

Rotary

DECEMBER 2025

MAGAZINE

One path to healing:
Find your inner clown

page 14

A Rotary journey
through the world
happiness index

page 26

What science tells us

page 36



THE HAPPINESS ISSUE



Rotary 

POLAND GRAND TOUR

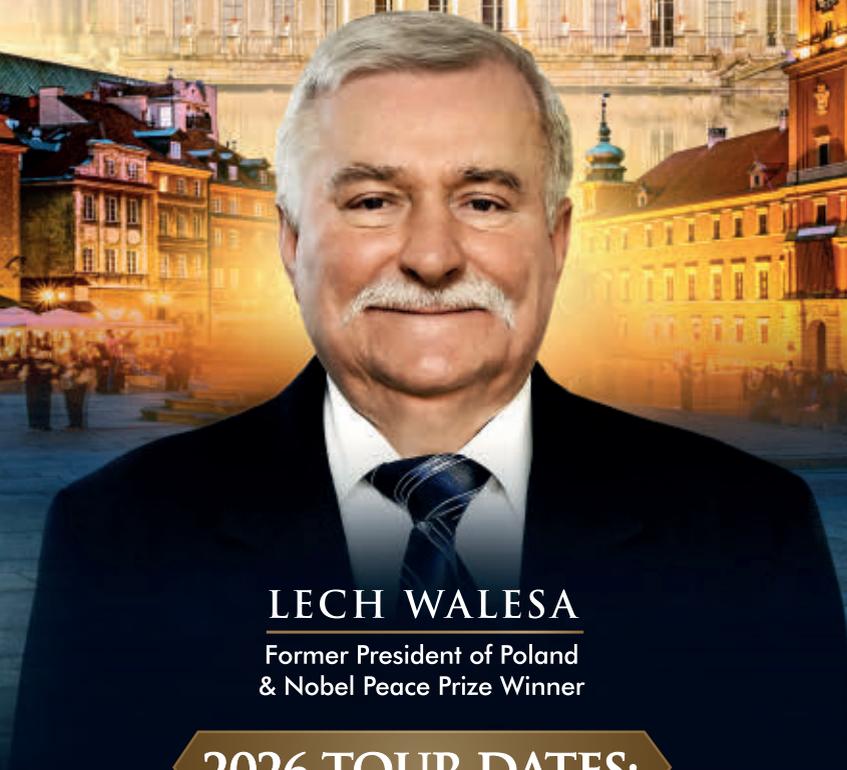
12 DAYS

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AND HISTORIC SPLENDORS

&

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WORLD-FAMOUS PERSONALITIES

including:



LECH WALESZA

Former President of Poland
& Nobel Peace Prize Winner

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To health and happiness

This month's special issue of *Rotary* magazine is all about happiness, that most elemental of human yearnings. More than a feeling, though, this state of positive well-being, and the conditions necessary to create and sustain it, should be considered a universal right.

December also marks Rotary's Disease Prevention and Treatment Month, when we highlight our members' work to promote health and wellness, including mental wellness. Globally, nearly 1 in 7 people have a mental health disorder, according to a recent World Health Organization report. Yet only 9 percent of people with depression receive adequate treatment.

We are fortunate in Rotary to have a powerful way to support emotional well-being and happiness: friendship. The connections we build in Rotary can be a powerful force for change. I know this from personal experience.

When my fellow members first proposed that I become club president, I demurred. I had a stutter. I was terrified of speaking. But having club members who supported me and surrounded me with affection enabled me to face my fear, and I found a way to stand confidently before a crowd.

Today, I regularly address audiences — some numbering in the thousands — in a language that is not native to me. The Rotary members in my life helped me create lasting change within myself.

That fellowship gives us the courage and means to create lasting change in the world as well, and mental health services are in desperate need of improvement. The WHO reports that governments on average devote only 2 percent of their health budgets to mental health, and only 11 percent of that funding reaches community-based services. In some countries, only one trained mental health professional is available for every 100,000 people. The WHO has called for strategic and urgent action to close the gap.

Rotary can answer that call by championing mental health awareness in our clubs, working with local health systems, funding training for community health workers, and supporting initiatives that bring care to places where none exists. Even small investments in mental health yield enormous returns in productivity, public health, and happiness.

While we are creating lasting change in the world, we cannot forget to take care of each other. Past RI President Gordon McInally wisely reminds us that we must go beyond asking, "How are you?" We owe it to each other to instead ask, "How are you *really*?"

As we transition to a new year filled with new possibilities, let us *Unite for Good* — for healing, friendship, and access to happiness.

FRANCESCO AREZZO

President, Rotary International



WELCOME



YOU ARE HERE: Rovaniemi, Finland

“HAPPINESS” IN FINNISH: Onnellisuus

WINTER WONDERLAND: Brushing against the edge of the Arctic Circle, the small city of Rovaniemi is the self-declared official home of Santa Claus. As such, it is thronged with tourists indulging in seasonal joy and the natural beauty of the northern lights, forests shrouded in snow, and herds of reindeer. Outside of town, at Santa Claus Village, visitors can greet Santa inside his snow-covered cabin. A white line painted across a village street marks the Arctic Circle at 66 degrees 33 minutes north latitude.

SANTA’S A ROTARIAN? The Rotary Club of Rovaniemi was chartered in 1946. A second, the Rotary Club of Rovaniemi Santa Claus, came to town in 1965. Raimo Laitinen (pictured here), a member of the latter, is one of the village’s official Santas and travels the world to bring joy and hope to children. In 2022, he visited Ukraine where Rotary clubs sponsored a Santa spectacular for children affected by the war.

Rotary

MAGAZINE

December 2025

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A Record Year of Generosity: Rotary Members Make History

In 2024-25, Rotary members around the world came together to make history — raising more than US\$569 million to support life-changing service projects. This remarkable achievement reflects the power of collective action and the deep commitment of our global community.

2025 by 2025 Endowment Goal Achieved

Through the successful completion of our 2025 by 2025 Endowment campaign, we set out to raise US\$2.025 billion and surpassed that goal with an incredible **US\$2.050 billion**. This achievement secures Rotary's ability to keep Doing Good in the World for generations to come.

Your Gifts Making an Impact

Thanks to the generosity of supporters around the world, The Rotary Foundation awarded over

1,424	468	74
GLOBAL GRANTS	DISTRICT GRANTS	DISASTER RESPONSE GRANTS

Better Together

- Renewed our agreement with the **Gates Foundation**, recommitting to the fight to end polio
- Awarded the **Programs of Scale grant** to an initiative that works to build peace in Colombia
- Partnered with Symbiosis International University to create a **Rotary Peace Center in India**



“Your gifts, commitments, and dedication matter not just today, not just this year, but for future generations of Rotary members to come. This is why the goal of reaching 2025 by 2025 was set, not just as a number, but to deliver on the promise of Rotary for our communities.”

— Mark Daniel Maloney
2024-25 Rotary Foundation Trustee Chair,
at the Rotary International Convention



CONTENTS

December 2025
Vol. 204, No. 6

THE HAPPINESS
ISSUE

FEATURES

26

Bound for bliss

Where lies happiness? With help from Rotary members, our inquisitive Everyman aims to find out.

By Jeff Ruby

Photography by Evan Sheehan

36

What makes us happy

Nearly a century of science suggests one action outweighs all others. Rotary members have a head start.

By Erin Gartner

Photography by Sarah Elizabeth Larson

46

Knock knock ...

How many Rotarians does it take to change a light bulb? Members tell their best jokes, and the magazine mines its archives for classic wisecracks.

Illustrations by Tianyi You

On the cover: Inside humanity's universal, eternal, and at times delusory quest for happiness. Photograph by Evan Sheehan
Prop styling by Kelly McKaig



- 1 President's message
- 2 Welcome

CONNECT

- 8 Editor's note
- 9 Letters
- 12 Look who's talking
... it ain't the guy who's moving his lips

OUR WORLD

- 14 When the world laughs with you
For these clowns, the joy and healing aren't just for the audience
- 17 What the doctor ordered
A New Jersey club's "comfort closet" stocks basics for discharged patients
- 18 People of action around the globe
- 20 Penny for your thoughts
"Happy dollars" tradition builds club camaraderie
- 22 The prize
In 1901, when the Swedish Academy presented the first Nobel in literature, Mark Twain and Leo Tolstoy were still alive — yet neither won the award. In this imaginary account by Tolstoy's daughter Sasha, the two men resolve to focus on a greater reward.

OUR CLUBS

- 50 Virtual visit
Rotary Club of Formosa Happiness, New Taipei City, Taiwan
- 52 Where are they now?
All along her journey of self-empowerment, Janelle Hall finds Rotary
- 54 Dispatches from our sister magazines
- 56 A made-up machine promises a foolproof path to the contented life
- 58 Trustee chair's message
- 60 Calendar
- 62 2026 convention | Crossword
- 64 Say cheese
Prized for its rich, nutty flavor, this Swiss cheese will put a smile on your face

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE SEIDLITZ; PHOTOGRAPH: (OPPOSITE) SARAH ELIZABETH LARSON



Rotary is good
for a laugh. Feel
the joy in a portrait
gallery of happy
Rotarians.
page 36

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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.



EDITOR'S NOTE

Messengers of happiness

Stuck at the back of an immense crowd, I craned my neck to try to catch a glimpse of the 14th Dalai Lama. “He’s the messenger of happiness,” said a young man beside me. As if to emphasize the point, his T-shirt was adorned with one of the Buddhist leader’s sayings, “The purpose of life is to be happy.” I was eager to see this joyful messenger for myself, but from this distance, I could make out only the maroon hue of his Tibetan monastic robe.

It was May 2007. The spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism had come to Chicago on the final stop of his North American tour. The event, titled Finding Peace in a World Full of Turmoil, was held in Millennium Park and drew more than 10,000 people of varied faiths and backgrounds. The size of the crowd made it difficult to hear, but one teaching stood out: The secret to both personal and global happiness is to develop a warmhearted and compassionate mindset. The Dalai Lama extolled service to others as a form of “wise selfishness” that benefits the provider, too, by creating a happier, more harmonious world.

Unaffiliated with any religion, I was nonetheless deeply moved by his message. By the end, I vowed to meet him and hear his teachings up close.

My wish came true about a decade later, in November 2016, when I attended a conference in Dharamsala, the city in northern India that is home to the Dalai Lama. The conference organizer arranged a brief private audience for me and a fellow journalist. I was so flustered on the morning of our meeting that I accidentally left behind a copy

of his best-selling guide *The Art of Happiness* that I had intended to have him sign for a friend’s daughter.

When His Holiness entered the room, he seemed every bit the warm, affectionate grandfather I never had. He playfully patted me on the head — I had shaved my hair the day before to honor him. I told him about my experience at his Chicago event. Then, knowing it was a long shot, I asked if he might have time for an interview over the next few days.

To my astonishment — and that of his aides — he invited me to return the next morning. For a full hour, he shared personal stories and emphasized his core teachings on peace and happiness.

As our staff prepared this special issue focusing on the joy of Rotary and of service and giving, I couldn’t help but think back to this encounter with a man known for his joy, laughter, and peace. You’ll find similar themes throughout our coverage, from interviews with Rotary members in countries ranked at the top, middle, and bottom of the World Happiness Report to the science of why service and giving make people happy.

“Humans are social beings that need communities to survive,” the Dalai Lama said in 2016. “By caring for the well-being of others and our community, we not only bring happiness to others but also find greater happiness and purpose in our own lives. Cultivating warmth, generosity, and a sense of shared humanity helps to reduce loneliness and creates a more peaceful world.”

These sentiments will no doubt resonate with members of Rotary, themselves joyful messengers of peace.

— WEN HUANG

The author (right) shares a few laughs with the Dalai Lama during a 2016 interview.

Letters to the editor

THE PATH TO PEACE

I am continually amazed and proud to read about the tremendous humanitarian efforts of Rotary worldwide when I receive *Rotary* magazine each month. It hit home in September when Francesco Arezzo wrote that literacy “is the key to human dignity, economic mobility, and peace” [President’s message] and Holger Knaack wrote, “Education breaks the cycle of poverty, opens doors to opportunity, and empowers individuals” [Trustee chair’s message].

When I was president of the Rotary Club of Santa Cruz, we established a literacy club in which we taught adults to read and write. It was a moving moment when those students told us, “Thank you for giving me the opportunity to communicate with others, believe in myself, and help others along the way.”

In practicing “peace through education,” Rotary is instilling self-confidence in others to promote peace in the world.

Bruce McPherson, Santa Cruz, California

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

I enjoyed reading about President Francesco Arezzo in the September issue [“Out of the gate”]. Arezzo discussed his reluctance to become his club’s president and later district governor due to his stutter and concern about “making a fool of himself.” He said he owes [the fact that he overcame his fears] to “all the Rotarians I have met in my life.”

As a fellow orthodontist who once shared his fear of public speaking, I appreciated his sentiments. In 2019 I learned about Rotary’s alliance with Toastmasters, which was formed to bring more personal growth opportunities to its members. I am a 30-year Rotarian and joined Toastmasters in 2023 to finally work on my fear of public speaking.

For those of us in Rotary who want to address this common human fear and do not expect to be RI president, I strongly recommend you visit a Toastmasters club. Then, the next time you are asked to give an update or introduce a club speaker or give a wedding toast, you’ll be better prepared and happy to do so. Toastmasters works.

Dr. Stephanie Steckel, Smyrna, Delaware

POLITICAL VIEWS

I read with interest the criticism from a fellow Rotarian [“Pick out the politics,” Letters to the editor, September] suggesting that *Rotary* articles sometimes veer into politics, contrary to Rotary’s nonpolitical stance. While I respect that concern, I’d offer a different perspective: Everything is political.

Politics is embedded in the ways communities organize themselves, distribute resources, and make collective choices. Rotary, by design, avoids partisan politics — but our work cannot avoid the political realities that shape the world we serve.

Consider Rotary’s signature initiative: the fight to end polio. Vaccination campaigns have faced not only logistical challenges but also political resistance and even violent opposition. Rotary has navigated these complex terrains not by retreating from them, but by working through them — always anchored in our humanitarian mission rather than partisan allegiance.

Global health, clean water, literacy, peace, and economic development all intersect with political realities. What distinguishes Rotary is that we approach these issues with neutrality, integrity, and a commitment to serving all people, regardless of their politics. If anything, our experience with polio shows that Rotary’s impact comes not from ignoring the political dimensions of service but from transcending them.

Gerry Kosanovic, Corvallis, Oregon

Many kudos to Robert Bates for his letter. Rotary is a service club not a political action committee. We have lost membership over the last few years. I suspect pushing any political agenda will only cause more loss of members.

Don Nelson, Wautoma, Wisconsin

Correction: In the October issue, “People of action around the globe” misstated the amount of money that Rotary member Ralph Zuke has raised to support polio eradication. The correct figure is more than \$57,000.



Overheard on social media

In August, we wrote about community health workers who provide essential frontline care in countries around the world.

Community health workers are the backbone of care in so many parts of the world. In my diplomatic career, I saw firsthand the impact they make: saving lives, building trust, and strengthening communities often against great odds. Thank you for shining a light on their vital work and for supporting them through Rotary.
Maria Brewer (former U.S. ambassador)
➔ via LinkedIn



GIVE THE GIFT OF ROTARY



When you give to The Rotary Foundation, you're supporting the work of Rotary members who are working with communities around the world to find sustainable solutions to their needs. Rotarians and Rotaractors are taking action to make a difference, but we need your help.

A gift today can accomplish great things from delivering polio vaccines that protect children for a lifetime to providing medical equipment that gives newborns a healthy start.

**Your gift today can make a difference.
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Your gift does not purchase a specific item but will support projects like those shown here.

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\$15
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Fighting disease



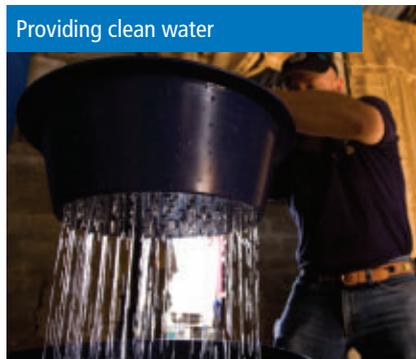
\$150
HAND WASHING STATION

Hygiene practices



\$50
WATER FILTER

Providing clean water



\$200
REPLACING LIVESTOCK

Community economic development



\$100
MIDWIFE TRAINING

Maternal and child health



\$320
PEACE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Violence-prevention strategies





THE SPECIALIST

Look who's talking

... it ain't the guy who's moving his lips

W

When I was 8, my eldest brother gave me a ventriloquist dummy for Christmas.

I would stand in front of the mirror and practice, practice, practice. There was a little routine that came with it that I memorized. I used to bring him to school for show-and-tell and tell jokes. When I was 12, I started doing kids' birthday parties. Later, I started doing corporate stuff and shows for adults.

Edgar Bergen was a real influence. He was the modern reinventor of ventriloquism. His show with his famous dummy Charlie McCarthy was the No. 1 radio show in the 1930s and '40s. It's completely wild — people gathered around the radio on Sunday nights and listened to a ventriloquist voice a dummy.

The proper term is a ventriloquial figure. But nobody uses that. A dummy, right? Dummies and puppets.

Al Getler
Rotary Club
of Colchester-
Milton, Vermont

Ventriloquist

It's a comedy between two people. I play the straight man. Floyd, my main character, he's always misbehaving. Ventriloquists would call him the wise-guy character. When we're having a conversation, he's looking around the room. He's alive. He's going back and forth with me. It's fluid. It's well practiced. There's a lot of physicality to it.

The basic premise is you don't move your lips and you substitute letters for the ones that are more difficult to say. When you start off, the books will tell you substitute D for the letter B. Well, if you do that "basketball" just becomes "dasketdall." The reality is you have to use your tongue behind your teeth to form the sounds you want.

One of the highest grossing comedians in the world is a ventriloquist. Jeff Dunham outpaces Jerry Seinfeld. We've been close friends for a long time. I always tease that he became a millionaire and I became a thousandaire.

Every July, hundreds of ventriloquists from around the world come to a convention in Kentucky near the Vent Haven Museum of ventriloquism. I'm serving as executive director of our 50th anniversary convention in 2026. This year we had a British invasion night with two British ventriloquists. One of the hits of the convention was a ventriloquist from Australia. And then we had some Japanese performers during our open mics. That's how big all of this stuff can get. ■



Inspiring Action, Feeding Communities

Empowering Clubs to Create a Ripple Effect of Hope



Born from the Rotary Club of Naples, FL, Meals of Hope has packed over 100 million meals across the U.S., addressing food insecurity while strengthening communities.

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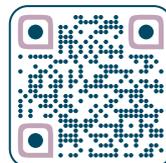


Build stronger bonds among members and the community.



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17

In a doctor's care

20

Share the joy with "happy dollars"

22

Twain, Tolstoy, and the prize

MENTAL HEALTH

When the world laughs with you

For these clowns, the joy and healing aren't just for the audience

It's 2015, and Bruce Reges is standing in an orphanage in Guatemala, dressed like a clown.

At a towering 6 feet, 5 inches tall, he's a sight to behold, but he's not feeling especially funny. Despite the red nose and the puppet in his hand, his mind is perpetually filled with memories of Iraq, where he saw an endless stream of death and destruction while serving as a first sergeant in the U.S. Army in 2006-08.

"Can I play with that, too?"

His attention snaps back to the present, where an adorable girl with a shy, toothy grin is pointing at his puppet, a clown marionette. Reges, who had been trained as a soldier to act hard, softens. As he hands the puppet to the child, named Wendy, he feels seen. The act of clowning, he will learn, has therapeutic powers.

For Reges and for other military veterans in the Rotary Club of Big Rapids in Michigan, clowning is healing some of the invisible wounds of war.

"What happens when you clown is you add good memories to the really hard ones," Reges says, reflecting on all he's learned through clowning since that day in 2015. "It gives you a weapon to fight against the hard things."

Since ancient times, clowns have used physical humor to make us laugh, or think, or connect. They're the mimes of ancient Rome, the court jesters of medieval England,

the sacred shaman clowns of the Sioux Nation.

As a form of therapy, clowning is nothing new, but it is niche. "Clowning is not for everyone," says John Bair, a Rotary member in suburban Chicago and a clinical psychologist who worked with veterans at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center for 30 years. "Some people are afraid of clowns."

Therapeutic clowning grew out of the practice of psychodrama, which was developed in the early- to mid-20th century by psychiatrist Jacob Levy Moreno, who encouraged patients to act out their problems. As a type of expressive therapy — which also includes art, music, and movement therapies — clowning encourages people to explore their emotions. "For people who are kind of stuck, it puts them in the present," says Bair. "You can't clown without taking on a new persona."

For some veterans, returning home from war can bring feelings of alienation and numbness. They may be diagnosed with mental health conditions such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or suicidal ideation. Clowning isn't a cure, but Bair says that it can provide a sense of safety along with a much-needed jump-start.

Reges returned from Iraq in 2008 with a traumatic brain injury that changed his personality. He was haunted by the deaths of 143 soldiers stationed at his base over the course of his 15-month deployment. He had no job. In time, his wife wanted a divorce. He stopped

To learn more about the Clownvets program and movie, visit patchadams.org/clownvets-program.



PHOTOGRAPH: DARREN IOZIA

The Michigan Warrior Clowns, seen here climbing into a large pair of underwear, perform at veterans homes, street fairs, and car shows.

“What happens when you clown is you add good memories to the really hard ones. It gives you a weapon to fight against the hard things.”

paying his mortgage and lost his home. “I didn’t want to do anything anymore,” he says. “All I wanted to do was be away from people.”

Theatrics had long been a part of Reges’ life. His mom was a puppeteer, and when he was in high school, Reges had a part-time job playing a clown on a local *Bozo’s Big Top* television show.

Decades later in Iraq, the Army reservist was assigned to civil affairs with duties that included helping rebuild schools. He quickly recognized that Iraqi children were terrified of U.S. soldiers in their full body armor. So he asked his mom to send over some puppets. The kids loved them, and so did Reges and his fellow troops. He even started a nonprofit called Peace Through Puppets.

But back at home, he was suffering. He desperately needed some levity, and that’s when clowning found him again.

Around 2015, Hunter “Patch” Adams, the clown-doctor famously portrayed by Robin Williams in the 1998 movie about his life using humor to heal, wanted to send a group of veterans with PTSD and other conditions to Guatemala for a week and teach them to clown.

Clinical psychologist Mark Kane, who had been counseling veterans for nearly 20 years at the Grand Rapids Vet Center in Michigan, was intrigued. He’d often used out-of-the-box approaches in his practice, including drum circles and equine therapy. Kane’s mother had been a clown and used humor and clowning to build bridges, including to address racial tension over school integration in the 1960s.

Kane enlisted a group of veterans who had struggled with their mental health to fly to Guatemala with Adams. Reges was among them. During visits to orphanages and hospitals, Kane watched a group of embattled individuals dress up in wigs and act like children again. They’re going to these developing countries not with their M16s but with their red noses, he says.

Science supports the idea that clowning benefits not just audi-



From left: Veteran Ken Vaughan and Rotary members Tara Braun, Mark Kane, Russ Nehmer, and Bruce Reges clown around in September at a park in Big Rapids, Michigan. Science supports the idea that clowning benefits not just audiences but performers.

Art as medicine

Clowning is a subset of expressive therapy, in which individuals use the arts to express and process emotions and experiences. Other types of expressive therapy include:

- ★ Music therapy
- ★ Art therapy
- ★ Dance and movement therapy
- ★ Drama therapy

ences but performers: Their brains generate feel-good hormones such as oxytocin and dopamine, says Bair. For some of the veterans, clowning in Guatemala was the first time they'd had fun in years. "When they put on the hair, the mask, the nose, and they started clowning, they told me, 'I could come out of myself,'" says Bair.

Kane eventually retired from counseling but continued clowning with the group. He returned to Guatemala for a second time. As Marcos the Clown, he teamed up with veterans and launched a group called Michigan Warrior Clowns, which performs at veterans homes, parades, marches, street fairs, and car shows. They've also done clown weddings and even a clown funeral.

Not all of the Warrior Clown members are veterans. Kate McGlynn, whose clown name is Katy

Bee, launched a clowning business when she was struggling with PTSD from domestic abuse. "Clowning saved my life," she says. When she's performing, McGlynn says, her focus on bringing joy to others pushes her own struggles to the background. She's seen the same effect on others, including the other Warrior Clowns, whom she calls "the silly platoon."

"These guys, all they have to do is stand there and smile and be. They're in character, and they don't have to prove anything," she says. "They're just sweethearts, and I know they were not sweethearts before."

It's clowning that connected Reges and Kane to Rotary. The trips to Guatemala became the subject of a documentary called *Clownvets* in 2019. That year, the Rotary Club of Big Rapids raised money to send local veterans to the Cinequest film

festival in California for a screening of the documentary.

Their support meant a lot to Kane, who joined Rotary, and he encouraged Reges and the other veterans to do the same. Today, the Big Rapids club continues to support the Michigan Warrior Clowns.

For Reges, clowning and Rotary have given him pathways to connect with others. "Otherwise, we isolate. We don't want to be around people," he says. "And Rotary helps me get involved with the community."

Today, the memories from Iraq haven't gone away. He says he carries the weight of the lives lost. "They're whispering in my ear, 'What are you going to do with this time that you have?'"

As long as he can hand a puppet to a child, or bring joy to someone struggling, or serve his community through Rotary, he knows the answer. — KATE SILVER

Short takes

The Rotary Foundation exceeded two major goals: It raised over \$569 million in 2024-25 and increased the Endowment to \$2.05 billion, \$25 million above a long-term target.



Dubai, United Arab Emirates, has been tentatively selected to host the 2027 Rotary Convention.



PROFILE

What the doctor ordered

A New Jersey club's "comfort closet" provides basic needs for discharged patients

Dr. Kelly Willman
 Rotary Club of
 Somers Point,
 New Jersey

Kelly Willman saw future Rotarians in her colleagues at Atlantic-Care Regional Medical Center in New Jersey, but there was a problem: Many health care professionals don't have flexible schedules. So Willman brought Rotary to them, starting the Somers Point Health-care satellite club of the Rotary Club of Somers Point.

"As soon as I started to pitch it to my friends, they said it was a no-brainer," says Willman, a surgeon and trauma medical director at the Atlantic City hospital who was then the Somers Point club president. "It was fun because all the younger members could participate in the more traditional activities at my club then also sponsor events that older members wouldn't necessarily think to develop. It was this nice blending of generations, bridging the gap."

Most of the group's projects are based in health care. The club received a \$5,000 district grant to develop a "comfort closet" at the hospital that members stock with clothes, shoes, soap, and other items for patients without homes who are headed to shelters or other difficult circumstances when they leave.

"We understand that they can't stay in the hospital indefinitely," she says. "We're going to try to set them up for success and provide a jumping-off point that they can hopefully build on."

Willman hopes her club can help the hospital's nearby sister campus develop a comfort closet of its own. In the meantime, she's channeling her doer mindset and finding other ways to help. "We all need to be making our community better," she says. "Rotary offers so many opportunities to make a difference in the world, and that's the avenue I chose." — JP SWENSON

A record 1,036 Rotaract clubs earned the 2024-25 Rotaract Giving Certificate for clubs whose members collectively donated at least \$100 to the Foundation.

Discover Rotary is a new place on social media to learn about RI resources and events. Follow @RotaryLearn on Facebook and @discoverrotary on Instagram.



The Rotary Fellowship of Sea Lovers was recognized in September.

People of action around the globe

BY BRAD WEBBER



St. Vincent and the Grenadines

The Rotary Club of St. Vincent staged a “glow run” for good health in June in partnership with a fitness center. At dusk, about 500 participants carrying illuminated sticks brightened the streets along a scenic route starting from the cruise ship terminal in the islands’ capital, Kingstown, reports club member Kimeisha Bailey. Businesses and medical facilities sponsored the family-oriented event. “This Glow Run is part of our club’s ongoing commitment to disease prevention and treatment,” Bailey says. The run also supported a District 7030 emphasis on promoting healthy lifestyles and encouraging Vincentians to stay active. “By getting the community moving, the club aims to raise awareness and take action,” Bailey says. The club also offered a virtual workout session for families and a nutrition webinar.

Rotary
Club of St. Vincent

18%

Proportion of children ages 13-17 in St. Vincent and the Grenadines who are physically active at least one hour a day

United States

Acclaimed chef Vikas Khanna created a children’s book, *Festivals at the Bungalow*, with support from the recently chartered Rotary Club of South West Florida District 6960. The club raised \$20,000 from U.S. and Indian Rotarians, other individuals, and businesses to print 2,000 copies of the illustrated book that are being distributed free to Rotary-led literacy initiatives. The book “takes children on a journey across India, showcasing how families come together to decorate, cook, and celebrate,” says Priya Ahluwalia, who helped start the club with her husband, Mohit Pohani. “The combination of stories and recipes makes it both educational and engaging, sparking curiosity while fostering cultural appreciation.” On 15 August, Rotarians joined Khanna in ringing the closing bell of the Nasdaq Stock Market in New York City to mark the book’s publication.

7%

Share of Asian restaurants in the U.S. that serve Indian food



Rotary
Club of South West Florida
District 6960

1989

Last case of wild polio in South Africa

South Africa

What started in 2016 as a casual dinner among friends has grown into an annual gala in Cape Town to raise money to help end polio. “We thought we’d raise some funds while enjoying a meal together. As the idea grew, I brought my Rotaract club on board,” explains Rex IP Omameh, today a joint member of the Rotaract and Rotary clubs of Blouberg. At the 2024 gala, about 100 revelers enjoyed the paparazzi treatment as they strolled the red carpet. The party, attended by local luminaries, guests, and members of District 9350 Rotaract and Rotary clubs, raised money for Rotary’s polio eradication efforts as well as a Rotaractor trip to Uganda to participate in a polio vaccination campaign. “Each year we see more people, especially young people, becoming passionate about polio awareness through this event,” Omameh says. This year’s celebration, which was scheduled for 8 November, is branded as Africa Unite: A Gala for Peace and Polio.

Rotaract
clubs in District 9350



Mauritius

Putting “happiness” in your club’s name is one way to set the agenda. “From the beginning, our mission was clear: Every initiative we undertake must contribute meaningfully to the emotional wellness of our beneficiaries,” says Syam V.D. Mudhoo, a past president of the Rotary Club of Helvetia Happiness. The club even has an enforcer of ebullience of sorts called a director of happiness. That officer oversees such initiatives as “mindfulness moments” and “spontaneous laughter yoga.” Social “FriYAYS,” held monthly and open to guests, loosen the traditional meeting structure by including games and icebreakers “to surprise, delight, and recharge,” Mudhoo says. “We also know that true impact begins within.” Hence the effort members put into ensuring they are in good spirits themselves. “It’s a lifeline.”



1 in 2
People around the world will develop a mental health disorder in their lifetime

Rotary
Club of Helvetia Happiness



GOODWILL

Penny for your thoughts

“Happy dollars” tradition builds club camaraderie

Little by little, Marylin Galimi noticed, her Rotary club was losing something that made it special: camaraderie. The virtual club meetings that outlasted the COVID-19 era weren’t helping. So as the new president of the Rotary Club of Syracuse in New York, she set out to rebuild bonds through an in-person meeting once a month. She just needed a way to get people there.

“I had a light bulb go off,” she says. “What did I used to like? I liked the happy dollars.”

Yes, happy dollars, that venerable tradition in many clubs of members donating a buck for a chance to stand up and share some good news with the proceeds going to a good cause. Galimi hoped that sharing a little everyday joy would help members get to know each other as more than boxes on a screen. “We just forgot how

to do that,” Galimi says. “We forgot how to socialize, and the humanity that comes with seeing each other across the table.”

At the club’s September meeting, Galimi conveyed the happy news that her son started his first week of college and her daughter was back to school. A new member then shared that she was a breast cancer survivor. Galimi recalls that when the club did happy dollars prepandemic, members would use the occasions to introduce guests. “It makes your guest feel really valued,” she says. “From that, you can get new members.”

Galimi is not the only one who thinks so. The Rotary Club of Calgary in Alberta is also introducing what it is calling “happy bucks” this year with an eye toward its membership goals.

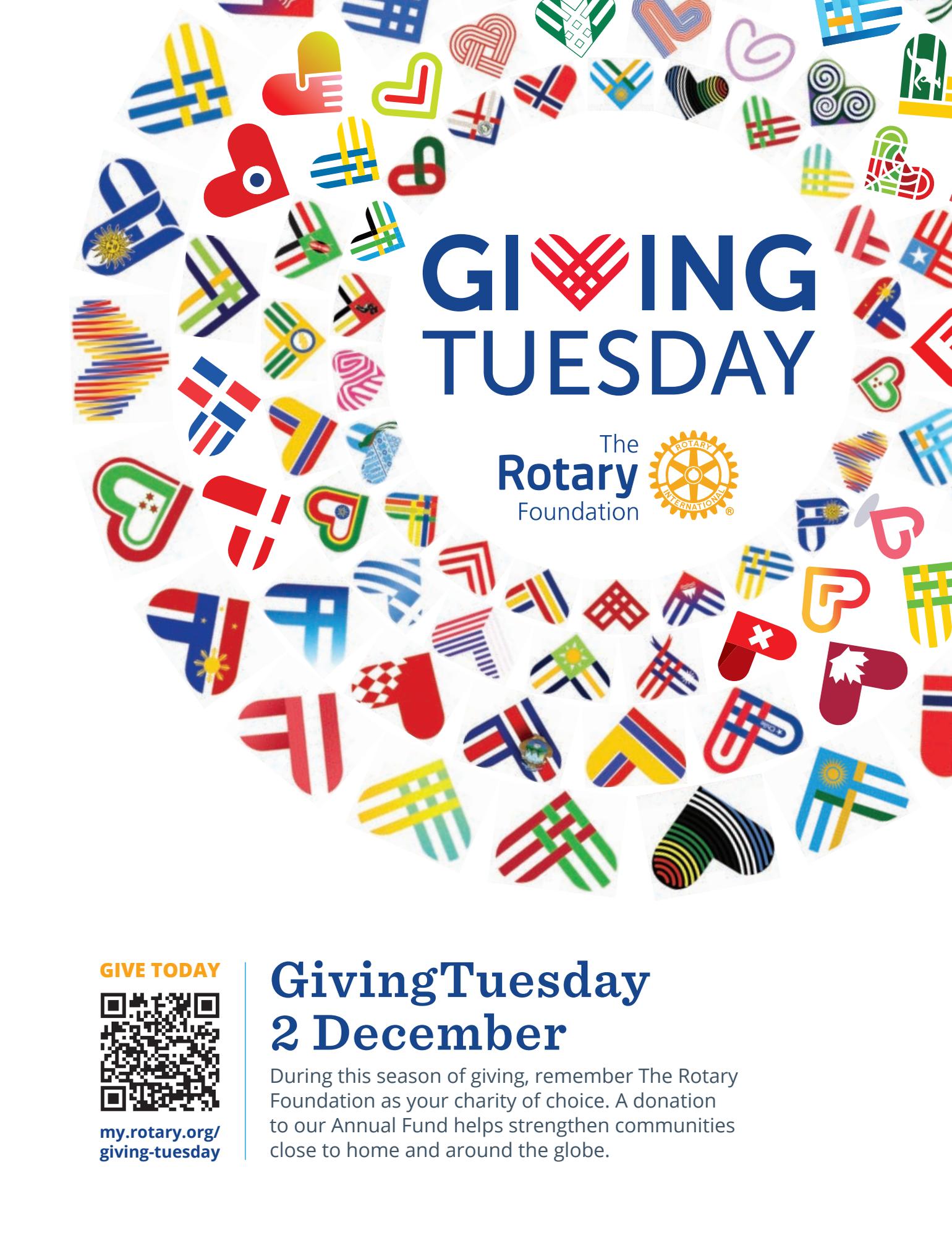
Club President Bill Hamilton says a priority this year is to focus on fellowship and fostering a club culture that will attract and retain members. “We want to give them a reason to come to the meetings,” he says.

At the first meeting of the Rotary year, the club had a happy buck trial run, Hamilton says. Dennis Tran, the club’s fellowship director, introduced the concept and asked everyone to share with others sitting nearby something that made them happy over the past few days. “We wanted everyone to give a happy story at the table, just to practice,” Hamilton explains. Groups at each table chose their happiest moment to share with the full meeting. The winner was someone who had received a note from her daughter declaring her “best mom.”

Subsequent meetings have included a few minutes for members to share their news. “When we started it, I was nervous people weren’t going to stand up and make announcements,” Hamilton says. “I can’t stop them. Everyone loves to hear it. We get enough bad news stories in our day.”

In the Calgary club, money isn’t really the point, Hamilton says. The club’s fellowship goal is the priority, and anyway, many people no longer carry cash. Meanwhile, in Syracuse, Galimi says the money goes toward the club’s literacy committee.

Galimi says a happy dollar tradition is easy to implement and has the potential to bring members together. “Sometimes it’s not the big things that bring us together,” she says. “Being able to tell people about a grandchild, a birthday, a new friend, just being here today — sometimes the little things are the most impactful.” ■



GIVING TUESDAY

The
Rotary
Foundation



GIVE TODAY



[my.rotary.org/
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GivingTuesday 2 December

During this season of giving, remember The Rotary Foundation as your charity of choice. A donation to our Annual Fund helps strengthen communities close to home and around the globe.

ESSAY

The prize

In 1901, when the Swedish Academy presented the first Nobel in literature, Mark Twain and Leo Tolstoy were still alive — yet neither won the award. In this imaginary account by Tolstoy's daughter Sasha, the two men resolve to focus on a greater reward.



By Geoffrey Johnson

Illustrations by Alice Pattullo



I heard the sleigh approaching long before I saw it: the muffled thud of hooves, the fierce breathing of the steeds, the crystalline jingling of bells that gave voice to the snow's silvery descent. And suddenly, there they were, coursing between the long row of birch trees leading up to our home deep in this part of Russia — the three white horses galloping abreast, the ebony sleigh flying behind them, the driver pulling frantically at the reins, and the sleigh's solitary passenger, slumped in the back and buried beneath a misshapen mountain of blankets and furs.

The sleigh skidded to a stop in front of the house, and from beneath the blankets, the furs, and the frost, a man emerged. I led him into the house, where he began to reveal himself. As he unwound his scarf, sullen gray eyes appeared, crowned, once the fur-lined ushanka came off, by a nimbus of white hair. I stood behind him and helped remove the long sealskin coat, and it was as if the winter landscape had accompanied him inside, for he was clad from shoulder to shin in white serge. Even his shoes, once he shed his galoshes, were white. I was dazzled.

"Father is expecting you," I said and walked down the hall toward the study. He followed slowly, studying the paintings that lined the wall. He began to remove one of the cigars that peeked from his breast pocket, but I leaned in and whispered, "Father will not allow that." As I spoke, I inhaled the aroma of what years later I would recognize as the scent of tobacco and whiskey, things, given Father's abstemious ways, I had not yet encountered in my 17 years.

"And how shall I address your father? Does he prefer to be called Count Tolstoy? Comte?"

"No, Father has come to disdain those titles. My mother calls him Lyovushka, but then, she is his wife. I might go with Lev Nikolayevich."

"I have had a variety of names myself. Despite the ravages of time, my wife persists in calling me Youth."

"And they say you're the humorist." Our guest laughed and it pleased me. "Father will likely call you by your biblical name."

"Mark?"

"No, the one you were born with. Samuel."

"And his English?"

"Is better than mine, though you may also speak to him in French or German. He is fluent in each."

"I can understand German as well as the maniac that invented it, but I talk it best through an interpreter. I will stick to English."

I opened the door to the study and gestured for the man in white to precede me. A single candle flickered in the darkness. At his desk, half-hidden behind a stack of books, Father sat hunched over an open volume. He had been studying these same books since he heard about the Nobel Prize and its inaugural winner. I had grown to know them so well myself I could tell which of Prudhomme's volumes he was reading. *Le Bonheur*. Happiness.

I took a seat in the shadows and waited. "Sasha, you may leave," said Father in Russian, but this one time I defied him and sank deeper into my chair.

Our guest paced nervously until Father finally spoke. "You have come about the prize?"

"You know the answer to that question. You have received my letter and I yours. Neither of us is happy about the choice. I druther it had been even you than that French polecat."

"I have no interest in a prize culled from the profits harvested by that merchant of death."

"It's not about the money. It's about the unhappy choice."

Even from my seat in the shadows, I could see Father's grimace and hear the bitterness as he began to read from the book on his desk. "*Nous irons explorer l'infini côte à côte, du plus profond amour à la paix la plus haute, l'infini du bonheur, impénétrable aux yeux.*"

Father groaned, but the man in white merely chuckled. "The French language has always been a marvel to me. How beautiful, how expressive, how full of grace. I always think I am going to understand it, and I am always deceived."

Father spit out the words. "We will explore the infinite side by side, from the deepest love to the highest peace, the infinity of happiness, impenetrable to the eyes.' Foolish trash uttered by two ethereal juveniles who know nothing of life. It is neither noble nor literature."

"It is a blessing to know nothing of life. Happiness consists in not knowing. I was once that foolish myself, long after I should have known better.

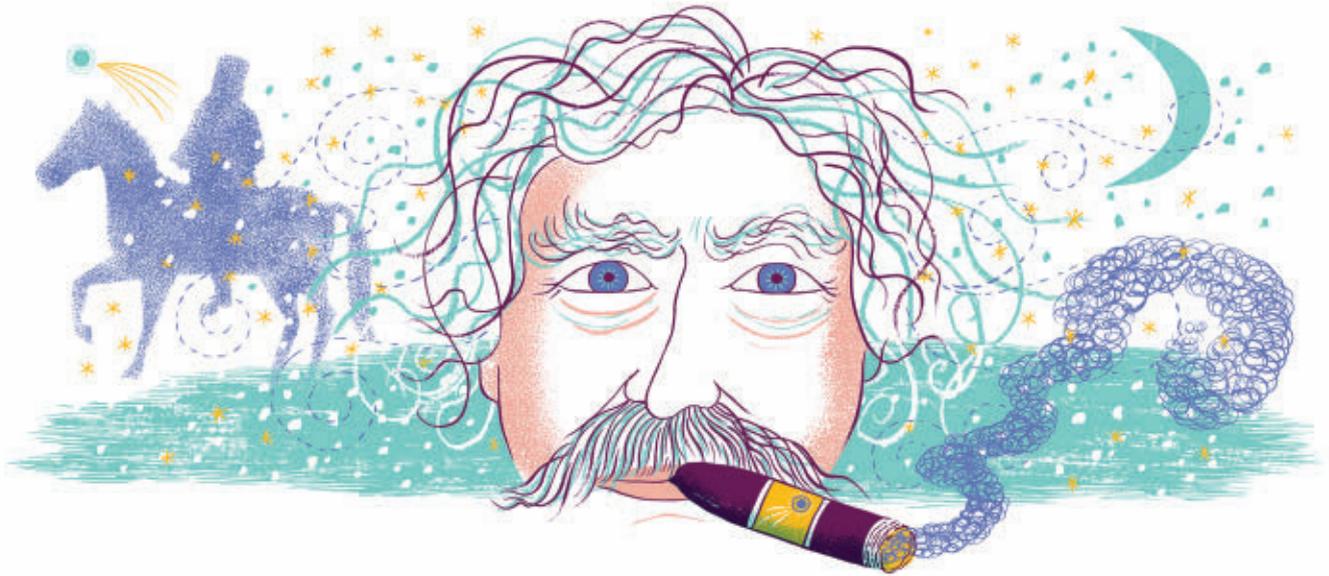
When our daughters were young and my wife and I rejoiced in them and our splendid new home, I defied a friend to produce anyone in the world who was more thoroughly and uniformly and unceasingly happy than I. How brazenly I invited the Fates into our home. I have since learned that people are a suffering machine and a happiness machine combined."

Father had told me our guest had four years earlier lost his daughter Susy, and now the room filled with that grief and, I think, the terrible griefs that lay ahead for that poor man. Father rose and walked toward the shaded window. Clad in his black trousers and peasant's tunic, he was almost lost in the darkness.

"You are not alone," he said. "There was a time, long ago, when everything seemed to me quite plain and simple. The proper object of life was happiness, and I promised myself much happiness ahead. Abetted by life's vagaries, I almost immediately violated that promise."

Now it was Father's turn to pace. "When I was 7 years old, my brother Nikolay proclaimed that he had discovered the secret to happiness. He inscribed his secret on a little green stick and buried it on the grounds here."

Father drew back the curtains, and the room exploded with light from the waning moon as it shone



“One must first believe in the possibility of happiness in order to be happy.”

off the snow. He gazed toward a copse of trees: the place where the legendary stick lay buried, and the place where Father intended to lie after he died. “I suppose I shall never know that secret for myself.”

This was all too much for Mother. She had been sitting unseen in a remote corner of the study, but now, exasperated, she leapt forward and began yelling. “The two of you should give up hoping for any extraordinary happiness and not so disdain what you already have,” she shouted. “One must first believe in the possibility of happiness in order to be happy.”

Startled, our guest shuffled over to stand by Father. Mother closed in on him. “And you!” she pointed. “Recall your own great Gecklberri Finna. Is it not true that after achieving glory and wealth and security, he only found happiness by sleeping the night away in an abandoned barrel and resuming his unkempt, uncombed, and unencumbered ways?”

The two eminent men stood speechless, cowed by Mother’s tirade. She continued. “Happiness is least likely to be seized when you are chasing only after that. You’re more likely to find it while pursuing something else. Besides,” and here Mother paused so her news would have the most profound effect, “the French ambassador tells me that Sully Prudhomme will not travel to Stockholm to accept the prize.”

“My wife spends too much time in St. Petersburg conferring with princes and priests and diplomats,” Father grumbled to the man in white. Mother’s scolding had made them allies.

“Ah, but the Countess,” said our guest, bowing in Mother’s direction, “she has provided us with a valuable piece of information — and she has given me an idea. If Prudhomme won’t travel to Stockholm to accept the prize, we will.”

The two men exchanged glances, laughed, and

ran from the study like a pair of boys released from school. By the time we reached them in the front hall, they were pulling on their boots and coats and hats. “No!” I said. “You can’t do this. Stockholm must be 1,600 kilometers away, and you’ve got to cross the Baltic Sea.”

“Lev, you lead us to the Baltic and I’ll get us the rest of the way,” said the man in white. “I navigated the Father of Waters as a young man, and I’m still enough of a ring-tailed screamer to leapfrog an inland sea.”

Outside in the cold and the snow, the horses waited. Lyubov nuzzled my shoulder wanting the chunk of maple sugar she knew I had in my pocket, but Vera pulled at the harness eager to be off. Rather than climb into the sleigh, Father vaulted aboard Nadezhda and became again the fearless horseman he’d been in his youth.

The man in white pulled the sleeping coachman from the sleigh and clambered aboard to take his place. “Take good care of my father,” I said and kissed him on the cheek.

“Don’t fear, Sasha. I came into this world riding the tail of a comet, and I intend to go out the same way. This little jaunt will be only another exciting adventure along the way.” He had removed one of the cigars from his breast pocket, and now he struck a match and lit it. In the flame’s brief flare, I saw that his eyes, earlier so sullen and gray, were now bright and blue and beautiful. I might have even said they were happy.

The wind came up, the snow swirled, and the horses, trailed by peals of laughter and plumes of smoke, bolted toward the horizon.

Joyful and frightened, I began to cry. I turned to Mother. She smiled serenely and took me by the arm. “Come,” she said and led me back into the house. “Now the fun begins.” ■



TOGETHER, WE

END POLIO

Support Miles to End Polio and the Rotary team as they ride in El Tour de Tucson in November to raise funds to end polio.

Donate at endpolio.org/donate.

Rotary



PEOPLE OF ACTION

By **JEFF RUBY** ○ - - - - -

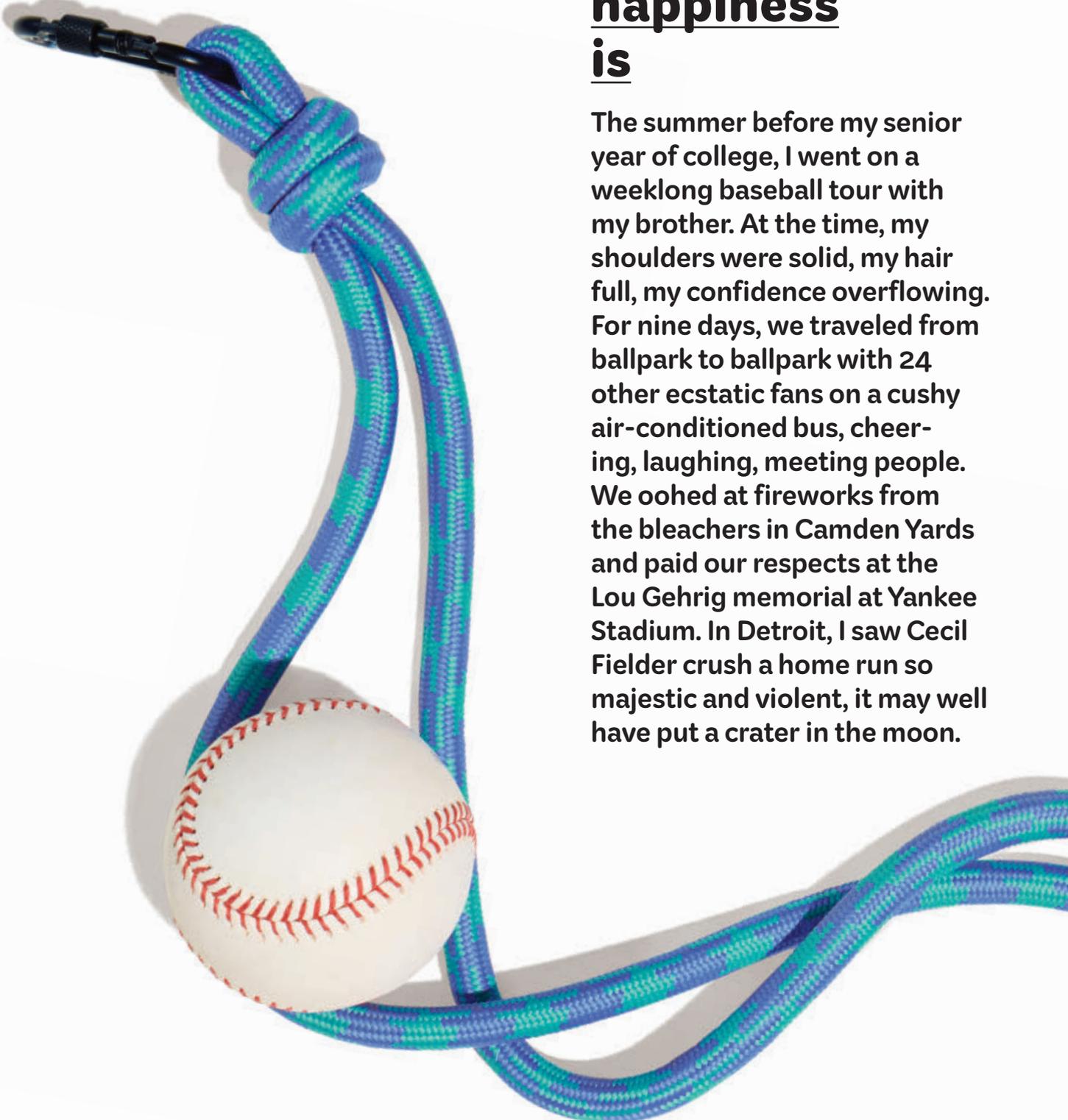
BOUND for

Where lies happiness?
With help from Rotary members, our inquisitive
Everyman aims to find out.

BLISS

Photos by **EVAN SHEEHAN** ● Prop styling by **KELLY MCKAIG** ● Illustrations by **MADISON WISSE** ○ - - - - -





What happiness is

The summer before my senior year of college, I went on a weeklong baseball tour with my brother. At the time, my shoulders were solid, my hair full, my confidence overflowing. For nine days, we traveled from ballpark to ballpark with 24 other ecstatic fans on a cushy air-conditioned bus, cheering, laughing, meeting people. We oohed at fireworks from the bleachers in Camden Yards and paid our respects at the Lou Gehrig memorial at Yankee Stadium. In Detroit, I saw Cecil Fielder crush a home run so majestic and violent, it may well have put a crater in the moon.

Every night, we pulled into a Red Roof Inn, where Kenn and I unloaded all the luggage from the bus, a task that earned us a free 12-pack of Bud Light courtesy of the tour guide. Despite our best efforts, the unopened beer began to stack up until we were forced to fill a hotel bathtub with ice in Cleveland and throw a party. After everyone left, Kenn and I watched movies until I nodded off, falling into the kind of untroubled slumber that comes only with sun-logged exhaustion. I wasn't simply seeing America. I was *experiencing* it.

When the trip ended, life returned with a thud and memories of the baseball trip were washed away in a tsunami of questions about my future. I felt unsettled and aimless, enduring a rocky senior year that involved a broken collarbone and endless worries about graduation. All I wanted was to be back in Detroit, drinking cheap beer with my brother and watching Fielder's moon shot.

Some part of me must have recognized that this concept of happiness was unsustainable, but as I found myself dragged into adulthood, those nine days and nights weren't simply enshrined as the most pleasant of my life, they solidified my idea of What Happiness Is: an uncomplicated euphoria that could be prolonged only by constant reinforcement. Another game. Another beer. Another adventure.

Fast forward 25 years: I was serving as the dining critic for *Chicago* magazine, a coveted position that came with prestige, power, and a mighty expense account. For entire months, I got paid to eat nothing but dry-aged rib eyes rubbed with Himalayan sea salt and sizzling with thick knobs of garlic truffle butter. If any job ought to have sparked happiness, this was the one.

Instead, it made me anxious. When I wasn't fretting over the writing, I was certain that I would be called out in public by an angry chef or get exposed as a fraud with no food background. I engaged in senseless Twitter wars with strangers and struggled to find pleasure amidst my skyrocketing cholesterol and expanding waistline. In the back of my mind lurked a queasy feeling that I had landed in the wrong job, the wrong life, and as the everlasting bacchanal slowly curdled into something oppressive and ugly, all I could think about was getting out.

In other words: What the hell was wrong with me?

Put the "you" in eudaemonia

Ask 10 people what they want out of life and common themes quickly emerge. Many will speak of love or peace or good health. Others focus on God or spiritual pursuits, seeking deeper truths through personal growth or making a positive impact on the world. Most often, though, people seek some form of happiness.

But what exactly is happiness? A feeling? A physical sensation? Something more mystical and universal? Your interpretation, which may change from day to day, depends on any number of factors: your upbringing, your experiences, your brain chemistry. The irony, that most of us have no clue how to define a concept as subjective as happiness — let alone achieve it — doesn't stop us from trying. A maxim attributed to Plato defines

a human as "a being in search of meaning," and 2,400 years and millions of self-help books later, no one's come up with anything better.

Every year, the World Happiness Report surveys more than 100,000 people around the world and crunches data to create a global happiness ranking of countries. I always found the list a bit silly: Why was Finland always at the top? In what topsy-turvy world were Salvadorans, Saudi Arabians, or, for that matter, Brits happier than Italians who live *la dolce vita*? What was the deal with Egypt? The very idea of trying to define and categorize happiness on an international scale struck me as a pointless exercise.

Dig a little deeper, though, and you find that the index's numbers are not based on people's fickle emotions or the fleeting moments of pleasure I had learned to seek out. Rather, they are founded on "life evaluations" that reflect the larger circumstances of a person's existence. This may include freedom to make life choices, having someone to count on, and generosity. Temporary emotional states such as smiling and laughing ("I feel happy today") are disregarded in favor of big-picture judgments ("I'm happy with my life overall"). The latter is related to a concept that Plato and Aristotle called eudaemonia, which translates today as "happiness" or "well-being" — though from a strictly Aristotelian perspective, the word represents a lasting peace achieved through living a meaningful life in accordance with one's values.

This distinction underscores where so many of us go wrong. Though I had worked hard to get to my position at *Chicago* magazine, there was little about being a dining critic that aligned with my overall values. One day, my acid-tongued teenage daughter declared my days were spent "telling rich people where to eat," and everything crumbled after that. A year later, I quit my job and went back to school to get a degree in social work. 

Have a Harvey moment

What if a happy life isn't so elusive after all? Maybe the answers are in plain view, sitting there in the World Happiness Report just waiting to be plucked. Hoping that was true, I reached out to Rotary members from five different countries around the world — and across the spectrum of national rankings — and asked each one how they define happiness in their lives. The goal was to collect not just big-picture philosophies, but also smaller, more concrete advice I could apply to my own life.

I started near the bottom. Likely affected by political instability and an ongoing economic crisis that has led to shortages of goods and services, Lebanon's happiness rating ranks 145th among the 147 countries included on the happiness report. "To find someone happy rather than resilient in Lebanon is very difficult," says Michel Jazzar, a 74-year-old dentist and past governor of District 2452 who lives in Jounieh, roughly 10 miles northeast of Beirut. "Lebanese are the happiest depressed people in the world."

A sincere grandfatherly type, Jazzar thinks in Arabic, mentally translates those thoughts into French, and speaks them in English. He possesses a sincere positivity that cannot be faked; in his mouth, potential platitudes such as "We have to be citizens of the world" become profound calls to action. He offered me plenty of familiar advice — live in service to others; surround yourself with people you love; don't let your ego run wild — but one phrase stuck



out: He spoke of having a "giddy sense of humanity." When I asked what that meant, he said that hope can lead to happiness, but one can practice being happy in a much more tangible way: through laughter. "I go on Facebook and listen to jokes," he says. "I like to watch Steve Harvey to find out how Americans laugh."

Steve Harvey? The key to happiness is Steve Harvey?

I dug up an old YouTube clip of Harvey onstage in his most ridiculous maroon suit riffing on the joys of driving a "raggedy-ass car." It wasn't really my thing, but there was something about the eager enthusiasm of stand-up comedy that felt comforting. Every morning, during the 20 minutes I used to meditate, I decided to watch a comedy set instead. Each time, it established a clear mood for my day. With John Mulaney and Sarah Silverman, I began to appreciate the humor in the most trivial situations of my life; watching Dave Chappelle helped me cut through the autopilot formality in my interactions with people — and I began to approach people with an openness that surprised even me.

Michel Jazzar spoke of having a "giddy sense of humanity." Hope can lead to happiness, he said, but one can practice being happy in a much more tangible way: through laughter.

DIY

Next, I connected with Ambalavanan Muruganathan, the CEO of a manufacturing company in Chennai, India, and a member of the Rotary Club of Madras Mid-Town. Judging the overall happiness of a country with a population of 1.45 billion seems particularly difficult, but India raised eyebrows by landing at 118. This was nine spots below its neighbor and political sparring partner, Pakistan, prompting an outraged *Times of India* to sourly complain, “India just sent a spacecraft to the Moon.” As if that mattered. Muruganathan didn’t wade into his country’s low ranking other than to say, “We’ve got a long way to go in stillness of mind.”

A yogi and fitness nut, Muruganathan, 58, repeatedly stressed the importance of working out and mindfulness, having “360 vision” and being fully aware of your surroundings. You can reach this state, he claims, not from seeking happiness but rather stability. And the best way to cultivate stability is through self-confidence, which must be instilled in children at a young age. “Schools need to identify the specialty in each child and help them achieve it,” he says. “Children have not been allowed to understand their greatness.” Only when people learn to understand themselves, Muruganathan says, will they embrace humanity — and their own potential.

I wasn’t able to fix the flaws in America’s educational system before this story was due, so I asked Avi, my self-assured 13-year-old, if Muruganathan’s statement rang true. “It’s not other people’s job to make me feel good,” she replied. “I have to do it myself.”

Avi explained that her confidence didn’t originate in school, but rather from horseback rid-



ing. I had been to a few of the kid’s lessons over the years and found them difficult to watch. Her tough instructor always seemed to be barking at her to keep her shoulders back. At 13, I would have fallen apart under the constant criticism; Avi sees it as the quickest way to improve at something that matters deeply to her. During the past school year, when a gym teacher chastised her for her gymnastic ineptitude, Avi simply shrugged. “I can control a 1,000-pound horse,” she said later. “Who cares if I know how to jump rope?”



Paint with a cosmic palette

“We tend to wait for happiness to show up,” says Sapna Jaggeshar Mudhoo. “It is there already if you learn to know what signals your body and brain are giving you.”

A psychologist and, fittingly, a charter member of the Rotary Club of Helvetia Happiness, her sunny disposition mirrors her surroundings in Mauritius (ranked 78th), a tropical African island nation in the Indian Ocean known for stunning beaches, coral reefs, and, somehow, an underwater waterfall. But climate change and the economic impacts of the pandemic hit the island hard, and Jaggeshar Mudhoo says that

Mauritians are busy “working for peace around us, and not within us.” In her practice, by teaching their brains to expect joy again — even in small moments — Jaggeshar Mudhoo instills in patients a feeling that their lives matter.

This I knew something about. As a therapist in private practice, I spend my days working with clients dealing with drugs, sexual abuse, health issues, and complex trauma. My preferred approach of psychotherapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, is built on the idea that our general notions of happiness are flawed. We’ve been conditioned to believe that happiness is our natural state, and if we’re not happy, something is wrong with us. What’s actually normal is an ever-changing flow of emotions, pleasant, painful, and boring. If we can learn to acknowledge our own thoughts — even uncomfortable

ones — without judgment, then we can open ourselves up to a life with a broader range of emotions: peace, conflict, contentment, sadness. Think of it like painting with every color in the palette after trying the same shade of yellow over and over.

Per Jaggeshar Mudhoo’s advice, I spent a week keeping a “happiness journal,” noting moments of emotion in my life and their corresponding sensations. One came while my wife and I watched Avi compete in a horseback riding competition on a farm on a punishingly hot day. The mosquitos had a surprising bloodlust, and I had chosen the wrong shirt for the occasion. As the afternoon progressed, I could feel an itchy rash spreading across my back.

Our child got last place. But as I chatted with my wife and listened to the cicadas humming the end of summer, I felt a light feeling in my stomach and a gentle tingling in my neck. And when those sensations faded, I was left with a startling clarity that my brain, my body, and my surroundings had locked into place, like some kind of cosmic Tetris. I didn’t need air conditioning or a cold drink when I had a warm reassurance in my gut that the moment made sense, and I would remember it. That’s when I suspected Jaggeshar Mudhoo was onto something.

SAPNA JAGGESHAR MUDHOO



Rotary Club of Helvetia Happiness, Mauritius



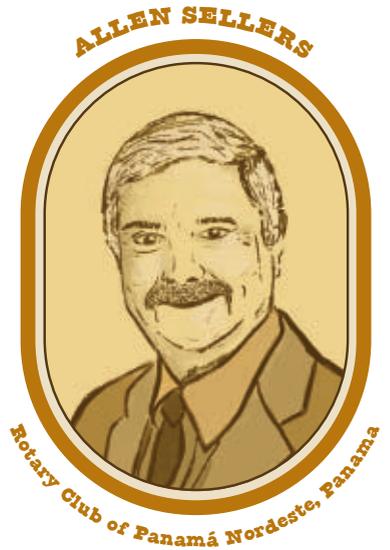


Small victories

Allen Sellers, a member of the Rotary Club of Panamá Nordeste in Panama City for 44 years, says that Panamanians tend to think of happiness in a more goal-oriented framework. “Many times I’ve heard that Panamanians are some of the happiest people in the world,” he says. (The country’s happiness ranking is No. 41 overall.) “I think that this possibly is due to the fact that we enjoy specific, immediate objectives.”

This resonated with me. For years, I believed “to-do” lists were a big waste of time (Don’t write about doing it! Just do it!), but lately, I have found the act of crossing off tasks immensely satisfying. It’s proof of progress, a chance to allow myself to celebrate small victories.

Sellers, a soft-spoken 76-year-old with a military and corporate background, says this is a sign of something larger: a general sense of inner peace. “Happiness,” he says, “comes from many small, seemingly insignificant things that, when added together, become uppercase ‘HAPPINESS.’ And that is a feeling of satisfaction and well-being with the status of things and how we fit into them.” In other words, pay attention to the usual factors, such as health, and economic conditions, but don’t overlook the emotional aspects: rela-



tions with your family, friends, and, most importantly, with yourself.

I channeled Sellers by “checking in” on myself at odd times: What am I feeling? Why am I feeling it? Am I being as kind to myself as I am to the people I love? One day, I sat down and listed 50 things I am proud of, an exercise that went from self-indulgent to uplifting to, ultimately, profound. Not a bad way to spend an hour. In the days since, I have routinely pulled out that list and added to it. Every time, it feels good.

“Many times I’ve heard that Panamanians are some of the happiest people in the world,” says Allen Sellers. “I think that this possibly is due to the fact that we enjoy specific, immediate objectives.”

A Finnish formula for felicity

Which leads me to the world epicenter of happiness for the past eight years: Finland. When I connected with Katja Koskimies, who lives in the coastal city of Oulu near the Arctic Circle, she appeared to be lazing in some kind of a hammock in an idyllic garden. With her flaming red hair and nonstop enthusiasm, she obviously stands out in her home country, which tends to be more guarded about showing emotions. “I like to talk about feelings,” she says. “If you can recognize your own feelings, it’s easy to understand other people’s.”

In Finland, says Koskimies, a 53-year-old business coach, contentment is often quiet and grounded in everyday moments; that might include walking in the forest or calmly enjoying a cup of coffee in silence. Generally, that contentment is connected to one of three things: simplicity, nature, or personal space.

Finns, of course, have some built-in advantages: The country is roomy, roughly the size of Germany but with one-fifteenth of the population, and even the seeming disadvantages, such as the brutally cold winters, don’t seem to bother anyone. A member of the Rotary Club of Oulu City, Koskimies relayed tales of babies

“I like to talk about feelings,” says Katja Koskimies. “If you can recognize your own feelings, it’s easy to understand other people’s.”



routinely learning to sleep outside in temperatures well below freezing. “Weather makes no difference to us,” she says. “Sunny, rainy, snowy, it’s fine.” In the summer, Koskimies motorcycles and soaks in the lakeside sauna; in winter, it’s all snowmobiling, hockey, and ice fishing — as long as she can be close to nature and take it all in, a philosophy that echoed Ambalavanan Muruganathan’s “360 vision.”

I can’t skate and I promised my mother I’d never get on a motorcycle, but the day after talking to Koskimies, I was walking my dog and listening to a podcast when my phone died. My irritation at the sudden silence quickly gave way to boredom. As I looked around for any stimulation to save me, boredom led to curiosity. What does that Tudor mansion look like inside? Soon, I was lost in wonder at my surroundings. My neighborhood was beautiful, the sky huge and extraordinary, and my reliably uncomplicated dog was the perfect companion to experience it with. All this, just two blocks from my door.

Small steps, big effects

So what did I learn from all this? In the end, the small advice ended up making the biggest difference — any lesson I could practice daily to create enough moments of grace and mindfulness that happiness began to seep in without my realizing it. Particularly helpful was a “happiness calendar” Michel Jazzar shared featuring a different prompt for each day, none of them terribly complicated (“Take a step towards an important goal, however small”) but crucial reminders in the daily rush of my life. In the month I followed Jazzar’s calendar, I reconnected with an old friend, let go of a long-held grudge, and finished writing a novel I have been tinkering with for years. After 30 days, I saw a world filled with possibilities.

During that month, one other thing happened. I also dropped off my son for his freshman year at college. He had worked hard to get to that day, showing a steadfast dedication to schoolwork and personal growth that, in all honesty, I didn’t see coming. Predictably, there were a lot of big feelings. After saying goodbye to him in his dorm room, the skies cracked open, rain poured down, and I bawled my head off in the car. It was terrible and wonderful and probably more authentic than any moment I had ever experienced in my 53 years. It was not happiness, nor was it sadness. It was life. ■



WHAT MAKES



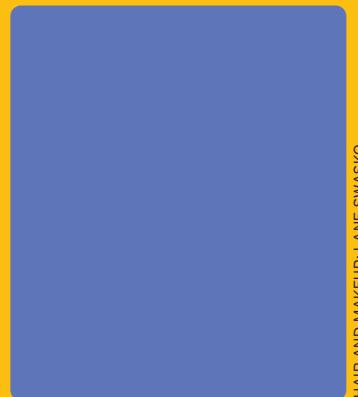
Nearly a century of science suggests one action outweighs all others.



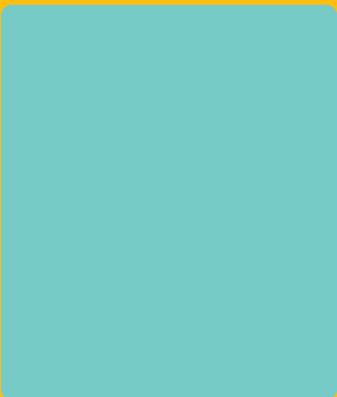
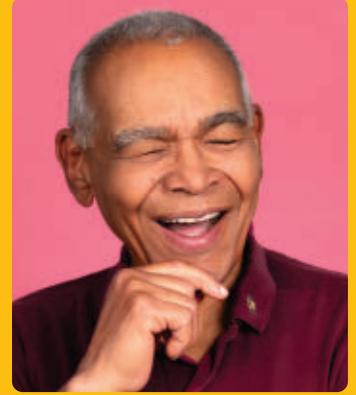
Rotary members have a head start.



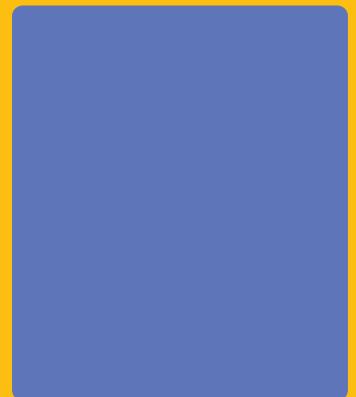
BY ERIN GARTNER



US HAPPY



PHOTOGRAPHY BY
**SARAH
ELIZABETH
LARSON**





ne of Rotary's single most ambitious projects, to confront malaria in Zambia, has roots in a friendship.

When Rotarian Bill Feldt discusses the initiative, which grew to receive The Rotary Foundation's first \$2 million Programs of Scale award in 2021, he doesn't mention dollars secured or accolades collected. He focuses on the doctor in Zambia who became his friend: Mwangala Muyendekwa.

"I stayed with Dr. Muyendekwa four times in his house in Zambia," says Feldt, a member of the Rotary Club of Federal Way near Seattle who was among those pushing hardest for the initiative that brought malaria care and prevention directly to a targeted group of Zambian communities for the first time. "And he stayed with me and my wife here in Washington. We email, sometimes talk on the phone. It's very personal, this work. We have some very, very close relationships stateside and in Africa."

He pauses, then adds: "This makes us happy, helps me feel fulfilled. Maybe that's it: Find something that's meaningful, and that's what gives you longevity."

Feldt is onto something. A vast and expanding body of research is illuminating clearer pathways to happiness, ones that differ substantially from many people's expectations. The overarching lessons from decades of science on happiness won't surprise Rotary members: No matter your culture, strong social relationships make us happier and healthier.

"What makes people happy, in the long term, is the feeling that their lives are meaningful and that they have a richly connected life," says Steven Heine, a professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver who studies cultures around the world, including how people search for meaning in their lives. "And we find that people, that their community relationships,

such as through Rotary clubs and similar organizations, are especially important in helping make their lives meaningful."

One pioneering contribution to this global field of research is what has become the longest-running study on happiness — still going at Harvard University after about 85 years. It taught us that the top predictor of long-term well-being isn't our wealth, our jobs, or even our genetics — it's the quality of our relationships. "People worry about their health, their diet, exercise. That's important, but being more socially active is one of the most important things you can do to improve your health," says Heine, who teaches social and cultural psychology at his Canadian university.

The advice seems to come at us from all directions: self-help books and podcasts, online health influencers, ads promoting supplements or specific diets, and wellness retreats

SCIENCE SAYS ...

If you're the type of person who believes people will act with kindness, that's a top predictor of happiness.

A gallery of smiles

Members showed their happy faces for portraits taken when they visited One Rotary Center

TOP ROW of grid, from left:

Daniel Tanase, Rotary Club of Suceava Bucovina, Romania; **Johrita Solari**, Rotary Club of Anaheim, California; **Hauwa Abbas**, Rotary Club of Abuja Metro, Nigeria; **Elizabeth A. Usovicz**, Rotary Club of Kansas City-Plaza, Missouri; **Jose A. Lopez**, Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse, Illinois

SECOND ROW:

Sarah Kim, Rotary Club of Changnyeong Misoya, Korea; **Manoj Desai**, Rotary Club of Baroda Metro, India; **Christine Buering**, Rotary Club of Altenburg, Germany; **Peter R. Kyle**, Rotary Club of Annapolis, Maryland

THIRD ROW:

Bryant Wallace, Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse; **Alberto Domenighini**, Rotary E-Club of 2050, Italy; **Ekram Hanna**, Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse; **Kluyvert Anyang**, Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse

BOTTOM ROW:

Mary Beth Growney Selene, Rotary Club of Madison West Middleton, Wisconsin; **Katerina Kotsali-Papadimitriou**, Rotary Club of Pendeli, Greece; **Gordon McNally**, Rotary Club of South Queensferry, Scotland; **Marcelo Haick**, Rotary Club of Santos-Praia, Brazil



HAUWA ABBAS
Rotary Club of Abuja Metro, Nigeria

on secluded beaches. The wellness industry juggernaut, worth an estimated \$6 trillion or more worldwide (depending on what you measure), pumps out so many bold promises it can be difficult to know what to pay attention to when the question inevitably floats into our minds: What will make me feel happier?

The science — which is still revealing insights — suggests you should look past the noisy hype and focus on lifelong connections. You can even get a prescription for it. Doctors and counselors are increasingly turning to what's known as "social prescribing," formally prescribing that their patients engage in social activities, such as going on a group hike or volunteering or joining a club.

Happiness, however we define it individually, is relative, of course, when people face trauma or overwhelming challenges like discrimination, poor health, homelessness, or poverty. Researchers wouldn't make a one-to-one causal connection that having good friendships means you're a happier person because many factors contribute. And much of the research on happiness examines how we feel over the long term, because of course sadness will find us at times.

Rotary members may have another thing going for their happiness, according to a parallel field of research into how benevolent acts — volunteering, donating, caregiving — seem to make us happier. But not all good deeds are equal in growing our well-being, says the 2025 World Happiness Report.

It turns out that benevolent actions benefit you most when they're done in "caring communities" that keep you more socially connected. Best known for its annual rankings of the happiest countries, the University of Oxford report also syn-

thesizes the body of research on happiness. This year, one focus was "how to amplify the joy of giving." The effects are stronger when you have choices for how to help and can understand clearly how your actions had an impact.

A top example of how Rotary members have built on their connectedness is their wave of actions big and small to support mental well-being for their RI friends and for people in their communities and beyond, particularly in reaction to what's recently been coined a loneliness epidemic. The potential happiness benefits of our relationships are another reason to embrace the goal of Rotary founder Paul Harris, who was driven to start the organization because he was missing his old happy friendships after moving to Chicago.

If you ask 10 Rotary members about their friendships in RI, you can expect to hear 10 stories about enduring, meaningful connections that make them feel content, valued — and yes, happy. To help deepen those friendships, many Rotary clubs layer humor, joy, and even silliness on top of service. One example: The Rotary Club of Melawati in Malaysia starts its meetings with "laugh therapy," when everyone forces themselves to guffaw or chuckle until they can't help it and

the laughing becomes genuine. That sets the tone for the meeting and sparks hugs between friends, club member Mahendran Daniel says. "You must keep the fun in the fundamentals of Rotary."

There's also the "Order of the Zucchini," created this year in Canada by the governor of District 5360, Manon Mitchell. As she visited clubs and presented members with honors, including Paul Harris Fellow recognition, she offered some people squashes, which helped her give away her garden's overproduction and made for an amusing photo of members holding large, bulbous gourds.

"It got a good chuckle," Mitchell says. "I find that in some clubs, things can be so serious at times, and I wanted to make people smile and feel great. There are so many ways of doing that." (She considered extending the gag to the Order of the Tomatoes but made sauce instead.)

These small moments of shared joy and connection are important, researchers say, in part because they help us relax and act as a balm from the harmful effects of stress. But researchers say long-term happiness, the kind that has lasting health effects, often takes a bit more work. After all, quality relationships can be hard to maintain, whether in Rotary, at work, or in our personal lives.

When the epic Harvard Study of Adult Development started uncovering in the 1980s the link between a person's well-being and the quality of their relationships, researchers didn't believe the data at first. "But then other studies began to find the same thing," Dr. Robert Waldinger, study director, said in a TED Talk interview in 2022. "We found that people had less depression, they were less likely to get diabetes and heart disease, that they

Starting a conversation with a stranger on a commuter train, a city bus, or in a waiting room made people feel happier compared with those who stayed quiet.

"Community relationships, such as through Rotary clubs and similar organizations, are especially important in helping make lives meaningful."



JOHRITA SOLARI
Rotary Club of Anaheim, California

recovered faster from illness when they had better connections with other people.”

One study Heine worked on at the University of British Columbia is an example of the expanding research about people from varied cultures, ethnicities, and geographies. About 1,000 people across India, Japan, Poland, and the U.S. shared the ways they find purpose in their lives for the research published in 2025 that investigated how their varied pursuits affect their well-being. “We found the same predictors across each country: connection to family, close relationships, feeling what you do really matters, feeling a sense of purpose,” Heine says. “Usually, we’re struck by the differences among cultures — what they value, what they’re motivated by. But here, when it came to meaning in life, the similarity was striking.”

The Harvard study started in 1938 and initially recruited 268 undergraduates, including future President John F. Kennedy. Researchers regularly interviewed the men and their families and collected data about their mental and physical health. (At the time, Harvard didn’t enroll women as undergraduates, so all original participants were men.)

Around the same time, Harvard researchers separately began interviewing a group of 456 boys from disadvantaged families in nearby Boston. The two cohorts were

The benefits for individuals and society from volunteering, donating money to others, and helping strangers are well documented.

brought together in the 1970s, as researchers began taking a deeper look into longevity. This combined study aimed to examine what happened over the course of people’s lives — how their opinions changed, their health shifted, and what ultimately led to a healthy, happy life. Today the study focuses on the original participants’ children, and women make up more than half of the 1,300 participants.

If Waldinger’s name or the Harvard study sounds familiar, maybe you’ve seen the now famous earlier TEDx Talk in 2015, when he first presented the findings to a small audience. The video has more than 50 million views across multiple websites and is one of the most-watched TED Talks of all time, likely because his advice still resonates: If you want to make one choice today that will make you healthier and happier, pay attention to improving your connections to other people.

The link between the quality of our lives and our social connections keeps turning up as the science of happiness and longevity continues to grow. The same goes for the connection between giving, gratitude, and our well-being.

The benefits for individuals and society from volunteering, donating money to others, and helping strangers — what researchers call prosocial behavior — are well documented, the World Happiness Report notes. Increases in such altruism are connected to decreases in deaths from suicide, overdose, or alcohol misuse. “People who engage in prosocial behaviour are healthier and happier, and they experience a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life as well as improved psychological flourishing,” says the report, citing studies spanning two decades and covering data from over 100 countries.

The good feelings from altruism go both ways. “Gratitude is one of the first big ideas from this space of positive psychology,” says Emiliana Simon-Thomas, science director of the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley.

She gives the example of how you feel grateful when a friend brings you a gift, like flowers, when you’re going through a difficult time. “Gratitude is a shared emotional experience,” she says, “when you have a moment where you recognize that something good has occurred in

Key determinants of happiness: nurturing relationships, caring for others, health, and work-life balance, says a review of studies from 100 countries.

Happier together

3 key lessons (so far) from the Harvard Study of Adult Development:

1 Social connections promote health. People are happier and live longer when they are more socially connected to family, friends, and community.

2 Quality over quantity. It’s not the number or types of relationships you have; it’s the quality of your relationships.

3 Good relationships don’t just protect our mental health. They protect our physical health, in part by helping buffer stress.



BRYANT WALLACE

Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse, Illinois

your life, and it's due to someone or something outside of yourself.”

And don't turn down opportunities for volunteering, she says, because it offers a way to socialize with people who have common interests or a similar sense of purpose. A bonus: Volunteering often includes physical activity, especially beneficial as we age, she notes.

Simon-Thomas co-created the Greater Good Science Center's popular online Science of Happiness course, which anyone can take for free. Beyond the eight-week course, the center publishes an online magazine that serves as a public repository for articles, videos, quizzes, and ideas to improve our mental health, distilled from the wide pool of research. Suggestions include simple “microacts” of joy such as listing things you're grateful for or asking someone to share something that made them happy. “We wanted to provide regular people access to the actionable insights from all the research,” she says.

The power of our relationships even shows up in our brains. Scientists can clearly map the neurological pathways of emotions like happiness and loneliness in detailed brain scans using advanced imaging tools, says neuroscientist Kay Tye, who leads a laboratory at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. “You would absolutely see different patterns of activity,” she says. “If someone is self-reporting joy or self-reporting pain or self-reporting fear, all of these things are represented differently.”

Tye investigates neural circuits in the brain to better understand our emotions — and, she hopes, find better ways to treat mental health disorders like anxiety and

depression. (The independent research nonprofit she works for was founded by Jonas Salk, well-known among Rotarians for developing the first successful polio vaccine.)

“Aligning with other people through emotional connections is healthy for your brain. It helps build positive, altruistic social connections,” she says. “So focus on quality connection, which doesn't need to be a lot of time. It doesn't need to be a lot of people. Play games, hold hands on a walk. Anything that's a positive interaction.”

Our relationships can even affect the tiny tips of our chromosomes, which carry our genes. Our interactions and daily choices, like how we respond to stress or experience companionship, affect the chromosomes' protective ends, called telomeres, according to research by 2009 Nobel laureate Elizabeth Blackburn and other scientists. Longer telomeres are healthier and help slow the aging of cells.

Supportive relationships, when you feel loved and a sense of belonging, seem to buffer the effects of stress and keep telomeres healthier, according to data detailed in *The Telomere Effect*, a book that Blackburn co-wrote with fellow scientist Elissa Epel.

**Healthy social ties:
“Focus on quality connection, which doesn't need to be a lot of time. It doesn't need to be a lot of people. Play games, hold hands on a walk.”**

Austin, Texas-based psychotherapist Betty Richardson, who spent decades of her career as a nurse and a hospital administrator, says she has repeatedly seen the positive effects of warm relationships, especially when people are going through their worst moments. “Having support of a loved one or loved ones is very important when a person is ill or facing possible death,” she says. “Loved ones certainly present a strong case for working hard to get better.”

Richardson, a member of the Rotary Club of the Austin University Area, experienced the importance of these connections when her son, Mark, was treated for cancer, before he died eight years ago. One thing that brought him joy during those treatments was watching funny TV shows with friends or family. “He also perked up when getting mail,” she says. “He would say, ‘People do care about me.’”

Her friends in Rotary, in Texas and in Mexico, where she has long worked with Rotary clubs, showed up for her. Her club helped her establish a memorial fund in her son's name, which has supported scholarships as well as the purchase of computers for a school in the border town of Reynosa, Mexico.

Richardson has also celebrated many a birthday in Reynosa because hers falls on World Tuberculosis Day, and she has long focused on fighting the disease in that region. “Just being with people who are interested in some of the same things, it provides a sense of accomplishment. Some of these projects aren't easy. Many require a fair amount of cooperation,” she says. “But without it — Rotary and volunteering — life possibly would have been quite boring.” ■

Young adults increasingly report lower happiness in recent years, but educating them about how people are more empathetic than they think may help build social networks.



SARAH KIM

Rotary Club of Changnyeong Misoya, Korea

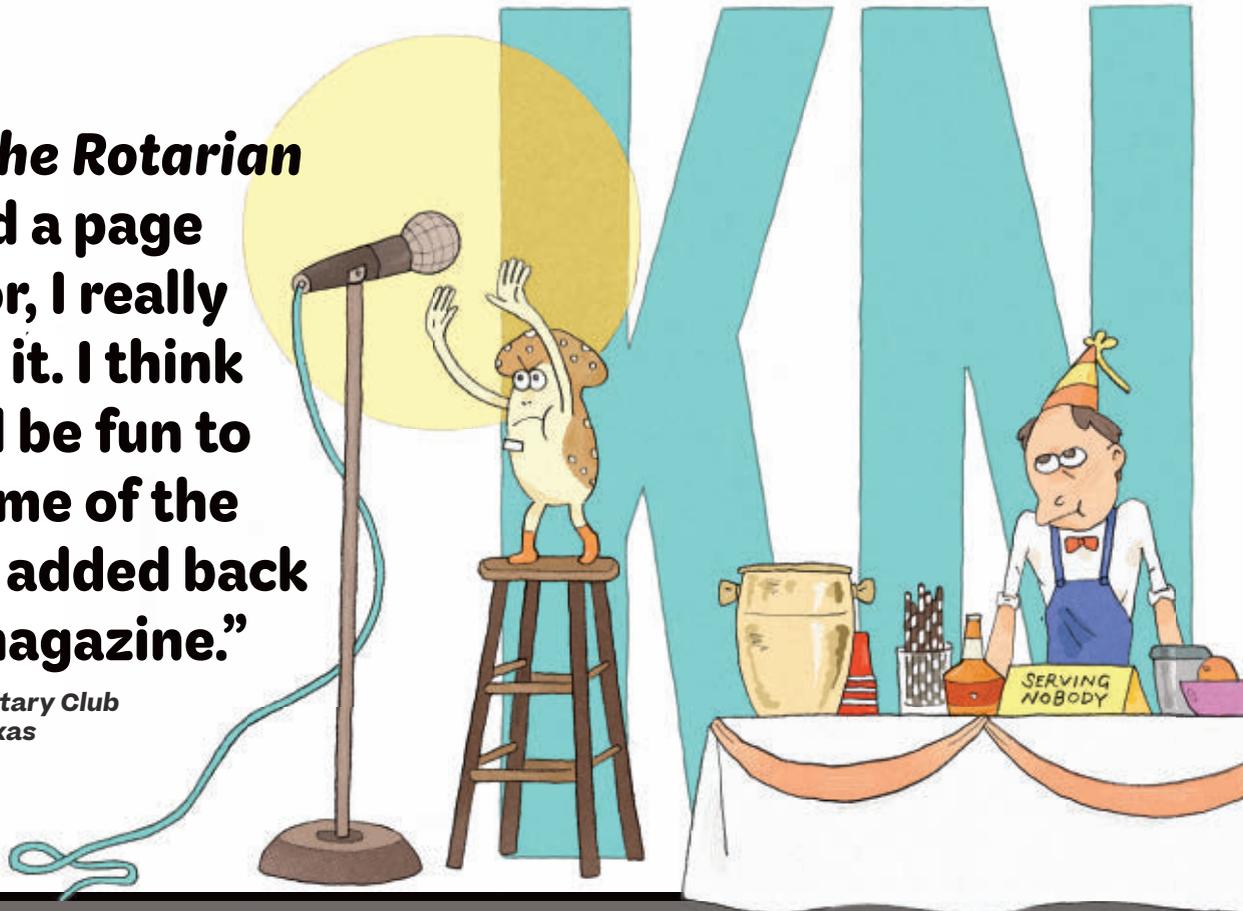


Why did Fred fall off his bike?
Because Fred is a fish.

*Susan Marstaeller,
Rotary Club of Bundaberg, Australia*

“When *The Rotarian* included a page of humor, I really enjoyed it. I think it would be fun to have some of the classics added back to the magazine.”

*Jim Hugman, Rotary Club
of Longview, Texas*



From 1940 to 2006, the magazine published a monthly collection of jokes, single-panel cartoons, and humorous anecdotes called Stripped Gears. Here are three classics.



How many Rotarians does it take to change a light bulb?

Just one – but it takes four meetings, a committee report, and a service project to illuminate the process.

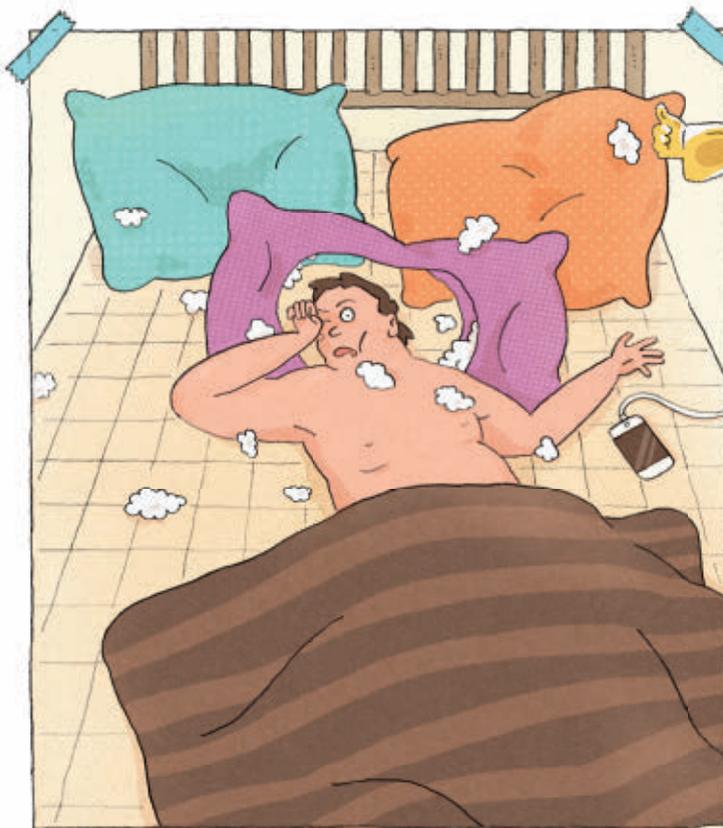
(And don't forget The Four-Way Test to make sure it's the right light bulb.)

*Michael Schatzman,
Rotary Club of Cincinnati*

A mushroom goes into a bar. The bartender says, "We don't serve your kind here." The shroom says, "Why not? I'm a fungi."
Dale Smith, Rotary Club of Mentor, Ohio

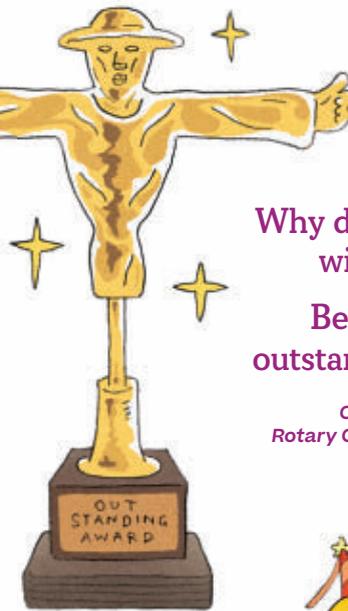
Illustrations by TIANYI YOU

Tenant: "The people upstairs are very annoying. Last night they stamped and banged on the floor until after midnight."
Landlord: "Did they wake you?"
Tenant: "No, I was still up practicing my tuba."



I dreamed I was eating a giant marshmallow, then I woke up and my pillow was gone.

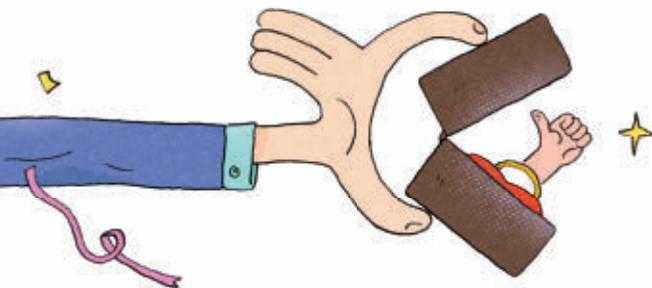
Stephanie Talley, Rotary Club of McKinney, Texas



Why did the scarecrow win an award?

Because he was outstanding in his field.

Cindy Sigamoney, Rotary Club of Hangzhou, China



What's a Rotarian's favorite type of tea?

Communi-tea.

Rotary Club of Eisenhower, Philippines

Why did the social media manager break up with her boyfriend?
Lack of engagement.

Ted Faigle, Rotary Club of Poipu Beach, Hawaii



It's hard to know where one generation ends and the next begins, but it's usually somewhere around 9 o'clock at night.

I used to be addicted to the hokey pokey,
but I turned myself around.

Todd Hallock,
Rotary Club of Cache Valley Morning-Logan, Utah

Why did the Rotarian bring
a ladder to the meeting?

Because they heard the
club was taking service to
the next level.

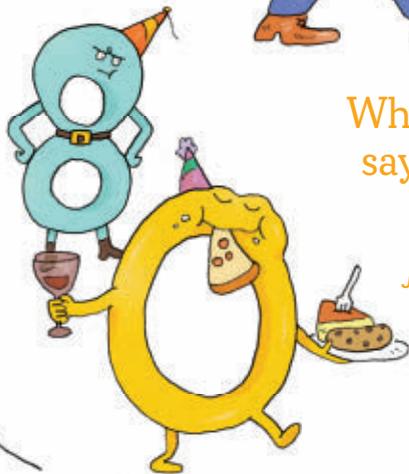
Jenny Foo, Rotary Club of
Kota Bharu, Malaysia



What did the zero
say to the eight?

Nice belt!

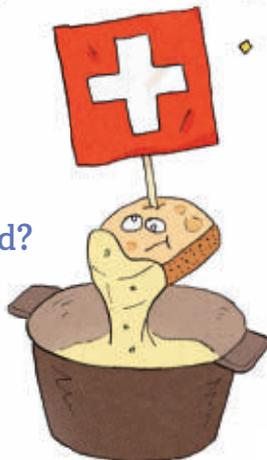
Jorge Maluf, Rotary Club
of Avaré, Brazil



What's the best thing
about living in Switzerland?

I don't know, but the
flag is a big plus.

Angela Ridpath, Rotary Club
of Plymouth, Michigan



Why was the cat sitting on the computer?
Because it wanted to keep an eye on the mouse.

Geetanjali Dhar, Rotary Club of E-Connect, India



OUR CLUBS

VIRTUAL VISIT

What's in a name

Rotary Club of Formosa Happiness, New Taipei City, Taiwan

When Roger Chin-Wei Tung was tasked in 2014 with starting a new Rotary club to attract younger members, he chose an aspirational goal for the club — and the name to go with it. “Three new clubs were being chartered in our district,” says Tung, who was a member of the Rotary Club of Lin Kou at the time. “One chose the name ‘Elite’ and another ‘Excellent.’ I chose ‘Happiness.’ I wanted our club to create happiness, a place to form lifelong friendships and build a spiritual connection through community service.”

Tung had seen the impact that Rotary membership could have on well-being after he began attending meetings of the Lin Kou club in New Taipei City in 2009. He initially went out of a sense of obligation to the Rotary families that supported a language immersion program he ran. “Then I realized I had found a family of like-minded people, and I quickly got hooked,” he recalls.

“Along life’s journey, if you meet friends who share your interests and values, your sense of happiness grows.”

He drew inspiration for the Rotary Club of Formosa Happiness (“formosa,” meaning “beautiful” in Portuguese, is the name explorers gave Taiwan in the 16th century) from Taiwan’s growing corporate movement to promote a culture of well-being. In 2013, encouraged by the government, about 1,600 Taiwanese companies signed a declaration to improve workplace happiness and address public dissatisfaction with working conditions.

“While productivity and competitiveness matter, many companies realized that happy employees perform better,” says Tung, the club’s charter president. “At Rotary, we came to the same conclusion — happy members create stronger clubs. Since our success will be measured by member happiness, we coined a term for it: ‘happi-tivity.’”

The club’s guiding slogan captures that spirit: Create a happy city, build international connections through service, inspire the younger generation, and ignite passion in Rotary.

That philosophy continues to shape the group under Club President Ryan Yu-Tsung Chiang, a second-generation Rotarian who works in the long-term care industry. Since taking office in July, Chiang has emphasized a family-centered approach to social activities and service.

Most of the club’s 56 members are working professionals with families and children, so the members design social events and service projects with a strong family focus. “Members and their families are encouraged to participate together,” he explains. “When spouses meet and collaborate on

DESIGN YOUR CLUB

The Rotary Club of Formosa Happiness found success in its family-centric approach. If you’re thinking about starting a new club, look for ways to create an experience that offers options to prospective members.

You can start by looking at the types of clubs in the district, the club experiences that aren’t being offered, and which target audiences aren’t represented in the district’s membership. Or, design your ideal club — for example, one that meets less frequently, is more affordable, does service often, has fun, offers growth. Then find others with similar interests.

In general, look for:

- Communities with recognized needs
- Groups of people and professions that haven’t been recruited yet
- Rotary alumni (former Rotaract and RYLA participants, vocational training team members, Rotary Scholars, etc.)
- Young adults, women, and people from ethnic minority groups or other underrepresented groups

For more about how to start a club, connect with prospective members, and make new members feel welcome, visit rotary.org/membership.



Ryan Yu-Tsung Chiang (in red shirt), president of the Rotary Club of Formosa Happiness, enjoys a walk in a park with members of the club. Roger Chin-Wei Tung (back, center), the charter president, envisioned the club as a place where members could find happiness through friendships built around service.

projects, their shared interests strengthen bonds, and happiness multiplies.”

For example, during the summer when children are off school, the club organizes baseball outings or two-day trips to Sun Moon Lake — activities that attract members and their families. In the fall, one of the club’s signature programs, Children of Happiness, provides after-school tutoring and companionship for students from underprivileged families.

Each year, the club allocates roughly 30 percent of its budget to social events and 40 percent to community service. And Chiang has combined the categories, integrating fun and service to strengthen participation and camaraderie.

This family-centered approach has doubled or even tripled participation. “We now get over 100 participants per event,” Chiang notes. “When families are willing to participate, they create an incentive for the members to engage in club projects.”

Rotary members are building meaningful connections, but so are their families. “Our children make new friends, and that

creates a larger network,” Chiang says. “Sometimes, when a member can’t attend an event, their spouse comes instead.”

The club’s after-school tutoring program, for example, is primarily run by members’ spouses and children. Chiang’s wife chairs the program, and his children volunteer as tutors. “At a time when our society faces a loneliness epidemic,” Chiang says, “we’re creating happiness and connection, not just for members, but for their families. It’s multilayered.”

The club has also sponsored Taiwan’s Special Olympics basketball team for several years, covering travel expenses for international competitions, purchasing uniforms and supplies, and hosting games with members of the community. “Through sports, these young athletes gain confidence and purpose in life,” Chiang says. “When they return home with medals, we celebrate them as heroes. It’s deeply rewarding to see their happy faces.”

Chiang also uses family-oriented activities to attract new members, espe-

cially young couples who often struggle to balance family and civic commitments. “We’re the perfect club,” he says. “We make it easy for them to volunteer without sacrificing family time.”

For example, on 8 August — Father’s Day in Taiwan — the club hosted a family cupcake-making event that drew dozens of new faces, thanks in part to a local social media influencer. “We followed up personally with parents who expressed interest in Rotary,” Chiang says. “If someone shows initiative, we welcome them immediately.”

That approach is paying off: Chiang has already met his goal of 10 percent membership growth this year. And the Formosa Happiness club is preparing to sponsor another club — Formosa Harmony — dedicated to the same ideals of service, community, and joy.

“Service enhances happiness,” Chiang says. “Giving back while you’re still able brings spiritual fulfillment. When you involve your family, that fulfillment deepens.”

— WEN HUANG

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

In pursuit of happiness

All along her journey of self-empowerment,
Janelle Hall finds Rotary



If this were a movie it would be a Hollywood salute to grit and gratitude, an inspirational biopic in which a determined woman survives life in a homeless shelter and repays the service organization that rescued her. Here is Janelle Hall, mid-2008, in her worn pink shelter robe, jobless after a turn mopping floors at a laundromat, a refugee from an in-law's tiny apartment with her then-husband and four young children.

"Hours from the street" is how Hall describes the day she and her family got admitted to the shelter in Clifton, New Jersey. This was shortly after a Rotary district governor had called on Rotarians to set up a program to help families like hers battered by the Great Recession, and one volunteer, Bonnie Sirower, who was a board member at a nearby YMCA, was told about Hall.

"She was looking for a hand up, not a handout," says Sirower, who was part of a team of Rotary members from District 7490 that spent weeks with Hall and others in need as part of the district program. They provided Christmas presents for her children, a wardrobe for job interviews, a bus pass to get her to those interviews, and then leads to a service organization that offered not only a job but child care for Hall's kids, free. "It was like divine intervention," says Hall.

The daughter of immigrant parents from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, Hall had flunked out of college, overwhelmed with challenges — small children, an emotionally abusive husband, and "bad decisions." So, with this chance for a second chance, the Rotary team helped locate a possible college and paid for her application fee.

"There weren't any computers at the shelter, forget a laptop," remembers Hall. "I wrote my essay with a pencil on purple copy paper. My acceptance letter was mailed to the homeless shelter and I still have it today."

Three years later she graduated from William Paterson University. Soon after getting a job, a coworker said, "C'mon, Janelle, why don't we get ourselves a master's degree!"

JANELLE HALL

- **PhD in public policy and administration**, Walden University, 2020
- **Adjunct faculty**, Seton Hall University, 2023-present
- **CEO**, United Passaic Organization, 2021-present

From homelessness to family turmoil, Janelle Hall faced many challenges. Now she's focused on helping others.



In Hall's biopic the pages begin flying off the calendar: a master's degree in public administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University in 2013; a doctorate in public policy and administration in 2020 from Walden University, where another coworker urged they both enroll for a PhD. "Guess who got her degree first?" Hall says with a grin.

Hall is now an adjunct faculty member at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. She has been honored by local and state officials for her contributions to her community. She has written a motivational book titled *The Daughter of Destiny*, which maps her history and offers "8 steps [that] can lead you to personal empowerment."

In her own climactic, destined moment of self-empowerment, Hall became the executive director of the United Passaic Organization, a broad-based service group for the city that helps families in need — and the very organization that once helped pay her rent years ago when she was struggling. Her story, not surprisingly, has compelled attention, especially among Rotary members. Early in 2024, for example, there she was addressing 300 people at a Rotary presidents-elect learning seminar in Whippany, New Jersey.

"Let me introduce myself," she told the audience, whereupon she removed the pink bathrobe she'd pulled on earlier, the very robe she had worn in the homeless shelter, to reveal a striking blue dress and her

proud empowerment. "I am a homeowner and college professor. I sit on the Board of Governors at Fairleigh Dickinson. I have my own business called Beyond Inspired. I am the CEO of the very organization that I once received services from."

With each accomplishment the room erupted in cheers, almost drowning out her conclusion: "And all the accomplishments I shared with you are thanks to the magic of Rotary."

"It took her almost an hour to leave the ballroom after her speech," Sirower reports. "Everybody kept wanting to talk to her. And she made a promise to me at that time that she would start her own Passaic Rotary club to replace the one our district had lost during COVID."

Within months, Hall had recruited 25 members and soon after, in February 2025, the Rotary Club of Passaic was officially chartered with Hall now serving as its president.

The club has already hosted its first retreat and is planning an international service trip to the Dominican Republic, which won't be Hall's first trip out of the country. In 2024 she was part of an organized trip to Ghana that she describes as a "quest for spiritual growth" and part of efforts "to reunite ... Africans and the global diaspora." The most meaningful part for her turned out to be a visit to an orphanage where Hall distributed 250 schoolbooks donated by a childhood friend and school principal, Tiffany Crockett,

who is also a charter member of Hall's Rotary club.

"You surround yourself with change agents. You want to challenge one another," Crockett says in describing her longtime relationship with Hall.

Hall's own journey has had no shortage of challenges. She says her husband did not physically abuse her but chipped away at her sense of self in other ways: verbal abuse, denial of control, restriction of access to friends, and a growing isolation. At age 21, "young [and] inexperienced," Hall married a man nearly twice her age. "My family essentially disowned me because of the choice I made," she writes in *The Daughter of Destiny*. She nevertheless kept her father company in the months before his death from leukemia in 2019 and helped her siblings take care of their mother, who had Alzheimer's, until she died in 2021.

There is much to be thankful for. Her children are grown; three of them are currently in college. Hall herself has "taken back ownership of my name." "My divorce is final!" she writes in her book. "When the judge banged his gavel, he gave me full custody of my destiny."

"Your journey in life is how you use your success to help others," Hall says. "Things may seem dim or dark for a reason. It's up to you to be a beacon so others can understand that darkness is just temporary." Roll credits. Close curtain.

— JONATHAN BLACK

DISPATCHES FROM
OUR SISTER MAGAZINES
ROTARY GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND



Rotary Children's Fun Day lives up to its name

In June, more than 25,000 children and hundreds of Rotary volunteers took part in this year's Rotary Children's Fun Day, a program of Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland. The annual event has been running for over three decades and provides a positive and valuable experience for some of the region's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

The event, enjoyed by more than 1 million children since its inception, is supported by Kids in Mind,

a children's charity that offers mental health and well-being support for children who have experienced family violence.

This year, the activities ranged from visits to aquariums, zoos, theaters, theme parks, and multi-sensory activity centers to activities brought to the children in their schools, such as animal experiences, archery sessions, films, and theater performances.

For many children in Great Britain and Ireland, experiences like these would not be possible without Rotary Children's Fun Day for a range of reasons, including affordability, transportation or accessibility issues, or other challenges.

Steve Rose, national project lead for the Rotary Children's Fun Day and member of the Rotary GB&I Board explains, "One of Rotary's leading commitments is to provide support and opportunity to young people from all backgrounds. The Rotary Children's Fun Day focuses particularly on those who might not ordinarily get that support and

opportunity but, arguably, need it the most.

"It is much more than a day of entertainment and fun; it is about opening doors for children who face challenges many of us cannot imagine and showing them that their futures are full of hope and potential," Rose says.

The Rotary Club of Skipton Craven is one of many clubs that plan their annual events in partnership with schools for students with a wide range of educational needs and disabilities. Clubs take great care to ensure visits are tailored to the needs of the students and that activities are based on sensory as well as experiential opportunities.

"This annual activity is a valued part of the school's learning year and something that is treasured by the school and, above all, the young people who participate," a Skipton Craven club member says.

Across the region, Rotary clubs have received incredibly positive feedback from parents, caregivers, and teaching staff. Some of them

To find out more about Rotary Children's Fun Day, visit rotarygbi.org/projects/young-people/childrens-fun-day.



have referred to it as a lifeline, with one teacher saying, “This special day for the children could not have happened without Rotary.”

For some participating schools, the annual event is firmly fixed in their calendars as a valuable part of the educational year.

“It’s the first time I’ve ever seen my boy integrate in play with other children,” one of the parents says. “Kids just loved the freedom to play in a big area, and it was lovely to spend a day out of school and meet other adults looking after kids with similar needs.”

This year the Rotary clubs of Teignmouth and Dawlish Water joined to support a school for students with communication and interaction difficulties, autism spectrum disorder, and other individual learning needs. They arranged an

exciting trip to Paignton Zoo for 80 students.

“Without Rotary support this trip would not be possible, and we are very grateful for the continued generosity of both Rotary clubs,” says the school’s deputy head teacher, Bryan Webster.

This effort is a positive experience for the Rotary clubs involved as well. “This national Rotary Children’s Fun Day program has enabled us to do something wonderful for the children and has brought our two Rotary clubs much closer together,” explains organizer Peter Taylor, a member of the Teignmouth club.

A collaboration of Rotary clubs from across the southeast organized a classic Children’s Fun Day, which included a mini fun fair, birds of prey exhibit, face painting, golf

games, bouncy castles, air slides, and more. All activities were designed specifically for the children.

Following the event, Hazel Soffe, executive deputy head teacher for two participating schools, thanked the Rotarians. “With many thanks to you, our schools were able to access a magical afternoon in a safe, familiar environment, with skilled, sympathetic staff, along with their families. Your amazing fundraising and generosity enabled the children to access this free of charge. We were blessed with amazing weather, which was so wonderful.”

The positive feedback came pouring in after the events had taken place, with Rotary members expressing how rewarding being involved in Rotary Children’s Fun Day had been as well as sharing what teachers, parents, and carers had expressed to them. It is evident to see how being involved in this worthwhile annual project with Kids in Mind demonstrates the true value of Rotary’s Service Above Self. — LORNA SINFIELD

“The comment of the day was one young lad, as he was getting back onto the bus, said it had been the best day of his life. That makes it all worthwhile.” — Rotary Club of Glenrothes

HANDBOOK

Patent pending

This clever machine promises a foolproof path to the contented life — we guarantee it







TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

On a grander scale

As 2020-21 Rotary president, I shared our hopes for a new initiative: Programs of Scale. The seeds we planted then are now bearing remarkable fruit.

After the success of Rotary's first Programs of Scale grant recipient, Partners for a Malaria-Free Zambia, the Gates Foundation and World Vision approached us to do more and bigger projects. They know Rotary can make great things happen. From that partnership grew the Rotary Healthy Communities Challenge, now Rotary's most significant disease prevention initiative after polio eradication.

The Healthy Communities Challenge aims to combat pneumonia, malaria, and diarrheal diseases, the leading killers of children under 5 in many parts of Africa. Despite progress, these diseases still claim 1 million young lives annually.

This strategic partnership between The Rotary Foundation, the Gates Foundation, World Vision, and PATH, a global nonprofit dedicated to health equity, is now saving lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Zambia.

Let us not forget that our partnerships are made up of people — volunteers, Rotary members, and professionals — striving to make a difference. One of them is **Gisela Bettencourt Mirção**, of the Rotary Club of Chimoio-Planalto, Mozambique, Healthy Communities Challenge national coordinator and assistant governor for District 9210, who reports:

In Mozambique, preventable diseases remain leading causes of death of children.

With support from our partners, District 9210, and the Ministry of Health, the Healthy Communities Challenge mobilizes resources, technical expertise, and volunteers to strengthen community health systems in two provinces in the country's west.

Community health workers are trained to deliver lifesaving education, prevention tools, and early treatment to families in hard-to-reach areas. The program expands access to testing, diagnosis, and treatment, ensuring children receive timely care. Rotary coordinates advocacy, procures essential supplies, and ensures local ownership alongside government health structures. In its first year, the Healthy Communities Challenge reached thousands of households across four districts, supporting more than 4,400 community health workers to protect children.

I have been involved since the planning stages, but I hadn't grasped the true impact until seeing it firsthand.

Through the Healthy Communities Challenge, Programs of Scale, and polio eradication, Rotary proves that partnerships, community engagement, and vision can transform global health and save lives.

Your support of The Rotary Foundation makes you part of this life-changing work.

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.

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CALENDAR

December events

TWINKLE, TWINKLE

Event: Holiday Light Show

Host: Eight Rotary clubs in District 6250 (parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota)

What it benefits: Local food pantries

Dates: 28 November-31 December
Since 1995, Rotary clubs in and around La Crosse, Wisconsin, have put on an extravagant display of lights that draws thousands of people to Riverside Park each holiday season. Opening night is the day after Thanksgiving and includes a parade and fireworks. Santa and his reindeer roam the park nightly through 23 December, and carriage rides, hayrides, and a live nativity are offered on select evenings. Admission is free; organizers encourage donations of cash and nonperishable food items.

HOME SWEET HOME

Event: Gingerbread House Decorating Contest

Host: Rotary Club of Hattiesburg (Sunrise), Mississippi

What it benefits: Local projects and nonprofits

Date: 4 December

One hour. Fifty teams. A whole lot of candy. These are the essential ingredients for a contest in which people of all ages race to build the best-looking gingerbread house, decorated with confections like candy canes and chocolates. The finished structures are judged by a jury of community members, who award cash prizes of \$100, \$250, and \$500.

BETTER TOGETHER

Event: Holiday Fair and Kringle Village

Host: Rotary Club of Greenville, South Carolina

What it benefits: Local projects and nonprofits

Dates: 4-7 December

In 2021 the club launched the Kringle Village, an annual European-style Christ-



ALL ABOARD!

Event: Family Day on the Polar Express

Host: District 7950 (Rhode Island and part of Massachusetts)

Date: 13 December

Rotary members and their families are invited to hop aboard the Polar Express, a 90-minute ride on a vintage train with a view of “the North Pole.” The fun-filled experience begins at the historic Blackstone Valley station in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and is produced by the local tourism council. To foster holiday spirit and camaraderie, the district has reserved an 88-seat train car, with discounted tickets sold by the Rotary Club of Woonsocket.

mas market. Last year the village merged with the Greenville Convention Center’s long-running Holiday Fair to provide people in South Carolina’s Upstate region with a single spectacular event for seasonal shopping and entertainment. Visitors can browse the wares of more than 400 vendors, enjoy live musical performances, meet Santa, and more.

CELEBRATE THE SEASON

Event: Winterfest

Host: Rotary Club of Hammonton, New Jersey

What it benefits: Local nonprofits

Dates: 5-7 December

This weekend festival offers something for everyone. Under a large heated outdoor tent, dozens of vendors sell arts, crafts, food, and drinks, while a high school jazz band and chorus make merry music. Activities for kids include balloon art and

face painting. On Saturday morning, the Galloping Grinch 5K race takes off from the fairgrounds. Attendees are encouraged to bring unwrapped toys or nonperishable food items for local families in need.

NOSH WITH ST. NICK

Event: Breakfast with Santa

Host: Rotary Club of Georgetown-Sun City, Texas

What it benefits: Local nonprofits and families in need

Date: 20 December

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the club’s holiday breakfast, which fills bellies and warms hearts as hundreds of families feast on pancakes and sausage and take photos with Santa. The proceeds, which reached almost \$30,000 last year, provide food-related assistance to children and families in the central Texas communities that the club serves.

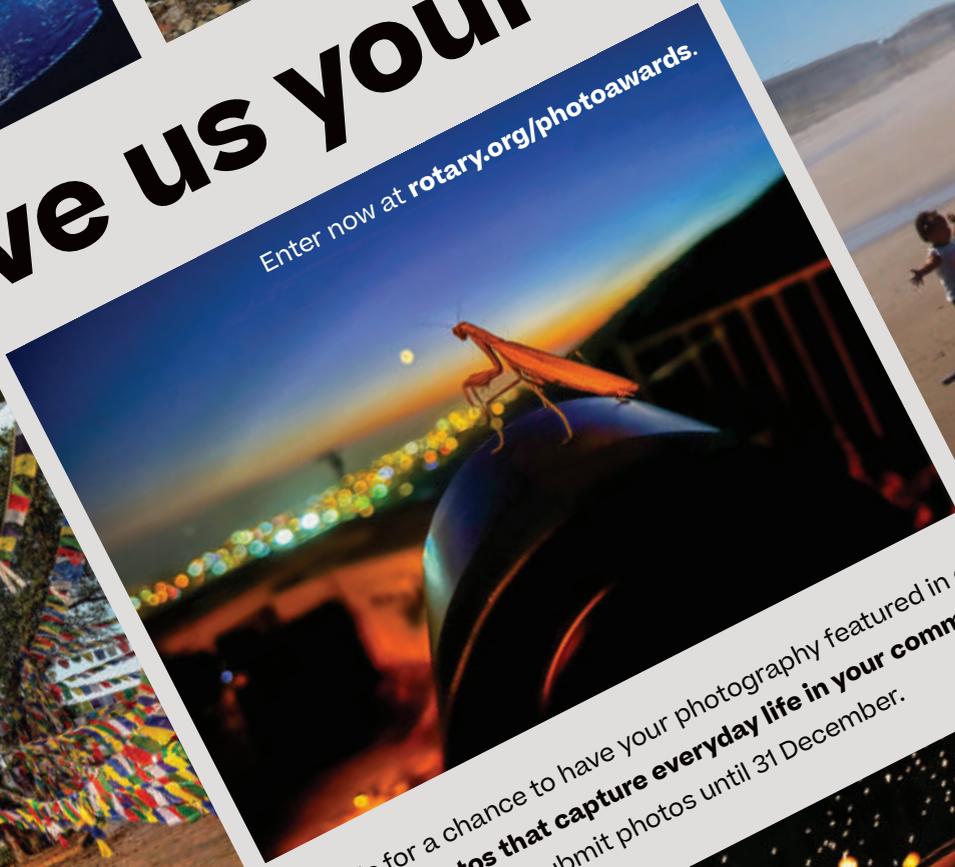
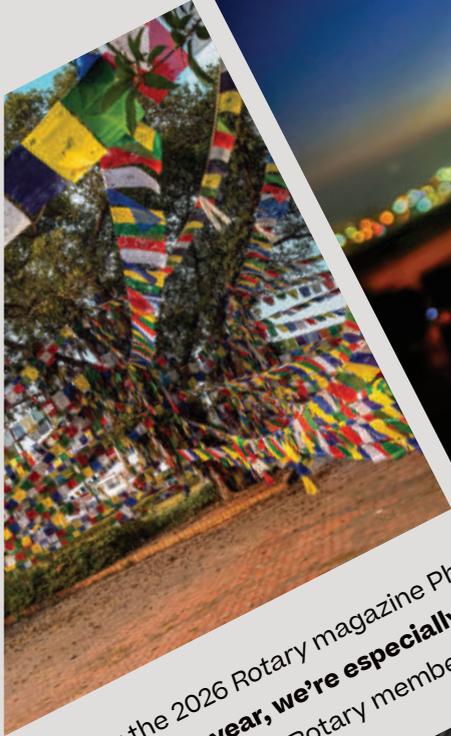
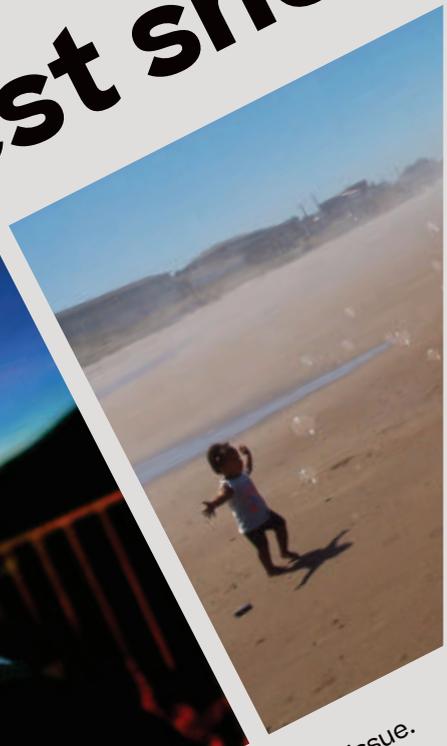
Tell us about your event. Write to magazine@rotary.org and put “calendar” in the subject line. Submissions must be received at least five months before the event to be considered for inclusion.

2026
PHOTO
AWARDS

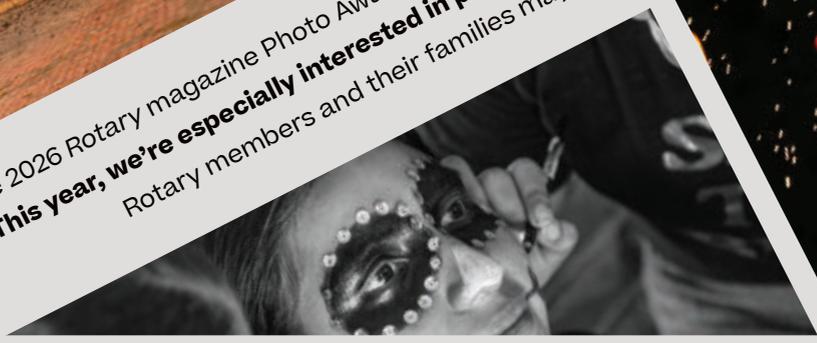


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2026 CONVENTION

Why I attend

“Where else do you have this many countries working together? That’s peace. It’s like you’re traveling the world but you are in one place.”



Robin Hollingsworth,
Rotary Club of Franklin, Kentucky

Gathered tips to make her traditional noon-time club more accessible

“I am looking for what projects others are doing, how they go about it, and how different that is from what we are doing.”

Used her convention time to “cross-fertilize” ideas with global members

Levina Owusu,
Rotary Club of Accra, Ghana

“No matter what we do, we can’t get this energy at our club or sitting in a district conference. It has to happen here at the convention.”



Nitesh Joshi, Rotary Club of St. Albans-Verulamium, England

Impressed by a breakout session on using artificial intelligence to boost project results

Members can’t help but smile when you ask why they attend the Rotary International Convention. They’re uplifted by celebrated speakers, bubbling with ideas from learning sessions, and joyful when handshakes turn into friendships. These first-time attendees this year shared why you don’t want to miss the convention 13-17 June in Taipei. Register now at convention.rotary.org.

CROSSWORD

Positive potential

By Victor Fleming
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas

ACROSS

- 1 Like food before it’s cooked
- 4 “Busy” insect
- 7 Kentucky county whose seat is Lexington
- 14 Like satisfying summer drinks
- 16 Black keys
- 17 Start of a quotation by the Dalai Lama
- 18 Slogs
- 19 Bargain buy
- 20 “Just say ___ drugs!”
- 22 Philosopher known as “the Stoic”
- 23 Kind of IRA
- 25 “Remember the ___!”
- 27 Part 2 of the quotation
- 32 “Heavens to Betsy!”
- 34 ___ *Doubtfire*
- 35 Lubricate anew
- 36 Play practice (abbr.)
- 37 Small cask
- 38 Prez on pennies and fivers
- 40 Defunct D.C. stadium
- 41 Slick goo
- 43 Tulsa sch.
- 44 Letters before omegas
- 45 Part 3 of the quotation

- 49 Figure of speech

- 50 Indent key
- 51 Spanish bull
- 54 Exam for H.S. jrs.
- 56 Trig. function
- 60 Some elder academics
- 62 End of the quotation
- 64 Emulated Rosie?
- 65 Living room pieces
- 66 “Fini!”
- 67 Certain movie ratings
- 68 Hardly dry

DOWN

- 1 Ocho ___, Jamaica
- 2 ___ above the rest
- 3 *The Way We ___*
- 4 Hot-water tank
- 5 North Pole worker
- 6 Genesis setting
- 7 In fine ___ (fit)
- 8 Overseas
- 9 “Are ___ for real?”
- 10 Aim of some runners
- 11 Buster Brown’s dog
- 12 One between 12 and 20
- 13 Big name in petrol
- 15 Elegant

- 21 Bagful for Dobbin
- 24 Apple or quince
- 26 Gooney ground
- 27 “Gotcha, bro”
- 28 Alternative to com, edu, or net
- 29 Head/legs separator
- 30 Old LP-playing system
- 31 Big game in the Rockies
- 32 Estimator’s phrase
- 33 “May I ___ you?”
- 37 Deborah of acting
- 38 Fleischer or Shapiro
- 39 Joke victim
- 42 Took a drive
- 43 Eligible for the draft
- 44 WWII attack craft
- 46 Kind of list
- 47 Favorable trend
- 48 Billionaires’ boats
- 51 Actress Hatcher
- 52 Forget to include
- 53 Clergy figs.
- 55 Chef’s measure (abbr.)
- 57 Cast forth
- 58 Blunt-edged sword
- 59 Abnormal sac
- 61 Skater Midori
- 63 Brain wave read, briefly

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Solution on opposite page

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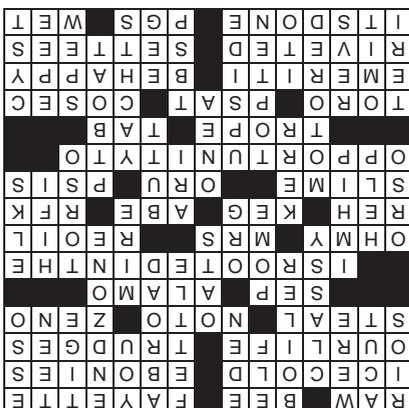
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Prized for its rich, nutty flavor, this Swiss cheese will put a smile on your face

Switzerland may be famous for its chocolate and its watchmaking industry, but cheese is just as paramount to Swiss culture. “Gruyère is a 900-year-old tradition,” says Thierry Ecoffey, a third-generation master cheesemaker who runs Fromagerie Romontoise with four cousins.

As its name suggests, the company is located in Romont, a picturesque town in the Alpine foothills almost halfway between Bern and Lausanne. The area is ideal for cows to graze and for farmers to grow the hay that’s needed in the winter. Ecoffey produces about 1,200 metric tons a year of Gruyère AOP (AOP stands for Appellation d’Origine Protégée or Protected Designation of Origin), half sold domestically. “Making this cheese requires us to use raw milk,” he continues. “We have about 20 farmers who deliver milk daily to our facility.”

HOW-TO: Creating Gruyère AOP involves a highly specified procedure. Rennet to help the milk coagulate is added before it’s heated. Then the curd is separated into grains and the vat of milk is slowly heated before being packed into circular molds and pressed for about 20 hours to separate the whey. The cheese wheels are stored in cellars for at least five months. “The fermentation process is entirely natural with just a little salt added,” Ecoffey says.

HOLEY COW: Gruyère is a semihard cheese with a nutty flavor and creamy texture. Contrary to the American image of “Swiss cheese,” Swiss Gruyère usually does not have any holes. For that, look to another Swiss variety, Emmentaler, or to Gruyère made across the border in France. — ALAIN DROUOT

Thierry Ecoffey
Rotary Club
of Romont,
Switzerland

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