHISTLE

Event: California Brewers Festival
Host: Rotary Club of Point West-Sacramento, California
What it benefits: Local nonprofits
Date: 13 September

This festival, which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year, attracts thousands of people to sample a wide selection of craft beer and other beverages, including wine, cider, sake, seltzer, and kombucha. The brewery whose beer is voted by attendees as their favorite is awarded the California Brewers Cup. The event also features live music, a "fun zone" with grown-up games, and a relay race in which participants in costumes sip beer as they run. Food trucks keep the crowd well-fed.

munity festival, the name of which is derived from a Ho-Chunk word meaning "fun times." The three-day extravaganza also includes a parade with 100 entries, an arts and crafts fair, an antique flea market, carnival rides, live musical performances, and other food vendors.

FALL FUN FOR ALL

Event: Stoneville Fall Festival
Host: Rotary Club of Stoneville, North Carolina
What it benefits: Local and international projects
Date: 27 September
 As the club's primary annual fundraiser, this early autumn festival has brought cheer to Stoneville, a small town near the Virginia border, for more than 35 years. Vendors selling food and crafts line down-

town Henry Street from morning to late afternoon. Attendees can play games and watch a variety of musical performances.

CRUSTACEAN CELEBRATION

Event: Lobster Festival
Host: Rotary Club of Charles County (La Plata), Maryland
What it benefits: Local projects, nonprofits, and scholarships
Date: 28 September
 This year marks the 50th anniversary of the club as well as its 50th annual lobster feast, held at the Charles County Fairgrounds. Ticket buyers get two whole Maine lobsters and a bowl of fried clams and can also partake in burgers, hot dogs, sides, beer, and soft drinks. The event includes live music, a silent auction, and children's activities.

Tell us about your event. Write to magazine@rotary.org and put "calendar" in the subject line. Submissions must be received at least five months before the event to be considered for inclusion.

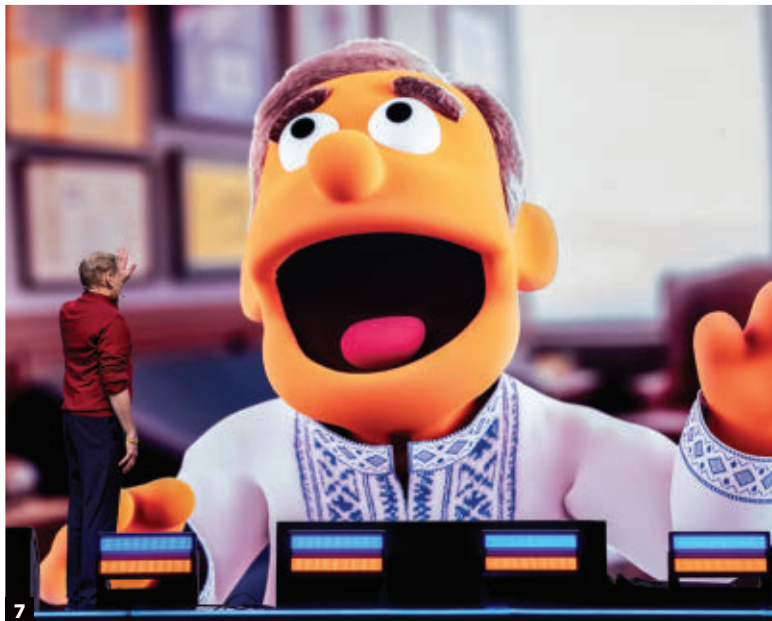


2025 CONVENTION RECAP

Rotary feels the magic all around

Members connect in June at the Rotary International Convention in Calgary, Alberta

1. Stephanie Urchick, 2024-25 RI president, welcomes attendees to Canada at the opening general session. **2.** Outside the BMO Centre, Rotary members pose next to a display of Calgary's distinctive celebratory call. **3.** Members from around the world revel inside the Scotiabank Saddledome. **4.** Academy Award-winning actor Geena Davis describes her work to increase and improve the representation of women and girls in media, declaring that "we can create what the future looks like." **5.** The Rhinestone Rodeo show lights up the stage. **6.** In a video address, Bill Gates announces the renewal of the Gates Foundation's partnership with Rotary to end polio, extending a 2-to-1 match for Rotary donations. **7.** Rotary General Secretary John Hewko banters with his animated puppet alter ego during a general session. **8.** Singer-songwriter and Rotary Peace Fellow David LaMotte performs before speaking about the power of collaborative change. **9.** During the closing general session, 2025-26 RI President Francesco Arezzo inspires members to *Unite for Good*. **10.** Pushpi Weerakoon, a Rotary Scholar and Rotary Peace Fellow from Sri Lanka, accepts the 2024-25 Rotary Alumni Global Service Award. **11.** Rosemarie Truglio, a senior vice president at the company that produces the TV show *Sesame Street*, discusses how to help children build emotional resilience.





IN BRIEF

Rotary establishes new peace center in India

Rotary has announced a partnership with Symbiosis International University in India to establish a new Rotary Peace Center. Located at the university's 400-acre Lavale campus outside Pune, the center will offer a one-year certificate fellowship program to train peace and development professionals from across Asia in peace studies, conflict transformation, and sustainable development. Its first cohort of Rotary Peace Fellows will begin the program in 2027.

The peace center, announced at the Rotary International Convention in June, will equip community leaders with advanced knowledge and skills in peace-building with an emphasis on issues pertinent to Asia. With a strong focus on Positive Peace, the center will offer a diverse curriculum including modules in post-conflict recovery and healing, social justice, population displacement and migration, diplomacy, and humanitarian response. Upon completion of the program, peace fellows will be awarded a postgraduate diploma in peace and development studies by the university.

"Our collaboration with Symbiosis International University marks a significant step in Rotary's ongoing commitment to fostering peace and developing sustainable solutions to address local and global challenges," says Rotary Foundation Trustee Bharat Pandya. "Peace is the foundation for safety, prosperity, and sustainable development

in our societies. The establishment of Rotary's peace center at Symbiosis is a proud moment for Rotary that will empower future peacebuilders."

The peace center's mission is to create effective learning support systems and an enabling environment that nurtures global citizens, cultivates skills and mindsets for resolving conflict, and contributes to a more inclusive, knowledge-driven, and sustainable future supported by a network of peacebuilders across the region. With two cohorts per year of 20 peace fellows each, the program is tailored to accommodate mid-career professionals, ensuring they are able to integrate their learning into real-world scenarios and have a positive impact on their own organizations and communities.

"I am delighted that Rotary has chosen Symbiosis International University as the site for a Rotary Peace Center," says Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar, pro chancellor of the university. "Symbiosis was built on the motto 'Vasudhaiva kutumbakam,' meaning 'The world is one family.' ... This initiative aligns well with our core values and long-standing vision."

The Rotary Foundation currently awards up to 130 fully funded fellowships for dedicated peace and development leaders from around the world to study at one of its seven peace center programs. Since 2002, Rotary Peace Centers have trained more than 1,800 fellows for careers in peacebuilding. ■

IN MEMORIAM

With deep regret, we report the death of **Kazuhiko Ozawa**, Yokosuka, Japan, who served RI as Rotary Foundation trustee in 2010-13, director in 2007-09, and district governor in 2000-01.

In addition, we report the deaths of the following Rotarians who served RI as district governors:

Moris A. Tallaj
Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic, 1970-71

Narmo L. Ortiz
Boynton Beach-Lantana, Florida, 1990-91

Joseph A. McCarthy
Dewitt, New York, 1994-95

Cha-Too Koo
Seoul Namsan, Korea, 1996-97

Roger Borup
Cape Coral Sunset, Florida, 1997-98

Seok-Hwa Kim
Sae-Cheonan, Korea, 1997-98

Hyon Kyu Park
Seoul South, Korea, 1998-99

Toyoji Yoshida
Koshigaya South, Japan, 1999-2000

Roy Brownie
Beaumont-Cherry Valley, California, 2004-05

Yasuo Kamitani
Tsuruga, Japan, 2004-05

Tadashi Nobuhara
Okayama-South, Japan, 2005-06

Masao Inoue
Kofu South, Japan, 2006-07

Hans-Ulrich Heininger
Rosenheim-Innstadt, Germany, 2009-10

Kazuki Okabe
Nanto, Japan, 2016-17

Denise DiNoto
Colonie-Guilderland, New York, 2022-23



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2026 CONVENTION

The hype is real!



Entertainers of all kinds bring energy and excitement to the convention stage.

If you've never been to a **Rotary International Convention**, you might wonder if the global gathering lives up to the hype that it's more fun than any conference you've attended. Your fellow members are here to assure you that the convention 13-17 June in Taipei will prove the hype is real: You'll find best-in-class opportunities to learn, travel, grow, and feel connected. Here are five ways the Rotary Convention breaks the mold:

- **The main stage rocks.** This is especially true when famous bands perform. Daily big-group sessions are packed with performers, members with inspiring stories, and speakers with serious star power.
- **Learning workshops are FUN.** Forget boring lectures — breakout sessions are led by your Rotary pals and experts committed to RI's mission. They recharge your batteries and inspire your service.

■ **New members feel the benefits.** Newbies, not just club officers or long-time members, say the programming is valuable and new friendships are guaranteed. We hear it all the time: You truly grasp Rotary's international power when you experience a convention.

■ **Families love the convention.** Relatives and travel companions are welcome under Rotary's global tent. Everyone enjoys the big-stage extravaganzas and House of Friendship activities.

■ **You can unwind and stay on budget.** It's easy to sneak in vacation excursions after convention hours with so many options close by in Taiwan. Register soon for limited-time savings.

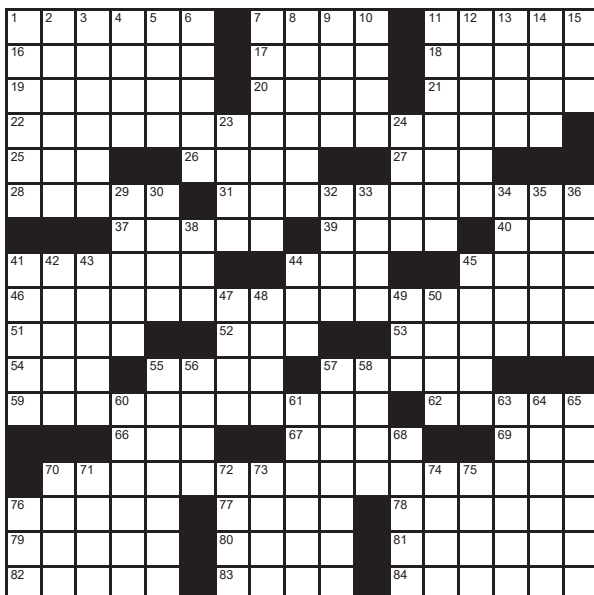
After their first convention, many members are hooked. Like a Rotarian attending her fifth one, in Calgary, Canada, said: Each is more enjoyable than the last. ■

Learn more and register at convention.rotary.org.

CROSSWORD

Visitors' riddle

By Victor Fleming
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas



Solution on opposite page

ACROSS

- 1 Shortening brand
- 7 Gorillas and chimps
- 11 Model of perfection
- 16 Gymnast Mary Lou
- 17 Fall leader?
- 18 ___ to (helped cause)
- 19 Black key by B
- 20 Like Santa's cheeks
- 21 Animal dens
- 22 First part of a riddle
- 25 D.M.V. issuance
- 26 Spinning toys
- 27 Long, long ___
- 28 Muscle contraction
- 31 Part 2 of the riddle
- 37 Some eateries
- 39 "Atta ___!"
- 40 Acorn source
- 41 The same in number
- 44 Former nuclear agcy.
- 45 "Que ___ ..."
- 46 Answer to the riddle
- 51 Take the bus
- 52 Balk caller
- 53 Entertains
- 54 ___ and outs
- 55 Present starter?
- 57 Philbin of TV
- 59 Part 3 of the riddle
- 62 Be generous
- 66 ___ Miz

67 Some deadly snakes

- 69 O.T. book
- 70 End of the riddle
- 76 Bygone gas brand
- 77 ___ cloud (cosmic debris)
- 78 Become a participant
- 79 Beginning to think so?
- 80 ___ Cong
- 81 Redundant bullring shout
- 82 Type of tea
- 83 Ray of old movies
- 84 Wage ___

DOWN

- 1 Moves on all fours
- 2 Send again
- 3 Cornell campus site
- 4 "Now!" in the OR
- 5 Strong string
- 6 Stoned
- 7 ___ of (relevant to)
- 8 Novelist Marcel
- 9 Relaxation
- 10 Charon's river
- 11 Contrary to law
- 12 Church officer
- 13 Change copy
- 14 Subtle quality
- 15 33⅓ rpm records
- 23 Time long past
- 24 Twosome
- 29 Land or sea suffix
- 30 Horse hair
- 32 A long time

- 33 Puerto ___
- 34 "___ me!"
- 35 Western writer Bret
- 36 Approves
- 38 "Heads up" abbr.
- 41 Open building spaces
- 42 Eva Marie of acting
- 43 Center
- 44 Dada artist
- 45 Winter annoyance
- 47 Bits of wordplay
- 48 Throw off
- 49 Annoy persistently
- 50 Writer Kingsley
- 55 Close election margin
- 56 Dept. store goods
- 57 Osso buco go-with
- 58 X Games airer
- 60 Bad-weather cause, at times
- 61 Wire-___ terrier
- 63 Family 12-step group
- 64 Speak poorly of
- 65 More level
- 68 Missouri city, informally
- 70 The "C" in UPC
- 71 "All right, I get it now"
- 72 ___ Scotia
- 73 Labor arduously
- 74 Return of the Jedi dancer
- 75 Yesterday, in Lyon
- 76 Drink slowly

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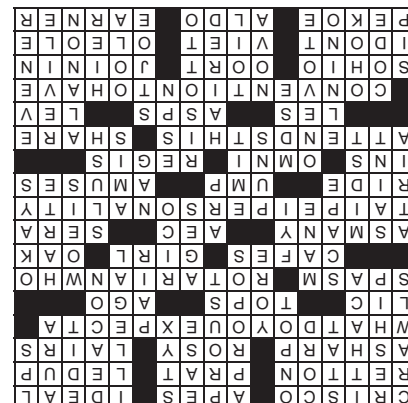
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A dish that speaks Sicilian

This meaty puff pastry conveys the island's history

In Italy, food is hyperlocal and hyperseasonal, with dishes you might find only in one town and only at one time of year. That's the way it is in Rotary President Francesco Arezzo's hometown of Ragusa on the island of Sicily. "Everyone thinks we are cooking fish all the time," explains Arezzo's wife, Anna Maria Arezzo-Criscione, who runs a boutique hotel with her daughters. "But Ragusa is in the mountains. We use a lot of meat, cheese, chicken, and veal. Traditionally, we only had fish during Lent."

One iconic dish from their town is sfoglio Ragusano, a savory pie of puff pastry stuffed with ricotta, sausage, and black pepper. The dish is typically eaten at Christmas. "It's very heavy," she says, "and it's very rich. It's not ideal for summer weather, especially in Sicily where it's very hot."

FAMILY FRIENDLY: Arezzo-Criscione has always made sfoglio with family, whether her mother, sisters, or daughters. Now that she and Francesco have grandchildren, the kids have become involved too. "You can imagine the chaos in my kitchen at that point!" she says. "But we like to keep the traditions and be together as a family."

ANCIENT ORIGINS: Sicily has been controlled by groups as varied as Arabs, Spanish, French, and Austrians, and this history shows up in its food, sfoglio included. As the dough cooks, the top layer of puff pastry opens to look like a flower, "almost an open rose," Arezzo-Criscione says. "This is because of the Arabic influence." She continues, "It's a dish that talks about Sicily and all its dominations through the centuries. This dish speaks Sicilian."

—DIANA SCHOBURG

**Anna Maria
Arezzo-
Criscione**

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