

# Rotary

JANUARY 2026

MAGAZINE

## Hope blooms

Rotary pushes Malaysia toward better mental health – built on the idea that we can all learn to help [page 26](#)



A grandmother's golden gift  
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Rain gardens protect coastal waters  
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Rampbuilders romp to 1,000th ramp  
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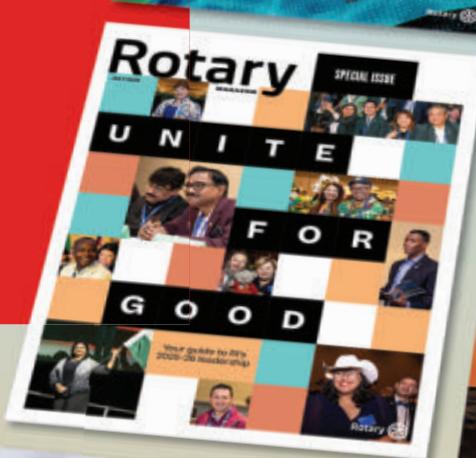
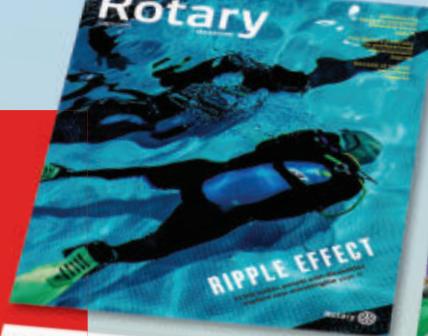
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## More than job training

In a garage outside Salinas, California, young people who are learning to restore classic cars are doing more than developing a skill — they are reclaiming their futures. This training program provides mentorship and, for some, a path away from gang involvement toward meaningful employment. Graduates leave with certifications, practical experience, and hope.

This is what Rotary's Vocational Service Month celebrates each January — the power of bringing together people with unique skills to do good in the world. It reminds us that integrity isn't just about our actions matching our words. Integrity is in everything we do.

The California automotive program has been such a success because it was built on integrity. Members of the Rotary Club of Carmel-by-the-Sea didn't assume they knew what the community needed. They listened. They learned there was a shortage of skilled mechanics as well as a large number of young people lacking job training. They recognized that technical skills alone wouldn't be enough, so they partnered with Rancho Cielo, a nonprofit offering counseling and support services alongside vocational training.

That is The Four-Way Test in action. Those four simple questions help us not judge others but guide us toward genuine, effective service.

Consider our commitment to ending polio. For nearly 40 years, we have promised the world's children we will eliminate this disease. Despite obstacles, we persist, and today we are closer to defeating the virus. Keeping this promise is the very definition of integrity.

The same integrity must drive our vocational service. With 1.2 billion young people in emerging economies reaching working age in the next decade and only 420 million jobs projected, we face a critical gap. Communities long excluded from economic opportunities need our support.

But support doesn't mean imposing our will. It means listening to local needs, building partnerships, and designing projects that communities can sustain themselves.

You have knowledge that can transform lives. Whatever your profession, your expertise combined with Rotary's values creates lasting change. The question isn't whether you have something to offer, it's how you'll use your skills to serve.

This January, I encourage you to ask how your club can address vocational needs in your community. What skills do your members have that could change someone's life? How can your networks open doors for young people? What partnerships can create sustainable jobs?

Let integrity guide you. Let The Four-Way Test light your path. And let the young people in California and the multitudes worldwide who need job skills remind you why vocational service matters.

Let us celebrate putting our professional skills to work for humanity with integrity at the heart of everything we do.

**FRANCESCO AREZZO**  
*President, Rotary International*



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



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**YOU ARE HERE:** Orange City, Florida

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**SEA COWS:** Manatees, the large aquatic mammals sometimes mistaken for mermaids by ancient mariners, are native to Florida and other tropical and subtropical areas. Nicknamed “sea cows,” manatees graze on seagrasses, helping balance marine and freshwater ecosystems.

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**WINTER REFUGE:** Blue Spring State Park (pictured here), about 30 miles north of Orlando, serves as a vital sanctuary for wintering manatees seeking warm water. Years of conservation efforts have increased their numbers here from about three dozen in the 1970s to a record-high count of 932 manatees in January 2024.

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**INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY:** This month, more than 500 Rotary district governors-elect from around the world will gather in Orlando for four days of intensive training and networking. Given Orlando’s reputation as the theme park capital of the world, some attendees may visit Walt Disney World, Universal Orlando Resort, or SeaWorld. Seeing the manatees of Blue Spring State Park would make for another memorable side trip, and January is the best time to witness these gentle giants in their natural habitat.

# Rotary

MAGAZINE

January 2026

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**Website:** rotary.org/magazine

**To subscribe:** Twelve issues at US\$18 a year (USA, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands); \$24 a year (Canada); \$36 a year for print and \$18 for digital (elsewhere). Contact the Circulation Department (866-976-8279, data@rotary.org) for details and airmail rates. Gift subscriptions available.

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**Illustration by Mike McQuade**



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### Care for the emotional wounds

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**By Betty Kitchener and Tony Jorm**  
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**Photo essay by Jasmin Brutus**

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EDITOR'S NOTE

## Lives well lived

In late November, a colleague spotted a familiar name among the notices of past district governors who had passed away. Jim Simmermon, of the Rotary Club of Oakmont Verona, Pennsylvania, had died at 99.

Three years earlier, *Rotary* magazine had featured him in our “What it’s like” series, which highlights members who’ve lived extraordinary lives. For Simmermon, the extraordinary lay in his devotion to Rotary. For over 70 years, he didn’t miss a single meeting or club activity.

Even the COVID-19 pandemic couldn’t slow him down. Simmermon joined as many as three Rotary meetings a week on Zoom. “My Rotary meetings are what I look forward to each week,” he told us then. “I enjoy seeing my friends and learning what’s going on with projects.”

Attendance alone didn’t define him. Simmermon served multiple times as club president and as district governor in 1982-83, and he championed Rotary’s polio eradication efforts.

His passing brought to mind another remarkable Rotarian: Hugh Barnett, of the Rotary Club of Maryville, Tennessee. Barnett lived to 107 and spent more than four decades in Rotary. He had lived through two world wars, became a civil engineer, and contributed to the Manhattan Project in which the U.S. rushed to develop nuclear weapons before Nazi Germany. After a film about the project, *Oppenheimer*, was released, *Rotary* magazine reached out to interview him in 2023. Sadly, he died three days before our scheduled call.

The lives of Simmermon and Barnett have taught me two things about Rotary. First, Rotary is a gateway to living long and living well. Regular gatherings build social bonds and a strong sense of community. Service brings purpose. Rotary provides a social support system that combats loneliness, boosts emotional well-being, and fosters personal growth, all of which are correlated with a longer life.

For Simmermon, after his wife passed away, Rotary became his anchor. “The best part of it has been the friends that I’ve met — and the difference we’ve made together,” he said.

Barnett credited his Rotary family for his long and happy life. In 2019, his club honored him with a bench engraved with his mantra: “Be happy.”

Second, Rotary needs younger people to carry the torch. Like many civic organizations, Rotary is aging. Members under 40 make up less than a quarter of the global membership.

Simmermon, who joined Rotary at 24, understood the importance of youth and mentoring. “Meeting successful people through my club helped me to develop more confidence, and I ended up starting several businesses,” he said. “When I talk to younger people about Rotary, I always encourage them to join. It’s enriched my life and given me a way to help others.”



Hugh Barnett (top) and Jim Simmermon

He also inspired the next generation at home. His sons Jim and Bill are longtime Rotary members. Bill, a wealth adviser, will serve as a district governor in 2027-28.

In the Chinese tradition I grew up with, families burn incense each New Year to honor the departed and seek their blessing for a prosperous future. In that same spirit, we honor Rotary members like Simmermon and Barnett, whose legendary lives continue to inspire the new generations that follow.

— WEN HUANG

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## Letters to the editor

### PROBLEMATIC PROJECTS

Rotary's support of the training of midwives in Papua New Guinea is a noble effort to be sure ["Buddy up," October]. The statistics presented in the article are stunning. However, when I read that two of the midwives are teaching "family planning," I was troubled.

The term "family planning" has long been a euphemism for abortion and contraceptives. Rotary should not be funding programs intended to control population. This is a morally problematic issue fraught with racist, elitist, and religious implications that Rotary has gone to great lengths to avoid.

Rotary is composed of people across political and religious backgrounds. We are meant to focus on the projects we can work on together, not those that separate us. At a time when Rotary is experiencing declining membership, it is unwise to engage in projects that will force members to question their membership or to consider diverting funds away from The Rotary Foundation.

**Josh McClure**, El Cajon, California

### STEP UP TO THE MIC

Thank you for providing a progress report on the worldwide effort to eradicate polio and for highlighting RI's leadership role ["Polio can be stopped," October]. Daunting logistical barriers such as funding, production, and distribution of vaccines have been overcome; 1.1 billion children have been vaccinated and more than 80 million lives saved.

However, we now face a new challenge: the specter of misinformation. We are seeing decreasing vaccine coverage and an increasing risk of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks and epidemics. For polio eradication to succeed, we will need to move beyond logistical concerns and become a trusted, authoritative voice to vulnerable populations. Is Rotary up to the challenge?

**Bill Campbell**, Cle Elum, Washington

### MAKE TIME FOR AI

The article about Hélène Barnekow, "The social investor," in the October issue, is



an eye-opener to anyone grappling with the wave of technology that brings with it the need for new skills. The article serves as a reminder that it's an individual's responsibility to hone skills that will be needed tomorrow.

As overwhelming as artificial intelligence may be, it's an inescapable feature of our day-to-day lives. To stay abreast, one will have to set aside time for trying out new tools. Otherwise, the AI train will be too far gone.

**Jessica Pekke**, California

### THE POWER OF INCLUSION

Mega kudos for the great September article "Skills for life" and special shoutout to the Rotaract Club of Little River Current Transitions, South Carolina. This is an excellent example of what genuine inclusion in Rotary is all about.

My adult daughter, Allison, has an extremely rare chromosomal developmental disorder causing moderate cognitive impairment and other physical effects. A little over two years ago, I talked to her about becoming a member of my Rotary club. She enthusiastically joined and now is in her second year. She actively participates in all club activities, with service activities such as helping our community personal needs pantry being among her favorites. She also became an unofficial greeter to anyone

### OVERHEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In October, Rotary members shared their reflections on the death of Jane Goodall, a pioneering scientist and a supporter of Rotary's efforts to end polio. (Read our 2009 interview with Goodall at [rotary.org/the-conversation-jane-goodall](https://rotary.org/the-conversation-jane-goodall).)

Dr. Goodall showed us that true leadership is rooted in empathy and respect for all living beings. Her vision continues to remind us that even small actions can ripple out into great change.  
**Kristin Tkalčec**  
► via LinkedIn

I hope that we can get more great people like her to finish the job and to finally end polio. We owe it to Jane and to the whole humanity. We are this close!! 🙏  
**Gustavo de Arriba**  
► via LinkedIn

## CONNECT

coming into our club meetings and immediately sets an ultrapositive tone.

These participation examples are win-win situations for both Rotary and individuals. I would highly encourage clubs to continue reaching out in your communities to explore these types of awesome opportunities and secondly encourage the magazine to provide additional stories over time.

**Pete Emmons**, Marysville, Ohio

## OFF BALANCE

I was disappointed in the article “Level the field” in the September issue. While the Israel/Palestine issue is extremely complicated, this was a one-sided condemnation of the “Israeli occupation.” Although [Honey] Thaljieh has accomplished quite a lot in her life and endured much hardship, the article should have been more balanced.

**Robert Caplan**, Menlo Park, California

## TAKE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

When I became a part-time consultant in 2017, I finally had time to look for meaningful work. I was searching for an organization addressing climate change but quickly discovered that, outside of government or large institutions, opportunities were hard to find. Then I stumbled upon Rotary. I loved the local and international projects being done and — without realizing I needed an invitation — simply showed up at a meeting.

While I enjoyed the work, I still felt something was missing. Climate change was, and remains, the issue I care about most. In 2020, when Rotary announced its newest area of focus, I knew I had found my home. Suddenly, there was space to do the work that mattered most to me, within an organization I already valued.

Our club launched a climate change action group with 10 members. Four years later, that group has grown to 130 people on our distribution list — only



Rotary members in Milwaukee help protect the environment by planting prairie grasses along the Milwaukee River.

a quarter of whom are Rotarians. It has become one of our club’s most effective recruitment tools, bringing in younger members and energizing our work.

I highly encourage other clubs to consider forming similar committees. Giving people a place to act not only helps Rotary grow but also eases some of the climate anxiety so many of us feel.

**Robyn Curtis**, Chilliwack, British Columbia

## MOTTO MISSES THE MARK

Service Above Self. Sounds nice, huh? No, it doesn’t describe at all what we do.

Some years ago, my club adopted a motto that perfectly describes what we do: “Alamo Rotary ... making a difference for people, in communities around the world.”

We all do this 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, even when we’re sleeping. We do it 24 hours a day because we donate to The Rotary Foundation. Every minute of every day, a Rotarian somewhere is using our donations to “make a difference for people, in communities around the world.”

It’s time we adopt a motto that truly describes what we do.

**Dick Olsen**, Alamo, California

# Take Us with you

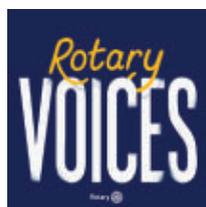
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### ON THE PODCAST

A recent episode of *Rotary Voices* features a conversation with Dr. Hannah Wunsch. Her book *The Autumn Ghost* chronicles the 1952 polio epidemic in Copenhagen, Denmark, and how it led to a revolution in medical care. Listen at [rotary.org/podcast](https://rotary.org/podcast).



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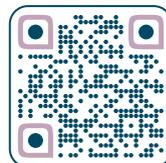


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THE SPECIALIST

## Back on track

*An urban planner turns a bad public transit experience into a career in sustainability*

**M**y first experience with public transit was a bad one. The bus behind my house in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, stopped providing service and I had to walk 7 miles under the hot sun to get to class. Ever since I was a boy, I heard that Juárez was an example of how not to plan a city.

**I asked myself, if I have the bad example, what's the good example?** When I served as head of the integrated transportation department for Juárez, I frequently traveled for work. I learned how cities around the world function and was inspired by their design. Public transit is a way to truly live the daily life of the city you're in.

**You must avoid urban sprawl when planning a sustainable city.** One indicator for efficient public transit is "passengers per kilometer." Compact cities allow for greater passengers per kilometer. The larger your city's

footprint is, the more people are obligated to purchase a car so they can go to work and school. An average of at least six to 10 floors in a city's buildings is ideal.

**Sustainability is good business.** When you advocate for environmental issues, you often make enemies because you're telling people what they're doing wrong. But when people can see sustainability not just as a responsibility, but as good business, the conversation becomes more productive. Sustainability strategies can help businesses gain certifications, scale up their operations, and save money.

**Certifications are key in achieving results.** I was tasked with leading the implementation of three bus rapid transit lines in Juárez in under a year. Understanding the stakes of low-quality transit, I implemented a certification that is a norm in Europe to ensure our lines were exceptional. I was recently invited to the Mexican Senate to analyze constitutional reforms and suggest changes using my background in public transit certifications.

**I'm chair of the Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group's Latin America chapter.** The action group empowers experts and those who are passionate about the environment. It gives them the platform and structure to make an impact. For people joining the action group, I recommend finding what your passion is and what impact you want to have because the structure is already there. ■

**Carlos Montoya**  
Director,  
Environmental  
Sustainability  
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## CLEAN WATER

# A drop to drink

*Nanotechnology brings safer water to the Ganges Delta*

**G**rowing up on the edge of the Ganges Delta in eastern India, Sajal Kanti Kayal understood from an early age that the most precious resource in the world was water. Here water comes in abundance. For six months of the year, it surges in from Himalayan snowmelt, monsoon rains, and tropical cyclones. But as it churns through the rivers of the state of West Bengal and neighboring Bangladesh on its way to the sea, that precious water picks up a dangerous payload.

“We’re surrounded by toxic water. Our ponds, canals, lakes — all polluted,” says Kayal. The 47-year-old is the founder and CEO of a charity that supports education, health care, and other local development in his home village of Kankura outside Kolkata. So he understands that clean water supports more than just public health. It can lift people out of poverty and increase the number of kids in schools. He knows this intimately. Over the years, he’s experienced hair loss, skin lesions, and frequent digestive upsets caused by tainted water.

“It’s a desperate situation,” he says. “There’s water everywhere, but not a drop to drink.”

Like many parts of the world, the region has surface water that is often contaminated by runoff, industrial pollution, and poor sanitation — a problem amplified by recurring floods. As a result, West Bengal has India’s highest share of waterborne diseases, particularly acute diarrheal diseases. Starting in the 1970s, officials encouraged people to drill what are known as

tube wells into groundwater aquifers. But in a painful irony, that water too was contaminated with a deadly poison: arsenic.

The highly toxic element leaching into water is a widespread global issue, putting as many as 230 million people at risk, with most contamination arising from arsenic that is naturally found in rock and soil. It’s a particular problem in northeast India and Bangladesh, where experts once called the situation the largest mass poisoning in history. Long-term exposure causes a host of illnesses from skin lesions to cancer.

On the Indian subcontinent, rivers carry weathered rock from the Himalayas and deposit it as arsenic-rich sediment in the vast alluvial plains that stretch like a ribbon across northern India and Bangladesh. With no smell or taste, arsenic is undetectable in groundwater except through regular testing.

Several years ago, Arindam Roychowdhury, owner of a health care company in Kolkata, traveled to the remote subdistrict of Kakdwip, among the interwoven tidal channels and islands along the Bay of Bengal. He was dismayed by what he saw. “People had tied a rudimentary cloth filter over tube wells to keep the insects out of the water,” he says. “Villagers were consuming water from highly polluted ponds and using the same source of drinking water for washing clothes and utensils, as well as bathing. Some of these ponds were green, ridden with moss. The stomachs of the children I met were swollen like a bowl, and it was clear that there was immense suffering from waterborne illnesses.”

Roychowdhury, a member of the

Visit [rotary.org/our-causes](https://www.rotary.org/our-causes) to learn more about providing clean water and to get involved.

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Lessons from Grandma



Across the Ganges Delta, water surges in from Himalayan snowmelt and monsoon rains, picking up pollutants along the way. As a result, West Bengal has India's highest share of waterborne diseases.

Rotary Club of Calcutta, wanted to help and knew his club, which focuses on service projects in health care, water and sanitation, and basic education and literacy, would be ready to join him.

An acquaintance at Tata Chemicals, a company specializing in the manufacture of chemical products for the pharmaceutical and other industries, told him about a filtration machine that employs a form of nanotechnology that is effective at destroying contaminants in water.

Because the systems use gravity-fed water pressure, they don't require electricity, making them especially useful in rural areas with less reliable energy. The technology is affordable and scalable with sys-

tems designed for individual households and entire communities.

Tata Chemicals agreed to provide the water purifiers at a subsidized cost for the Rotary club's project. After installing machines at four sites starting in 2022, the club received a \$30,000 Rotary Foundation global grant in 2024 to install 10 additional purifiers at schools, nongovernmental organizations, and other public sites to allow community access.

While the purifiers are highly effective at eliminating bacteria and viruses from water, they are unable to remove more than a small amount of arsenic. So the club uses them in villages with lower levels of contaminants, as levels

can vary greatly even among wells in the same area. Surplus amounts of clean water are then supplied to nearby villages for a nominal fee.

The project is directly benefiting an estimated 25,000 people. Each machine can filter 1,000 liters (264 gallons) of water per hour. Now, the members are looking to expand with another 21 filtration projects at schools.

The club's international partner on the project is the Rotary Club of Colleyville, Texas, which also champions water and sanitation projects. The Colleyville club's president and past Foundation chair, Kithsiri Athulathmudali, was experienced in clean water projects, particularly in his native Sri

Lanka, which experiences similar water quality challenges.

“What defines us is Rotary’s Service Above Self mindset,” says Athulathmudali, a former Sri Lankan ambassador to Qatar. “We see what needs to be done, whether it is half a world away or in our own backyard, and we roll up our sleeves and do it.”

Since 2013, Rotary clubs have led more than half a dozen global grant-supported projects to address arsenic contamination in India and Bangladesh.

The problem is not limited to less developed countries. In places like California’s agricultural heartland, residents, particularly in communities home to farmworkers, contend with water tainted by arsenic and fertilizer chemicals. There, too, arsenic is naturally occurring but can become more of a problem through excessive pumping of groundwater.

Globally, the issue remains a major public health problem without an easy solution beyond widespread testing and filtration, says Allan Smith, professor emeritus of epidemiology at the University of California, Berkeley and an expert on arsenic. “Methods for filtering arsenic have been around for a long time, but they do face problems,” he says. Downsides include the need for careful disposal of filters containing concentrated arsenic that must be treated as highly toxic waste. Even with filters, regular monitoring of water quality is needed and requires trained staff. “This is not something that can be left to the local communities,” Smith insists.

As part of its project, the Rotary Club of Calcutta made sure to allow for regular maintenance and periodic replacement of the filter cartridges, ensuring long-term



The Rotary Club of Calcutta received a Rotary Foundation global grant to install purifiers at schools and other public sites to allow community access.

effectiveness. On a two-week trip to Kolkata in 2024, Athulathmudali visited each of the villages to check on the state of the installations. Regular monitoring of water quality is crucial to the success of the project.

In another challenge facing the low-lying delta near Kolkata, sea-level rise and storm surges from intensified cyclones are increasing the salinity of groundwater. The area’s mangrove forests serve as a natural defense, and villagers are

replanting them in places to act as barriers along with earthen embankments, demonstrating that the solutions to the region’s water woes must be multifaceted.

For now, the quality of life has improved in areas with the new water filters, including in Kayal’s village of Kankura. “For adults and children alike, there’s no greater blessing than clean water,” he says. “It is the biggest investment towards our future.”

— KAMALA THIAGARAJAN

BY THE NUMBERS

230 million

People affected by arsenic contamination globally

90%

Arsenic pollution that’s naturally occurring

25,000

People benefiting from India filtration project

Short takes

Rotary leaders in Korea organized a large-scale public festival in November to bring together diverse groups of people and attract new Rotary members.



New features on the Service Project Center include a quiz game to expand your knowledge about how to measure impact. Play at [spsc.rotary.org/impact](https://spsc.rotary.org/impact).



PROFILE

## Peak performance

*A Rotarian from Australia pursues goals with tenacity*

**Jessie Harman**  
Rotary Club  
of Wendouree  
Breakfast,  
Australia

**J**essie Harman has completed many long-distance hikes. So when she found out that fellow Australian Rotarian and adventurer Ken Hutt was on the lookout for trekkers to join his next Himalayan expedition, she signed up, as she recalls, “without a moment’s hesitation. It was the perfect opportunity to raise funds for polio eradication and put myself to the test.”

Harman challenged herself to walk 6 kilometers (about 3.7 miles) a day for 60 days as part of her training regimen, culminating in an ascent to Mount Everest’s South Base Camp with the 14-member team last spring. “Even with the preparation, the walk to Everest Base Camp was physically and emotionally tough,” Harman says. “There were days when I wondered whether I would ever make it.” The team plodded through snow for days.

“No words can adequately describe the sense of accomplishment I felt on reaching Base Camp,” Harman says. “Nor can they do justice to the beauty of the landscape.”

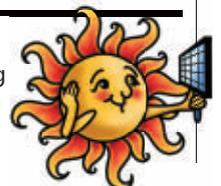
Harman is a past Rotary International director who, among her many positions in Rotary, is chair of the Polio Eradication Advocacy Task Force for Australia. She, Hutt, and other team members created a Raise for Rotary page that collected more than AU\$62,000 as of late October for the Trekking to End Polio fundraiser. (Harman’s page raised more than AU\$32,000.)

Harman’s commitment to polio eradication stems from her desire to see Rotary finish the job. “No child should suffer needlessly,” she says. “But it’s also about our willingness to pursue an audacious goal, with courage, resourcefulness, and tenacity. That’s the very essence of Rotary for me.” — ARNOLD R. GRAHL

The Rotary Foundation will accept nominations this month for the Distinguished Service Award. Learn more at [rotary.org/awards](https://rotary.org/awards).

This month marks the centennial of Rotary in Portugal. The Rotary Club of Lisboa was chartered 23 January 1926.

The Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group is challenging Rotary members to install 1 million solar panels. Learn more at [esrag.org/million-solar-panel](https://esrag.org/million-solar-panel).



# People of action around the globe

By Brad Webber

## United States

For more than two decades, young anglers across Nevada have gotten hooked on fishing during a statewide free fishing day. In the city of Sparks, the event tips the scales: On a Saturday last June, more than 2,000 people lined the banks of a marina for the event sponsored by the Rotary Club of Sparks. Rotarians, joined by community volunteers, provided free use of 1,200 poles and offered fishing tips, hot dogs, ice cream, and beverages. The club has sponsored its city's Kids Free Fishing Day since 2002. One of the event's founders, club member Don Welsh, organized an extra day for anglers with disabilities, including his daughter, Rebecca, who had trouble navigating the burgeoning crowds at the main event. Club member Ed Lawson, now the mayor in Sparks, prodded the state Legislature to grant an extra day of license-free fishing for those outings, dubbed Fishing with Rebecca.



## Mexico

A Mexico City Metro train station pays homage to St. Martha with signs depicting the patron saint of cooks with a water pitcher. Yet for many families in Santa Martha Acatitla, a namesake settlement on the capital's outskirts, potable water is in short supply, a problem exacerbated by an aging water system and prolonged drought. In October, members of the Rotary Club of Ciudad de México distributed water filters to 110 families in the community. Funded at a cost of \$50 each by the Rotary Club of Lenexa in Kansas and a private benefactor, the filter distribution was coordinated by Woodland Public Charity, based near the U.S. club. Mexican Rotarians laud the partnership, which blossomed during relief work from the 2017 earthquake that devastated their country's center. "By providing clean water to families in need, we are not only improving health but also building lasting relationships between our clubs and the communities we serve," says Oscar Rivera Rodríguez, a past president of the Mexico City club and governor-elect of District 4170. "This project reflects the heart of Rotary: partnership, sustainability, and service with tangible impact."



# 74 million

People in Mexico who lack household access to safe water



# 19%

Share of Americans who went fishing in 2024



**China**

The Rotary Club of Beijing is focusing attention on a condition at birth called hypospadias, in which the opening for urination is lower in boys. In rural China, the need for specialized medical training, financial hardship, and social stigma pose challenges to identifying and treating the condition, which can cause serious health problems if left unaddressed. The club has funded more than 160 corrective surgeries since 2016 at a cost of about \$1,400 each using proceeds from its annual ball, a Rotary Foundation global grant, and other sources. In April the club sent a vocational training team of two Rotarians and two urology surgeons from the Children's Hospital of Hebei Province to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia in the U.S. for three weeks of specialized instruction. Another 50 surgeries are expected in the near term, says club member Gilbert Van Kerckhove.



**1 in 1,000**

Boys born with hypospadias in China

**Philippines**

An auto repair program that trains electric vehicle technicians at a Philippine university is getting a boost from the Rotary Club of Iloilo. With the support of a \$32,000 Rotary Foundation global grant, the club provided equipment that is benefiting more than 300 students and faculty members, says Herman Lagon, a club member and college spokesperson. The university also plans to offer community-based training for youths and adults, with a goal of reaching 120 trainees annually through 2028, he says. The club partnered with the Rotary Club of Namweon Central in Korea. "The grant is of great help for the studies of the poor but deserving students, as well as a genuine service to the community," Lagon says.



**20,000+**

Philippine EV sales in 2025

**Australia**

Melbourne Rotarians made use of a long-standing partnership with Somali expatriates in the community to improve health care in the African country. With no in-country club to work with, the participation of the Somali diaspora in Melbourne was integral to the project's success. Abdiwahid Hassan, a member of the Rotary Club of Flemington Kensington, collaborated with fellow Rotarians, Somalia's Health Ministry, and a university in Somalia to fulfill a list of the most-needed items, some of which were donated by hospitals. Funds from the club and District 9800 helped cover the \$18,000 cost of shipping. Nearly \$100,000 worth of medical equipment arrived in Jariban in central Somalia in March, expected to help 40,000 people.



**8,101**

Somali-born residents of Australia in 2021

## GOODWILL

# Secrets of their success

Rotary Action Groups have a lot to teach about volunteer organizing

The **Rotary Action Group program began in 2005** to bring together people from around the world with passion for specific causes. Today the expert members of Rotary's 26 action groups, with topics ranging from peace to mental health to literacy, advise Rotary members on service projects and initiate projects of their own. They're terrific repositories of wisdom about making an impact. The Rotary Action Group for Family Health and AIDS Prevention has a lot of experience in this regard: Rotary Family Health Days, the group's signature program, is one of the largest medical public/private partnerships in the world. In honor of the 20th anniversary of action groups in 2025, we asked the family health action group's CEO, Sue Paget, for some tips on carrying out effective projects.



Members of the Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group perform a mapping exercise in India.

## 1. Start small and learn as you go

Successful social change initiatives almost always start small. Circumstances can vary hugely from place to place, so it's wise to limit a project's scope at first. A pilot project's successes and failures show what needs to change before it can be scaled. By expanding slowly and deliberately, Paget says, the family health action group has had time to thoroughly test its approach.

"There's a methodology when we go into a country," says Paget, who's a member of the Rotary E-Club of Eagle Canyon, South Africa. "You go to the Rotary clubs and get their buy-in, then you go to the ministries of health and get letters of intent. It takes a lot of work, but if you follow the steps, it can be done."

## 2. Partnerships are magic

Government agencies, nonprofits, and businesses can supercharge a project. Partners

from the same city or region appreciate local concerns. Or a potential partner might address the same issue at a national or international level.

A partner organization can help fund the project, share valuable expertise, or simply lend the strength of its brand to the effort — which makes it easier to recruit even more partners. And the benefits don't stop there, says Thembisile Xulu, CEO of the South African National AIDS Council, one of the action group's partners.

The family health action group "is a shining example of how public-private partnerships can multiply impact," Xulu says. "Its wide network of partners prevents duplication, ensures resources are used effectively, and fosters innovation."

To find partners, start by looking at existing connections, Paget says. When the Rotary Action Group for Family Health and AIDS Prevention launched, founder Marion Bunch already had relationships with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta and

the Coca-Cola Africa Foundation, from her previous nonprofit work. "They sort of kick-started us," Paget says.

## 3. Build a reputation

When carrying out a project, aim to leave a positive impression on everyone you work with. Paget says the dedication of the family health action group's members has won the support of influential people all over Africa. "We have created a reasonable reputation in terms of what we do. We are transparent, and I think people know we work hard," she says.

Ultimately, though, it's about producing results. "I really do believe that's how we've got that bigger support, whether it's from government partners or most Rotarians, along the way," Paget adds.

## 4. Focus on follow-through

Another key to successful volunteer organizing is also

one of the toughest parts: following through. Everyone involved in the project should understand the importance of responding promptly to emails and staying in touch with people. Even if people or organizations you contact can't contribute to the project, they may be helpful in the future.

It's that kind of thinking that helped the family health action group become a nonprofit powerhouse. Since the official inception of Rotary Family Health Days in 2011, 3.5 million people in 16 countries have received free medical services at the events.

"In 2009, when I was the governor-elect of my district, I planned to do things which were bigger, better, and bolder," says Stephen Mwanje, a Ugandan Rotarian who was a visionary for the initiative. "Today, Rotary Family Health Days take place all over Africa. One country after another has come on board, and as they say, the rest is history."

— ETELKA LEHOCZKY

Find a list of Rotary Action Groups on page 61.

# PRESS



# PLAY

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ESSAY

# Grandmother's gold

Mysterious family lore, deathbed revelations, and a priceless inheritance

By Wen Huang



**G**randma waited with a satisfied grin as my father slurped up the last of her hand-pulled noodles and wiped tomato and egg sauce from his lips. Then she spoke, and I braced myself for the usual lecture about us children skipping house chores.

"I'm afraid I only have a few months to live," she announced calmly.

My sister and I froze. Father dropped his chopsticks. "Are you feeling ill?" he asked.

"Not ... yet."

Mother couldn't resist. "Did your husband's spirit reveal the message to you in a dream last night?"

Grandma answered her sarcasm with a glare.

It was the fall of 1973 and we lived in China's central city of Xi'an. Grandma had just turned 72. Though she occasionally complained of headaches and dizzy spells, she seemed sturdy enough, hobbling around on her bound feet to cook, clean, and scold me over my homework. It never occurred to me that she could die someday. She was like the pear tree in our yard — gnarled, ancient but blooming year after year.

When Father pressed her, Grandma admitted that she wasn't suffering from any terminal illness. Her prediction was based on an old Chinese saying: "When a person reaches 73 or 84, the King of Hell is likely to make his call." With that first threshold approaching, she wanted to be ready. She asked Father to start preparing for her funeral, to set about making a pinewood coffin and inviting tailors to sew an elaborate traditional burial dress.

Father frowned. It was the height of China's Cultural Revolution. Traditional funerals, rife with Buddhist and Taoist traditions, were banned because they ran counter to the atheist Communist ideology. "Don't start imagining things," he said. "It's a new society now and people no longer believe in those superstitious sayings."

We assumed Grandma's fixation on death was merely a phase and she would soon snap out of it. But as winter deepened, her fear intensified. The topic hovered at every meal.

Since Grandma had raised me, the thought of losing her filled me with dread. My sister, though, seemed oddly

detached and even a bit intrigued. One day I called her out for being heartless. She glanced around to make sure Grandma was out of earshot and whispered, "Do you know that when Grandma dies, we could inherit a lot of gold bars — like those shiny dumpling-shaped ingots in movies?"

I scoffed, but she insisted a close relative had told her.

Growing up, Father had always described a life of hardship: My grandfather and several relatives had died of tuberculosis when Father was still an infant. During Japan's invasion, Grandma fled with her family in the 1940s, trekking hundreds of miles to Xi'an. "We had no money and begged for food along the way," Father would recall. For years, Grandma worked as a maid to raise him, and he often credited the Communist government for lifting the family out of poverty.

But my sister recounted a different story that left me a tad bewildered. Grandma and Grandfather had once been wealthy landowners in the neighboring Henan province, and their village was named after Grandfather himself. Then came floods, disease, and locusts, disasters that were compounded by the Japanese invasion. While their land lay submerged in water, the Japanese troops looted and burned their homes. After Grandfather died of tuberculosis, Grandma clutched my infant father and the family's remaining valuables and joined millions of refugees heading west.

My sister said that Father had to conceal this past. Under communism, landowners and capitalists were branded enemies of the people. Our family would be targeted for persecution if the government discovered our secrets.

I found it hard to imagine Grandma as the wife of a rich man. Ever since I could remember, she always wore the same outfit — a faded, baggy blue shirt with plate buttons down the left side, shapeless pantaloons, and white knee socks. She perfectly resembled the image of a proletariat woman portrayed in revolutionary movies. In the summer, I remember pleading with her to buy me an ice pop as neighborhood children swarmed the ice pop bike outside our house. She would always turn her pockets inside out, insisting she had no money.

Yet my sister remained adamant, pointing to Grandma's bound feet as

proof. In old China, foot binding — a symbol of beauty and privilege — was practiced mostly by wealthy women who never toiled in the fields. Even Grandma's choice of burial clothes, an elaborately sewn Chinese dress, hinted at refinement and a more elevated former status.

Because my sister sounded quite convincing, I began to buy into her story. In the next few days, whenever Grandma stepped out, we would rummage through the cracked suitcase under her bed, searching for hidden treasures. I even tapped the walls and floor like a detective, listening for hollow echoes. But nothing ever turned up.

Then, as if to prove her prophecy, Grandma fell ill that spring. She had a low fever for a week, followed by bouts of dizziness. Bowls of bitter Chinese herbal soup did little to cure her. Late one night, she woke us up, howling that she was approaching her end. Father rushed to my room and brought me to her bedside so she could leave me her last words.

I knelt beside her. Tears flowed across her temples. I began weeping too. Holding my breath in anticipation, I secretly hoped for a dramatic revelation from her along the lines of: "I buried a box of gold under the chicken coop. Go dig it up and spend it well. Don't share it with your sister."

Instead, when she finally cleared her throat, what she actually uttered was, "You must learn to cook. That way you won't suffer like your father, always at your wife's mercy for a good meal."

What?! I was dumbfounded. Even on her deathbed, Grandma was worried about Father's lack of culinary skill. Let me pause here and provide some context. As the sole male heir to survive the tuberculosis epidemic, Father was brought up, as my sister used to say, like an endangered species. Cooking and kitchen chores were considered a woman's domain, and Grandma never taught her son such basic life skills. When he occasionally grumbled about the fried rice that my mother had cooked and asked for his favorite noodles, she would refuse. That upset Grandma, who would mutter that her son's helplessness in the kitchen was her greatest failure.

As Grandma continued her deathbed pronouncements, I nodded along, glancing nervously to see if Mother was around. Luckily, she had gone to fetch a doctor from a nearby clinic.



← My grandmother (seated center) helped raise several generations of my family.

## “Do you know that when Grandma dies, we could inherit a lot of gold bars — like those shiny dumpling-shaped ingots in movies?”

Dr. Gao arrived. Feeling her pulse, the doctor comforted Grandma. “You’re not dying, Huang Mama. I bet you’ll live to 100.” He gave her amoxicillin and a sleeping pill, and before long, she was snoring.

Grandma lived not just another year, as she predicted, but 16 more.

While in high school, I asked Grandma about the rumored gold. To my surprise, she admitted it once existed. “I brought a few pieces of jewelry and gold bars when I fled Henan,” she said. But the floods, the war, and the journey had consumed most of it. More hardship followed. In the 1960s, Mao Zedong’s Soviet-style industrialization policy led to a nationwide famine that claimed the lives of millions. Then, my father lost his job after a colleague reported him to authorities for criticizing the Chinese government. Grandma spent the rest of what she had to feed the family. “I’m sorry that I have no gold left,” she added.

“Raising you — that’s my real gift.”

And she was serious about teaching me to cook. About once a week, Grandma and I would mix flour into dough, kneading it until it reached the right texture. We’d cover it with a damp cloth and let it rest for 15 minutes before rolling it into a large, smooth sheet. We then folded and cut it into noodles. On Chinese New Year’s Eve, she taught me to mix chopped napa cabbage and pork for dumpling fillings. Together, we fried delicate wontons in shapes like “layered roses” and “flying kites.” Though I never mastered the art of rolling dumpling wrappers to perfect thickness with both hands, I could fold an ear-shaped dumpling that resembled a gold ingot.

Having lived through famine and war, Grandma considered wasting food an unforgiveable sin. By adding a few new ingredients, leftovers became new dishes. When rations ran low, she foraged for wild

arugula for dumpling filling or pagoda tree leaves, mixing them with flour to steam.

She also taught generosity. A neighbor’s mother had died of a stroke; every time we made dumplings, Grandma sent the first dozen to that family. When panhandlers knocked, they never left empty-handed. “Buddhist deities sometimes disguise themselves as beggars to test charity,” she’d remind me. “Compassion brings you good luck.”

Grandma finally passed at the ripe old age of 88 while I was away at graduate school in Shanghai. Father had died the year before. When I jokingly asked my sister if she struck it rich in Grandma’s room, she gave an awkward giggle.

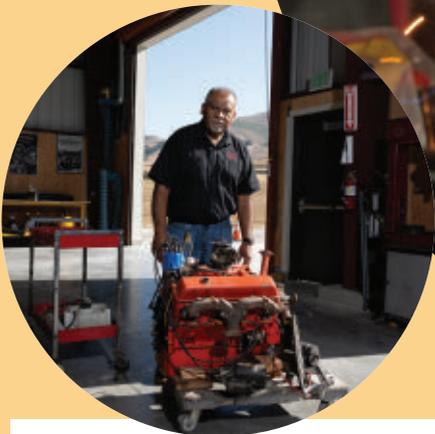
Grandma’s wisdom and cooking lessons became my inheritance. Cooking enriched my life, and after I moved to the United States in the 1990s, it helped me stay close to my Chinese roots. When I felt ill, I made her egg-drop soup with a dash of sesame oil and crystal sugar. In winter, I prepared her thick tofu and lamb stew with white pepper. In summer, I cooked my father’s favorite tomato-and-egg noodles. During the COVID-19 lockdown, I revisited all of Grandma’s recipes — steamed buns, pot stickers, fat noodles — and, like her, I would deliver food weekly to older friends who were confined to their homes.

As I grow older, I find the past as stubborn to erase as my accent. The faded memories of Grandma are creeping back. Her spirit lingers in my kitchen; her wisdom guides me. When I visit a Rotary project, be it promoting literacy, mentoring, vocational training, or the empowering of children with basic life skills, I think of the intangible gifts that Grandma bequeathed me.

Every holiday, I invite friends to make dumplings. I fold each one into the shape of a gold ingot, a nod to the lore my sister and I once believed. From the first batch, I always place two before Grandma’s portrait on my desk. I hope she can see them — shining not with gold but with gratitude. ■

*Wen Huang is editor in chief of Rotary magazine. His memoir, The Little Red Guard, chronicles his family’s attempts to find its way in a turbulent China.*

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# Care for the emotional wounds

A husband-and-wife team came up with first aid for mental health on a dog walk. They want you — yes, you — to join this global movement.





**By Betty Kitchener  
and Tony Jorm**

**ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIKE MCQUADE**

**T**he training session starts with a drawing of a T-shirt on paper. The adult students are asked to write on the front examples of negative assumptions and labels that people use about an imagined co-worker who is experiencing depression, unknown to the colleagues.

The judgments come rolling in: lazy loner, negative person, not a team contributor, and whinger, slang here in Australia for a complainer.

The students, who commonly do this kind of exercise early in the two-day class, are learning a skill that's growing in demand: mental health first aid. When people finish the course, they have the confidence and tools to talk supportively with someone who has a mental health condition that is new or worsening, perhaps reaching a crisis stage. The first-aider can be a bridge to move a person toward helplines, counselors, supportive local groups, and doctors.

The idea to create these courses came to us one evening while walking our dog. With the support of funding from Rotary members in Australia, we pursued extensive research to develop the training. Our Mental Health First Aid courses that started 25 years ago have reached more than 8 million people through nonprofit and government organizations in over 40 countries. (Lady Gaga even promoted training in the U.S. for teens to support peers.)

*I'm Tony Jorm, an emeritus professor at the University of Melbourne who has researched ways to encourage more people to intervene early to help those with mental health conditions. I've studied and tested consensus methods in science, the approach used to create mental health first aid guidelines that determine what to say, and what not to say, when assisting a person with a mental health condition.*

*I'm Betty Kitchener, a former teacher, educational counselor, and registered nurse who taught Red Cross first aid for years. I have had some serious bouts of depression, starting when I was a teenager. I've wondered if my parents and teachers could have supported me better growing up if they'd had this training. Could better support have prevented subsequent episodes in my adult life? But I don't dwell on those thoughts*

*too long because coping with depression and moving on to my happy life with my husband helped us create the training and makes me a capable, empathetic messenger of our evidence-based curriculum.*

There's a strong chance that someone in your social circle will experience a mental health condition — your loved one, a co-worker, a neighbor. Think about the enormity of this troublesome number: In any given year, an estimated 1 in 5 adults in our home country of Australia have a mental health disorder, such as clinical depression, debilitating anxiety, or a substance use disorder.

The prevalence of people with mental disorders in Canada and the U.S. is the same: about 20 percent each year. The worldwide figure is about 1 in 7 people (statistics can vary depending on the

conditions included). That makes mental health conditions a leading source of health burden globally. And people are alarmed by an increasing number of adolescents who report poor mental health in countries that track robust data.

What mental health first-aiders around the world learn is based on work funded by Rotary members. Australian Rotary Health, run by Rotary districts in the country, gave us our first grant for extensive studies on what to teach. To develop the curriculum, we collected consensus feedback from three expert groups: mental health professionals, people who have experienced mental illness, and people who care for others with these health conditions. We presented the groups with exhaustive lists of existing recommendations on how to give support outside of a health professional's office. We asked these experts: Which of these recommendations are the highest priorities that you want helpers to know? At least 80 percent of the experts had to agree on every first aid strategy included in our courses.

Our team was successful in winning further Australian Rotary Health grants to support research on teaching courses through e-learning and to teens. We can't overstate how awestruck we were by Rotarians who think health research is so important that they raise large amounts of money year after year, through walks and other events in their communities, to support researchers like us through Australian Rotary Health. We were so impressed that we joined Rotary.

Back in the classroom with the T-shirt exercise, the students turn over the paper shirt after they've learned more about depression. They write a new set of phrases on the back about what the "co-worker" with depression is experiencing: I feel hopeless. I feel helpless. I'm not good at this job. I can't concentrate. The activity is powerful at helping first-aiders understand the importance of engaging with people without judging them.

Now, if you're doubting whether you could ever feel comfortable, let alone qualified, to help someone facing a serious mental illness, let us reassure you: Mental Health First Aid courses are for everyone. The training prepares you to provide early intervention for a person experiencing mental health distress or

crisis, such as having suicidal thoughts or a panic attack, being out of contact with reality, or coming out of a traumatic experience. In some situations, the social support provided by the mental health first-aider is sufficient. Mental health first aid isn't a replacement for professional help, but that initial support is especially important when wait times to see specialists are long and the cost of psychological health care may delay people from seeking treatment.

**THESE DAYS, MANY MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID** courses are sponsored by workplaces for employees and by universities for students and staff. Mental Health First Aid International, the nonprofit organization we formed and the curriculum copyright holder, has worked with people including debt counselors, lawyers whose clients are going through divorce or other family challenges, and workers who administer social services like subsidized housing.

First-aiders learn to consider a person's culture when assisting. Mental Health First Aid International has used the same consensus research approach to create a curriculum for Aboriginal people, and the nonprofits administering the courses in other countries have developed guidelines appropriate for other groups or cultures. Alterations might reflect a group's customs and terminology or incorporate videos of people the learners identify with. While there are other programs that teach how to help people with mental health conditions, our commitment to the highest research standards for the curriculum sets Mental Health First Aid apart.

This type of first aid for the mind is only one piece of a jigsaw puzzle to help individuals and, more broadly, to reduce mental illness in society. People often face a suite of risk factors that need systemic solutions, and Mental Health First Aid brings awareness of important ones, such as discrimination, poverty, inadequate education, and homelessness.

In developing the instruction model, we took cues from physical first aid training, which is built on the cultural norm that most people want to learn to help someone with an injury or other trauma to their body. Many people take

physical first aid courses simply to be good citizens, and others, like scout leaders or sports coaches, for example, need the training for their jobs or various types of interactions with people.

In our light bulb moment on that dog walk in the late 1990s, we wondered: Why don't we have similar first aid for people who are feeling suicidal, having a panic attack, self-harming, or experiencing any of a wide range of mental health conditions?

We can all learn basics like how to listen nonjudgmentally. You don't have to be a professional to do that. Society needs professionals' high level of expertise, but everyone needs to have baseline skills. People often think that others' mental health is private and they shouldn't intervene. We tell people the opposite: Be on the lookout and talk about mental health freely.

After all, a psychologist won't be on the spot when a teenager first musters the courage to voice that they're fighting to trudge through each day because they're so depressed by a breakup and are having uncontrollable dark thoughts. But you might be there.

A health professional won't be on the golf course when your playing buddy opens up about feeling down, having fights with his family, and knowing he needs to cut back on his worsening drinking habit.

But you might be there. ■

*Outside of their work to expand Mental Health First Aid, Betty Kitchener and Tony Jorm are members of the Rotary Club of Coff's Harbour in Australia, where they relish working on the club's secondhand book sale that supports service activities including providing books to children.*



The authors at their club's 2025 changeover dinner to celebrate the new Rotary year.

## Surprising advice

The following are a few examples from Mental Health First Aid training that surprise many people and that the courses might not have included without the research on what expert groups recommend:

- **Don't go straight to problem-solving and try to talk a struggling person out of their negative thoughts.** If you tell a severely depressed person to appreciate the beautiful day, their secure finances, and their family, you may pile on to the guilt they already feel. Really listen and allow them to talk about how they are feeling without judging them.
- Sometimes people with anxiety want to avoid activities they find stressful. However, if you repeatedly agree to stay home with or accompany the person, you may unwittingly reinforce their condition. **Support a person with anxiety in learning ways to gradually manage their discomfort.**
- When you suspect someone is weighing whether the world would be better off without them, ask clearly and directly: Are you thinking about killing yourself? **The evidence shows asking about suicide is helpful rather than harmful.** The person with suicidal thoughts will feel more comfortable talking about them if you're straightforward.
- **When people are injuring themselves without suicidal intentions, resist the natural response to focus your conversation on stopping the physical injury.** Experts consistently advise to remain nonjudgmental and stay focused on addressing the distress that is driving the person to self-harm, perhaps with cuts or burns.



# Case study:





# MALAYSIA

Rotary members' vision  
of a country that embraces  
mental well-being is  
beginning to blossom  
with government support

**By Rose Shilling**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY REDHU MALEK

**S**omething is missing in the sweeping view of city and sea from the windows of a high-rise hotel in Malaysia where schoolteacher Kasvini Muniandy is enjoying a buffet lunch with Rotary members.

There aren't enough public parks in the urban areas of Penang Island for kids like her students to play, she notes, including among the apartment towers and dense rows of squat shophouses around the hotel in the charming, historic port city of George Town. Also in short supply is free time to hang out with friends or family. Instead, most kids go straight from school to religious or academic centers until the evening, when they have homework, Muniandy says.

She muses about whether these conditions contribute to the disruptive behavior that she sometimes has to guide her students through while she teaches English at a government school. "These kids in the urban areas, a lot of them are staying in high-rise buildings," says Muniandy, a guest of

Rotarians at a District 3300 conference luncheon that includes red chile rendang curry, a favorite in Malaysia. "They don't have the opportunity to even go to a playground."

Concerns like hers are shared by many as people in the Southeast Asian country try to understand the complex factors that may be contributing to a sharp increase in children and adults reporting mental health problems. The troubling trend for children is similar in many countries that monitor detailed mental health data, where parents and officials voice concern over the emotional toll of everything from social media to pressures to succeed in school.

In recent years, Malaysia's worsening statistics, including increases in adolescents attempting suicide, have jolted Rotary members to act, helping set off a wave of change in Malaysia to prioritize mental well-being. The work is becoming a legacy for Rotary in the country, one that's still unfolding alongside the government's commitment to change the culture to better support mental health. At the district conference, Rotarians recounted during breaks how a coalition of clubs started a campaign to upend social stigma so people can feel more comfortable talking about their mental health struggles and getting help.

"We raised the mental health agenda to the national level," says Bindi Rajasegaran, a member of

**Previous pages, top left:** (from left) Rotarians Palani Nadarajan and Sreeganesh Vasudavan join a Rotary-backed psychological first aid session by experts at Help University. **Right:** Shanthy Thiruchelvam, an organizer, calls the class an eye-opener.





*“The more I researched, the more surprised I was at the condition of mental health in our country. Number one, it was taboo, unspoken of.”*

**AND EVEN EARLIER, MALAYSIAN** Rotary members created the National Coalition of Mental Wellbeing, which helps the government carry out priorities for mental health funding. Their vision has blossomed alongside a government campaign to raise awareness about mental health care — with initiatives ranging from a mental well-being guidebook for older residents to a focus on mental health in the workplace. Many nonprofits, universities, and health consultants are coalition partners.

For Rajasegaran, the crusade began after her son-in-law died by suicide, which she says left her withdrawn for years before she finally was able to try to understand. “The more I researched, the more surprised I was at the condition of mental health in our country,” she says. “Number one, it was taboo, unspoken of. The number of suicides and mental health problems amongst the youth was horrifying, and nobody was talking about it.”

She realized that all her research added up to a community assessment, like the ones Rotary members everywhere regularly use to understand people’s needs. That’s why the global grant focused on mental health training for teachers and counselors. “They wanted to learn even more,” Rajasegaran says. “That ignited their interest. All they knew was something just at the surface, not deeper. And the biggest question was, Where do we go?” Now they know the resources and how to get in touch with community groups, nonprofits, and helplines, she says.

About a dozen clubs in Malaysia’s two Rotary districts, 3300 and 3310, supported the learning sessions, along with the grant’s international partner, District 3620, which covers part of Korea, using district and Rotary Foundation funding totaling \$49,000. Counselors reported on how the training helped interrupt suicide attempts or otherwise deescalated suicidal thoughts, with data reviewed by the Ministry of Education, listed in the grant as a partner.

By securing Ministry of Health support from the

the Rotary Club of Ipoh Central. When members talk about the effort’s beginnings, they inevitably mention Rajasegaran’s work and how she recruited their help. To honor her dogged devotion, Rotary named her one of its 2023-24 People of Action: Champions of Impact for uniting clubs to bring mental health first aid to schools. Backed by a Rotary Foundation global grant, about 360 counselors and teachers who work with students ages 13-24 learned techniques in 2023 for talking to students with a mental health condition and directing them to counseling, when available, or to other resources, like helplines. Professional counseling is not widely accessible in Malaysia, and a national effort to expand psychological first aid is built around the idea that just as with physical first aid, anyone can learn to listen supportively to someone’s struggles and guide them to further help.

**Above:** Bindi Rajasegaran inspires Rotarians across Malaysia to push the country toward better mental health. For her dogged devotion, Rotary named her one of its People of Action.



## Rotarians want to reverse these numbers



start, Rotarians established a connection that allows them to voice their opinions about policies, says Rajasegaran, a past district governor and a member of The Rotary Foundation Cadre of Technical Advisers. She and Rotarian Siti Subaidah Mustafa, chair of the coalition, also serve on a separate advisory council that the health minister consults on mental health priorities.

Siti Subaidah, a member of the Rotary Club of Central Damansara, says to counter the shortage of psychology professionals, the coalition is preparing more people to provide first-line support, including police, nurses, and general practice doctors whom people see more regularly. “We really want to be developed as a center of excellence for psychological first aid,” she says.

The need for health insurers to cover mental health services has also come up at coalition meetings. But the effect on premiums will be a big concern as the government tries to rein in recent staggering increases, Rajasegaran notes.

Rotary members already helped push for one of the most significant policy changes in recent years: Attempted suicide is no longer a crime in Malaysia — an important step in reducing stigma and barriers to people seeking help. Rotarians used their connections to reach people in the government and organize an awareness session for members of Parliament, which voted in 2023 for the repeal. “That was a big win for us,” Rajasegaran says. “Now, with all our advocacy, people are beginning to speak about mental health.”

The coalition is expanding its campaign to reach many groups, including providing homeless people with mental health concerns the opportunity to speak with counselors or other coalition volunteers once a month during a food distribution at a Kuala Lumpur shelter. And the pension fund provider for Malaysia’s public employees has asked the coalition to develop an online or in-person option where older residents could seek mental health advice from specialists, Rajasegaran says.

**Left:** Rotarian Mahendran Daniel says awareness campaigns are preparing Malaysians to accept the idea they might need mental health care.

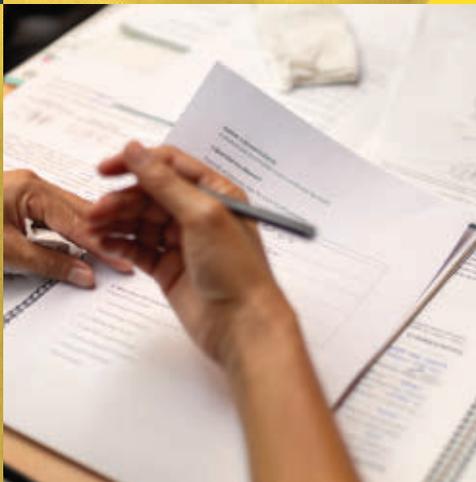
**Above:** Learning sessions include role-play of talking with people with mental health conditions.



The prevalence of depression among adults surveyed was about 5%, ***another statistic that doubled*** from the rate four years earlier.



In Malaysia, the prevalence of ***mental health problems doubled over four years*** in children ages 5 to 15, affecting about 1 in 6 by 2023, the government reports.



**Methodology:** To gauge kids' mental well-being, Malaysia's national health survey asked parents or other caregivers to collect answers for their children about their social and emotional health over the month prior, including whether the child had been bullied, often had temper tantrums, or had at least one good friend. Kids with higher tallies of difficulties were considered to have mental health problems.

**MALAYSIAN MEMBERS ARE AMONG** those leading the way in Rotary in embracing psychological first aid concepts as this kind of training spreads globally. Rotary clubs in many parts of the world have offered mental health first aid learning sessions, often covering all or part of the cost, for Rotary members and workers from schools or other institutions. Many courses sponsored by Rotary clubs use the Mental Health First Aid curriculum developed 25 years ago by a couple in Australia who became Rotarians (see the accompanying essay on p. 26).

In parallel with the national efforts, Malaysian Rotary clubs continue to team up to organize psychological first aid instruction for school workers that use learning modules created by the psychology department at Help University in Kuala Lumpur. Shanthi Thiruchelvam, a member of the Rotary Club of Klang Valley, sat in on a session at the school last year sponsored by her club and three others for about 60 counselors and lecturers from universities. She was riveted.

Between moments of levity that induced smiles and bouts of sincere comforting in role-playing exercises, the counselors recorded their observations about the scenarios and passed the mic to share their thoughts. Thiruchelvam learned that she needs to “look, listen, and link,” meaning to look attentively at a person describing a struggle and notice body language, genuinely listen without interjecting opinions, and most importantly, link them to places where they can seek further help. “There is no health without mental health,” she says. “I personally learned so much. What an eye-opener.”

Understanding differing cultural norms — Malaysia's largest ethnicities are Malay, Chinese, and Indian — is important to reach people from families that for generations have shunned any acknowledgment that grandma was depressed, or an uncle developed a mental health condition after a loved one died, Thiruchelvam says. “This subject was just not a conversation in families,” she says. “We can't be using those yardsticks anymore.”

In the first aid sessions, master's students role-played distressing scenarios that could strain a person's mental health: failing an exam, losing a job, grieving the death of a loved one. Mahendran Daniel, of the Rotary Club of Melawati, says he and the future first-aiders were shaken by the instructors' realistic role-play. "They were really shivering, quivering, crying, and having anger outbursts," he says. The counselors said they appreciated the chance to practice how they might react in those situations.

At Help University, a large part of Rotarian Dhanesh Balakrishnan's job is to ensure students' well-being as dean of student life and wellness, so working with the school's experts to provide psychological first aid instruction is a natural fit. In turn, he links university representatives with national coalition and government leaders, including in the Ministry of Youth and Sports, to provide mental health expertise. "My vision is, How do I get as many stakeholders as possible to enhance mental well-being in the country?" he says. "I'm trying to connect the dots."

His club, the Rotary Club of Bukit Kiara Sunrise, held psychological first aid training for members because the group has run a mentoring program for years for kids ages 15 to 19 as they prepare for further schooling after graduation. Rotarians can help the teens access low-cost mental health counseling should they need it, and the first aid training was one example of how the members learn about topics to grow their mentoring skills. "That's another level of learning for them to mentor their mentees more effectively," Balakrishnan says.

Future teachers who complete university-level studies at government Teacher Education Institutes receive some child psychology instruction in their pedagogy course, says retired institute instructor Letchumi Ramachandran. "Some of the students do come to us teachers — they feel comfortable talking about relationships, talking about families, home issues," says Ramachandran, a member of the Rotary Club of Tanjung Bungah in Penang. In a course to learn to instruct adults, the teachers-in-training get some psychology education that helps with productive interactions with parents and any job stress they might feel, she says.

In two years of teaching teens at a private international secondary school in Malaysia, Yevonne Patrick says she noticed two students with evidence of cuts on their arms from self-harming, when they wore shorter-sleeved shirts in gym class instead of their uniforms. She softened some rules for these students, with the principal's understanding, to make time to listen to what was bothering them and refer them to a school counselor.

With a degree in psychology, Patrick supplemented her skills in how to react in this type of worrying situation by taking a course in psychological first aid a few years earlier. The main lesson she's held onto



is how to interact with students with empathy and without judgment, remembering that what they're going through can contribute to their sometimes unruly, even rude, behavior. "That develops a bond and it's easier to talk to them," she says.

**ROTARY CLUBS IN MALAYSIA** HAVE held awareness campaigns, promoting slogans like "It's OK to not be OK," and online forums during the pandemic for people to share their mental health experiences and feel the support of the group. Daniel, one of the Rotarian organizers, says the larger target behind all the clubs' educational efforts is to prepare people to consider the idea that they might need professional help. Without that readiness, he says, many people in Malaysia would instantly brush aside a suggestion to see a counselor — or get angry about it — and suffer in silence. "You must go through awareness first before acceptance," he says.

He touches on similar themes when he helps clubs grow by extolling the fun of Rotary in his role as

**Above:** Dhanesh Balakrishnan connects Rotary clubs with mental health experts from the university where he is dean of wellness. His club learned psychological first aid to help members better mentor teens.

**Right:** Future psychological first-aiders and their instructors.



district membership engagement chair. He worries Malaysians have given up a lot of basic activities. “Confining yourself to the room is not going to help,” he says. “You’ve got to be outdoors. You got to have the green, the air, the water, the trees, the sand, the soil — all of that gives you back the kind of things to build you up.”

The Rotarians are proud of the progress made as they notice more people talking about mental health, but they know the effort to normalize mental health care has a long way to go. “Addressing mental health issues is not an easy thing,” Rajasegaran says. “It’s ongoing. You have to keep doing it.”

To bolster the national efforts that Rotarians have spurred, district leaders encourage clubs to take their own approaches to promote mental health, making it a priority always, not just when an awareness day (or month) comes up on the calendar. Thiruchelvam, one of the Rotarians who organized the psychological first aid training, issues this challenge: “Mental health is every day, guys. You don’t have to wait to annually do something. Let’s address it here and now.” ■



THE

WORLD

OF

By Patrick Tyler



A restoration plan for Texas coastal waters includes a simple, affordable solution: **rain gardens**



# It's one of the last expanses of wild Texas coastline,

a huge area of saltwater estuaries sheltered behind a narrow landmass in the Gulf of Mexico that forms the world's longest barrier island. One of those stretches of water, Baffin Bay, juts in from a coastal lagoon to cover 60,000 acres. Endowed by nature with high salt concentrations, these waters nurture sea grass growth and safe spawning grounds for species that underpin one of the most fertile fisheries in the U.S.

Here, the spotted sea trout and red fish are king. This fishing paradise draws anglers from all over the U.S., contributing millions of dollars a year to the coastal economy. On the commercial side, black drum fish are a pillar of an industry that puts prime fillets in restaurants near and far.

From the air, though, the problems with Baffin Bay come starkly into view. In my aging airplane I travel frequently to this corner of Texas, flying low over Baffin Bay's waters on my final approach along the coast to Port Mansfield, 50 miles to the south, near the border with Mexico. Algae blooms, including one in the 1990s believed to have been the longest ever recorded anywhere — it lasted a staggering seven years — cloud the water to a chocolate milk-like density, preventing sunlight from reaching the seabed grasses. Those grasses serve as the lungs of the food chain, and without them, Baffin Bay in recent decades has suffered from extensive fish kills, species depletion, and other alarming symptoms of environmental distress.

"All of a sudden we started seeing brown tide and for as long as two years at a time, the visibility would have been less than 6 inches in the water," says Jim Scoggins, a lifelong fisherman on Baffin Bay. Years ago he could dip his fishing rod into the bay and see the gold-plated lure at the tip of the rod 7 feet down. "It was that clear," he says.

The source of the bay's troubles lies inland with stormwater that picks up nutrients in the fertilizers and manure from farms and the region's sprawling cattle ranches — food for algae blooms. Contaminants also come from the small towns popping up along U.S. Route 77, and the bustling city of Kingsville.



The fragile watershed is also home to busy corridors of migratory birds and butterflies and rich ecosystems of native plant life. Those plants, it turns out, may be one small part of the solution to these woes.

**EFFORTS TO RESTORE BAFFIN BAY BEGAN MORE THAN A** decade ago when commercial fishers, recreational anglers, guides, other business owners, and scientists came together to voice concerns about the degradation. Volunteers then embarked on a citizen science initiative to test water quality and help identify the sources of pollution.

The findings led to a formal watershed protection plan in 2022 and the birth of the Bringing Baffin Back initiative. The plan’s solutions include large-scale infrastructure projects such as replacing failing wastewater treatment plants and aging septic tanks, which can contribute to significant bacteria and nutrient loading in the watershed. But it also looks to nature itself as an antidote. It calls for protecting and restoring wetlands to filter water naturally and for educating landowners on beneficial soils and vegetation in riparian, or transitional, zones to act as a protective barrier between developed land and bodies of water.

Going a step further, the plan encourages smaller efforts that, if scaled up, could have a real impact too. One of those initiatives is led by a highly moti-



Researchers collect water samples in Baffin Bay. Rigorous monitoring, including by citizen scientists, has helped identify possible sources of pollution.



Researchers collect sediment cores. Their findings are guiding efforts to reduce pollution loading throughout the watershed.



vated schoolteacher with help from the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi.

Rosana Ryan, a science teacher in the small town of Sarita, 40 miles south of Corpus Christi, has spent her career trying to get her students outdoors, away from computer screens and other distractions, to engage with the world they live in. She built an outdoor classroom where her kids could plant, feed, and harvest flowers and vegetables. The students collect and measure weather data, especially important along this hurricane coast. And now they have begun to study pollution-control measures, namely something known as rain gardens.

Rain gardens are made by digging out shallow depressions and lining them with permeable soil and deep-rooted native plantings. Located strategically, they can channel water running off rooftops, parking lots, and streets before it enters waterways. By mimicking patches of meadow or forest, rain gardens can absorb around 30 percent more runoff than a typical lawn, helping prevent flooding.

Spread throughout a watershed, such projects can have a measurable impact. Contaminants picked up by urban and agricultural runoff are the leading cause of water pollution in the United States, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Rain gardens can filter out 90 percent of those chemicals and 80 percent of sediments before returning stormwater deeper into the soil where it can recharge groundwater. One more bonus: Rain gardens create habitat for birds and pollinators.

When Ryan learned of the idea, she was fully on board. “I have always been very receptive to any project that will engage my students,” she says. The principal at her school, Kristen Tinsley, apparently feels the same way because the two of them welcomed a construction crew in October 2024 to begin excavations in the schoolyard for the Sarita Elementary Rain Garden.

Rotary members from the Corpus Christi club pitched in and happily got their hands dirty planting the educational tools they hope can be scaled up in the fight to save Baffin Bay. Aided by \$90,000 in funding from a Rotary Foundation global grant, they cut the ribbon in May 2025 on the first rain garden in the watershed designed to become a teaching model for South Texas communities.

**BAFFIN BAY, THE FOLKLORE SAYS, TAKES ITS NAME FROM THE** much larger Baffin Bay on the west coast of Greenland that’s named for William Baffin, a British explorer. It is said that a young sea captain named Mifflin Kenedy sailed the Baffin Bay waters in the Arctic during his youth in the mid-1800s. Later settling in Texas, he built a ranching empire in partnership with Richard King of the famed King Ranch, the largest in the U.S. Somehow, the Baffin Bay name came with him.

The area, then known as the Wild Horse Desert for its once vast herds of mustangs, was one of the first battlegrounds of the Mexican-American War in 1846. During the Civil War, it became an economic lifeline for the Confederacy, whose cotton farmers hauled their product through the area to Mexico to trade for gold and weaponry from British entrepreneurs.

Over time, that frontier once crisscrossed by Native Americans, Spanish explorers, and Mexicans



gave way to powerful ranching empires. The city of Kingsville grew up about 10 miles inland from the bay. The railroad came, some industry, and a U.S. Navy aviation training station. At its height in the 1970s and '80s, the city was home to some 30,000 people. Today, it remains the most sizable population center in the area, though smaller communities, too, like Sarita and Riviera benefit from the influx of seasonal residents, anglers, and a large Border Patrol station off Highway 77.

Not far from these settlements, though, when you step with fishing pole in hand into the shallows where Baffin Bay meets the Laguna Madre, the world unfolds as an endless and pristine waterscape out to the shoals of Padre Island, the great barrier whose sand dunes protect the lower Texas coast. It is tempting to just stand there and marvel at the scale and the majesty of it all.

Today, the area is a major draw for its world-class fishing, as well as birding and beachcombing, particularly along Padre Island National Seashore and its 66 miles of coastline, one of the last intact coastal prairie habitats in the country. Fishing for business and for sport contributes around \$75 million annually to the local economy.

“To put it mildly, Baffin Bay is a national treasure,” says Scoggins, the fisherman. “It’s not just a bay; it’s a national treasure and people have got to start realizing that.”

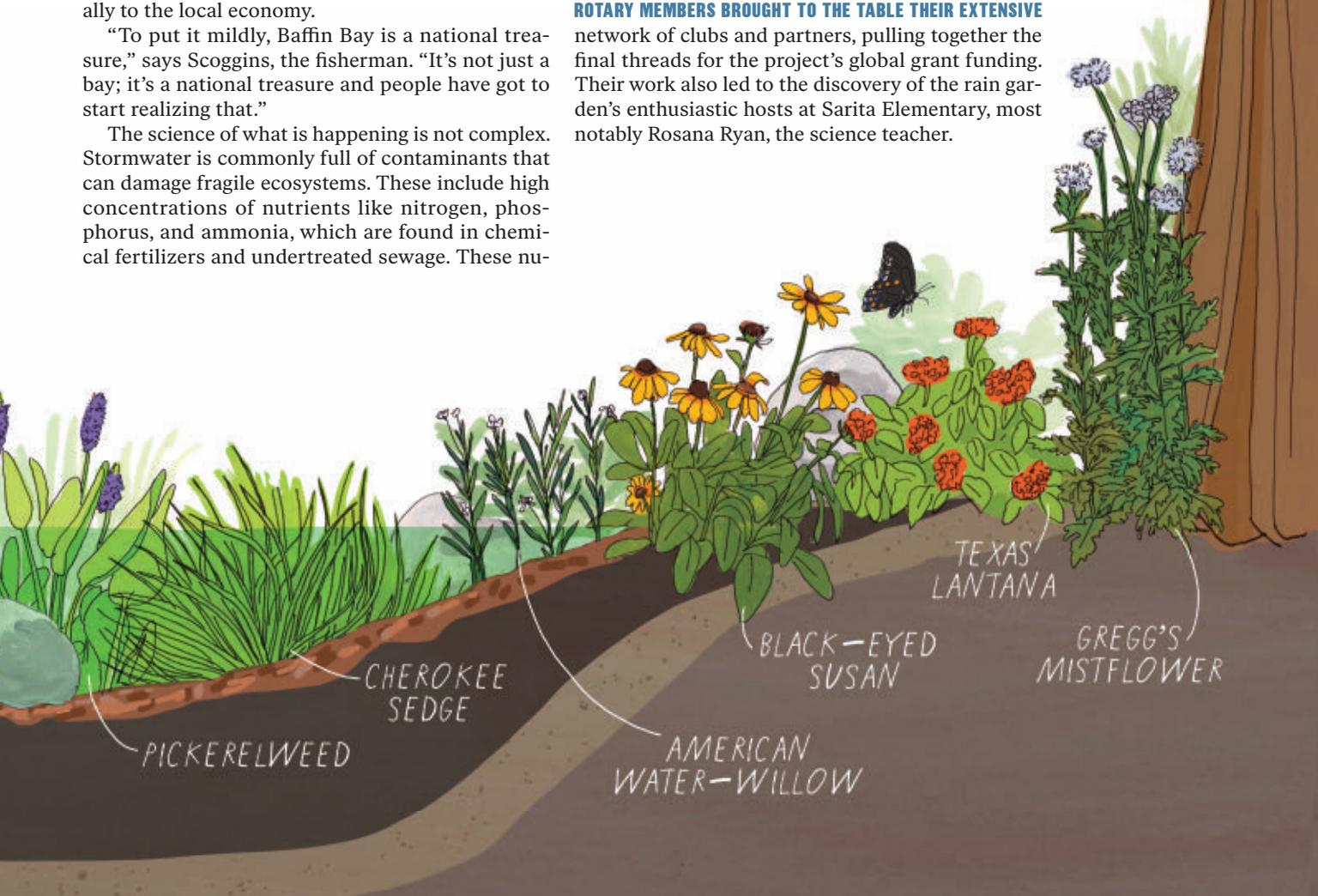
The science of what is happening is not complex. Stormwater is commonly full of contaminants that can damage fragile ecosystems. These include high concentrations of nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and ammonia, which are found in chemical fertilizers and undertreated sewage. These nu-

trients supercharge the growth of algae, browning the water and blocking sunlight from reaching the seabed, threatening the vast landscapes of grasses that support the tiny shrimp and clams that feed the large fish species.

Net surveys of black drum fish show periods of starvation during and after algae blooms, rendering the commercial species inedible and therefore unsellable at times. Locals even started calling black drum “jellyfish” because of their malnourished, softened flesh.

Professor Michael Wetz, a marine biologist at the Harte Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, has spent more than a dozen years mapping and measuring the decline of Baffin Bay while also helping to organize a group of interested parties that includes students, fishers, environmental advocates, educators, area government officials and, now, Rotary members. Their Bringing Baffin Back campaign, loosely modeled on the rescue efforts in Florida to restore Tampa Bay, has helped to organize the community coalition to develop pollution reduction strategies for municipalities, homeowners, industry, and agriculture.

**ROTARY MEMBERS BROUGHT TO THE TABLE THEIR EXTENSIVE** network of clubs and partners, pulling together the final threads for the project’s global grant funding. Their work also led to the discovery of the rain garden’s enthusiastic hosts at Sarita Elementary, most notably Rosana Ryan, the science teacher.



BALD CYPRESS



Rotary members from Corpus Christi and other clubs happily get their hands dirty planting the rain garden at Sarita Elementary School.

One organization Rotary brought on board is the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, whose environmental education staff is already organizing teacher and student field trips to Sarita for close-up inspections of the rain garden approach. With Rotary funding, workshops for elementary and high school teachers will bolster environmental education up and down the Gulf Coast.

Adrien Hilmy, a Coastal Bend project manager, knew of Ryan's zeal for science. Rotary members were equally impressed. Together, they briefed school officials on the scope and scale of the educational opportunity that the Rotary grant would make possible. Ryan and the school principal, Kristen Tinsley, who is also the superintendent of the Kenedy County school district, agreed.

"Teaching expands the views of students about the water cycles on Earth — shortages and droughts, the effects of heat sources on water in the formation of hurricanes," says Hilmy. Organizers hope students will take from this project that "you've got to have a system in place" to manage stormwater and protect water quality.

"The main challenge of the Baffin Bay area," Hilmy says, "is that no single project is going to solve the problem. Rain gardens are a relatively low cost means

to treat water at the source. Their trees, bushes, and other plants absorb excess water through their extensive root systems. This is a replicable approach: small scale projects repeated over and over again throughout a watershed."

The Corpus Christi Rotary club was fortunate to have Arthur Zeitler, a past district governor but also a lawyer and past regional Rotary Foundation coordinator. While the club had been funding other people's conservation projects for years, the rain garden project took its 200-plus members into new territory.

A few years earlier, the club had joined the lobbying effort inside Rotary to establish an environmental protection category for Foundation funding. After The Rotary Foundation Trustees formally adopted the environment as an area of focus in 2020, Zeitler helped his club take advantage of the new opportunity. "The consensus that was building was that we needed to be more involved in the environment with larger, hands-on projects," he says.

Zeitler knew the grant process and, after a brief search, he contacted the Rotary Club of Los Altos Quetzaltenango in southwestern Guatemala to become the international partner. The two clubs had in the past supported school and water system im-



*Are you already working to protect freshwater resources? Or is your club ready to make a commitment to restoring and sustaining a body of fresh water? Provide your project details and contact information to get started. Visit [communityactionforfreshwater.org](http://communityactionforfreshwater.org).*



provements in Guatemala. Other funding came from clubs and districts across Texas and from districts elsewhere in North America.

After securing the \$90,000 grant, the work began at Sarita Elementary to design a rain garden that could be carved into the school's campus on Highway 77, the main north-south artery along the coast.

Though the Corpus Christi club had cleaned up beaches, planted trees, and supported many conservation projects, it had never organized a multinational Rotary project of this size so close to home. Its members speak with pride about donning their wellies, grabbing their shovels, and getting their hands dirty giving life to the Sarita rain garden. "The club members thought it was a great idea and jumped right on it," says Marge DeWitt-Crocker, a recent past president.

"We are very proud to be involved in this project," adds Zeitler. "Our rain garden prototype is the first one in our watershed." And, importantly, it requires a "shift in the philosophy" of real estate developers and building code managers to modify how they plan for and manage stormwater runoff in a manner that protects streams, rivers, lakes, and bays. Rain gardens are relatively easy to incorporate in new developments and can be added to the yards of homes,

businesses, and city property. A backyard rain garden can cost as little as \$5 to \$30 per square foot, add to property value, prevent flooding, and lower water bills. Already, one teacher workshop has been held and two smaller rain gardens sponsored by others are planned at area schools, Zeitler says.

Hilmy from the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program says the challenge for advocates has been to avoid laying blame or engaging in rancorous debate about who is responsible for the decline of Baffin Bay and instead rely on positive messaging that will draw all parties into a collaboration to bring Baffin back. "The goal is making incremental improvements across all sectors," Hilmy says. So far, there's strong community support for that.

Beyond the big concepts, this project was personal for the 47 Rotary volunteers from seven clubs who showed up in Sarita to plant purple sage, lantana, black-eyed Susan, and other native south Texas plants. Some of them drove more than 200 miles to participate. Interest was so high they had to introduce a waiting list. DeWitt-Crocker points to the excitement of a project with both educational and environmental impact: "Restoring nature and inspiring young minds is what this project is all about." ■

*Aided by a Rotary Foundation global grant, members cut the ribbon in May 2025 on the first rain garden in the watershed, designed to become a teaching model.*

Photos by  
**JASMIN BRUTUS**



In Bosnia, where basketball is beloved, these athletes get a place for hoops and team bonding — with an assist from Rotary

# They got game





● Six wheelchair basketball teams from across the region gathered at Kamberovića park for the inaugural tournament in September 2024. A survey revealed a desire for more spaces for people with disabilities to gather and socialize.



● **Bottom, right:** Zenica Rotarian Harun Imamović helped organize the tournament with support from a regional coalition of organizations of people with disabilities.

**S**ome of the biggest names in basketball (think Nikola Jokić, Luka Dončić, and Peja Stojaković) hail from the Balkans, where basketball is part of national identities. In a survey of people with disabilities in Zenica, about 40 miles northeast of Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 90 percent said that playing sports — including the beloved pastime — was a way to boost inclusion and belonging. In response, the Rotary Club of Zenica and partners, with funding from The Rotary Foundation, upgraded a basketball court at a popular park in the city for wheelchair basketball and sitting volleyball, culminating in a two-day tournament to celebrate the new space.







The Zenica Rotarians got involved in helping people with disabilities when the women's sitting volleyball club in Zenica, the only one in the country, approached them for financial support to attend a 2022 competition in Italy. In 2024 Rotarians launched a multi-pronged project

that included leadership workshops, a panel discussion on the need for inclusive employment, and a media blitz to raise public awareness. Four teams played in the kickoff volleyball tournament, and two new players joined as a result. Another tournament was held in June 2025.



# OUR CLUBS

## VIRTUAL VISIT

### The ramps of Madison County

Rotary Club of  
Madison County, Georgia

**At a tiny fairground** in rural Georgia, power saws were screeching and nail guns were thwacking through the crisp air by 8:30 on a Saturday morning in October. That could only mean one thing: The Rampbuilders were at it again.

The Rampbuilders, as they are known, are members of the Rotary Club of Madison County who have been building wheelchair ramps free of charge for neighbors since 1995, at a pace of more than 30 ramps a year. On this particular Saturday they reached a milestone. The 32-foot ramp they were building to replace one that was in disrepair at an outbuilding used for Cub Scout den meetings was number 1,000.

“When people think of the Madison County Rotary Club, they think of the

Rampbuilders,” says club member Mark Wiggins. “That’s who we are.”

It all started at the home of Harold McCarty, a polio survivor, just five years after the club’s charter. Three club members knocked on McCarty’s door while making the rounds for Meals on Wheels, the nonprofit food delivery program. Unable to use his legs to get down his porch steps, McCarty would crawl down to a wheelchair below. So the Rotary visitors came back and built him a ramp.

That first ramp was tough, but they got it done. “It took eight hours or better,” recalls member Jerry Bond. “All we did was argue all day long,” fellow Rampbuilder Phil Piché interrupts to explain. And in the end, they realized the ramp was missing handrails — something they rectified later. But seeing how the ramp changed McCarty’s life sparked something in the crew. Piché says McCarty, who died in 2015, “couldn’t talk he was crying so much” when they finished.

Another member of that first crew, Roy Gandy, became the program’s driving force, coordinating construction for decades and missing only a handful of the next 799 builds. “He had a kind heart for people in trouble,” says Gandy’s wife, Barbara, whom several people affectionately call Queen Barbara. Roy passed away last May at age 94.

The Rampbuilders eventually hit their stride, even breaking into teams to see who could finish their ramp fastest. The record was 18 minutes. Typically, construction now takes them close to two hours.

Every member has a ramp story that has stuck with them: the 11-year-old boy

with spina bifida whose bus driver requested the ramp and donated \$25 for it; the 10th grader with macular degeneration who dictated her thank-you letter; the woman who lost her legs to diabetes, who sang to the crew while they worked. “You can’t drive more than five minutes without seeing a ramp that we’ve done,” says program co-chair Bruce Gandy (no relation to Roy).

Materials generally cost \$750 to \$1,000. In Madison County, where nearly 1 in 5 residents live below the poverty line, the free ramps remove a “game-stopper” barrier to basic mobility. “We live in a depressed area,” says Bruce Gandy. “Our folks around here just don’t have the money.” Demand has never let up. Hospitals call the club when they discharge patients who need ramps.

Madison is a picturesque rural county in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, a place where everyone seems to know everyone. The club meets over a Southern-style breakfast every Friday to plan projects to help with mobility, food insecurity, and education, from delivering meals to older people to reading with second graders. The broad range of programs is thanks to the club’s “open door policy,” in which the group invites community members to share their needs with them.

Cub Scout Pack Committee Chair Adaris Rodríguez Cortés realized the group needed a new ramp when a child who used a wheelchair visited during recruitment. The old ramp was steep, boards were falling off, and it wasn’t compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Today's Rampbuilders are a mix of Rotarians and community members, like Artry Bishop, who joined on ramp 53 and has helped build some 650 more. The club also receives support from local businesses.

Over the years, several of the Rampbuilders would become beneficiaries. It was the late John Mallonee who brought his fellow Rotarians to McCarty's house to build the first ramp. The club eventually built Mallonee a ramp too. The crew showed up at Roy Gandy's house in the months before he passed away. His wife had to keep him inside during construction. "We didn't want him sitting on the porch telling us what we were doing right or wrong," jokes Ed Brown.

Back at the fairground, bathed in golden morning light, a few dozen members and volunteers assembled the ramp like they'd done it a thousand times before. Saws blazing, jokes and banter flying, Scouts and other onlookers smiling in gratitude and in awe. Then the saws and nail guns fell silent — ahead of schedule, of course.

But before everyone could celebrate with a barbecue lunch, Brown called past and present Rotarians and other volunteers in matching T-shirts made for the occasion to join him on the freshly built ramp for photos. Brown, who was a Boy Scout, described the Rampbuilders' mission using the Scout motto: "Do a good turn daily."

In the coming years, a new generation will have to step in to fuel the program. "Several of our ramp builders are older and they will not be able to build forever," says Club President Ben Morris, who is among the younger members. "I hope, over the next 30 years, I can be part of helping it get to 2,000." In no time, he'll start off toward the next milestone. After all, there are 15 people on the Rampbuilders' waiting list.

— HEATHER BUCKNER



The Rotary Club of Madison County has been building wheelchair ramps for neighbors since 1995. In October the crew built its 1,000th ramp, at a building used by Cub Scouts.

## HOW TO START YOUR OWN RAMP-BUILDING PROGRAM

Inspired to improve accessibility in your community? Here's how Madison County Rotarians recommend getting started:

- **Identify the need.** Check in with nonprofits and hospitals to identify residents who need ramps.
- **Don't let inexperience stop you.** Partner with vocational schools for basic carpentry workshops. Pair newcomers with more experienced builders.
- **Start simple.** Begin with basic designs: short runs and minimal turns. Work your way up to more complex builds.
- **Expand your crew.** Invite community members to join your efforts. Madison County's team includes about 12 Rotarians and 12 volunteers.
- **Secure local support.** Materials for each ramp can cost up to \$1,000, but businesses may help cover expenses.
- **Keep a waiting list.** Demand will likely exceed capacity. Madison County builds more than 30 ramps a year and always has applicants waiting.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

## Second to none

Rotary’s alumni honoree brings double the skills — and the zeal — to her peacebuilding efforts



**As a child** during Sri Lanka’s 26-year civil war, Pushpi Weerakoon planned to become a lawyer. “I was born into a civil conflict, walked minutes away from bomb blasts, and saw parents of my schoolmates killed,” Weerakoon said. “From a very early stage, I understood the cost of conflict, and I knew I had to do something about it.”

In 1999, with Sri Lanka a member of the British Commonwealth, Weerakoon headed to the University of Buckingham in the UK. There she earned a bachelor of law and a postgraduate diploma in international and commercial law.

Weerakoon fully intended to continue traveling down the barrister’s path, but nature intervened. She was visiting Sri Lanka from England when, on 26 December 2004, an earthquake erupted beneath the Indian Ocean off the northwest coast of Sumatra, an Indonesian island. The most powerful earthquake ever recorded in Asia and one of the deadliest natural disasters in history, it spawned a monumental tsunami that hit Sri Lanka and more than a dozen other countries and left more than 220,000 people dead.

Moved by the devastation, she began volunteering with groups to help survivors. The director of the country’s Alternative Dispute Resolution Institute asked her to train grassroots leaders in mediation, drawing on her law education. “After the tsunami,” Weerakoon explained, “so many small claims clogged up the main court system.” It was hoped that those newly trained leaders could help resolve contentious issues in Sri Lanka’s well-established community-based mediation boards.

She traveled throughout the country holding mediation workshops for three weeks of every month for two years. Because the country was approaching the final stages of the civil war, she was accompanied by members of the military into high security zones.

“Remember,” she said, “I was trained to be a lawyer, where you think in terms of black and white

and then punishment.” But in a situation where combatants on both sides think they’re right, Weerakoon continued, “that’s not a matter of black and white. It’s a matter of transforming mindsets, about opening up and sharing thoughts and values and ideas — and the law doesn’t exactly help that.

“With that thought, I came back home, and that was it. I decided I’m not going to be a traditional lawyer.”

What followed were years of additional study and an impressive aggregation of degrees on her way to becoming an internationally respected peacebuilder, supported by Rotary at multiple steps along the way. She received an MBA from the University of Wales, a master’s in conflict transformation at Eastern Mennonite University (with the help of a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship), a master’s in public administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and a PhD in peace and conflict studies at the University for Peace.

She also studied at the Rotary Peace Center at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, earning a diploma in peace studies and conflict resolution. “Chula was very hands-on,” said Weerakoon, clearly impressed with the peace center program. “It’s not this theory and

that theory. It was very practical: If it’s a class on mediation, you sit down and actually mediate.”

There were also trips in the field where peace fellows interacted with Indigenous people whose lives and livelihoods were threatened by plans for a hydroelectric dam. “What Rotary exposed me to was like gold,” she said. “The experience to see it, and then now having to actually do it.”

Impressive as they are, Weerakoon’s academic achievements served more as steppingstones rather than as goals in themselves. In Sri Lanka, she served as the coordinator of the National Reconciliation Secretariat and, in 2016-17, the civil society coordinator for the country in the Open Government Partnership, a global initiative that promotes collaboration between government ministries and nongovernmental organizations. In that role, she helped craft a national action plan to address crucial issues related to health, the environment, corruption, and access to information.

For the last nine years, Weerakoon has worked at the United Nations International Organization for Migration, where she has taken leading roles not only in Sri Lanka, but in such far-ranging destinations as El Salvador, the Bahamas, and Micronesia, mediating disputes, support-

ing disaster recovery, and combating sexual violence. In Bangladesh, home to Kutupalong, the largest refugee settlement in the world, Weerakoon served as IOM’s refugee support officer. In that capacity she helped design a social cohesion strategy and coordinated efforts to address the Rohingya refugee crisis.

In June, Weerakoon was honored for her work with the Rotary Alumni Global Service Award at the Rotary International Convention in Calgary. During her seven-minute speech, she challenged Rotary members to ensure that graduating peace fellows have the resources to best employ their newly acquired skills. “Rotary does not just spark change,” she said. “It cultivates generations of it. Let’s make sure we have the valuable insights from the post-fellow fraternity ... that will help Rotary build a mechanism to continue to carry the legacy forward.”

Her speech offered only hints of the things she has accomplished as an internationally respected peacebuilder. Instead, she emphasized how Rotary had been there for her at each step of her life’s journey. “What Rotary gave me wasn’t just scholarships,” she said. “It was a family, a belonging. It was the certainty that, no matter where I am, I would not be alone.” ■



### Pushpi Weerakoon

- Rotary Peace Fellowship, 2007
- Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship, 2009
- Rotary Alumni Global Service Award, 2024-25

At the convention in Calgary, Weerakoon receives the Rotary Alumni Global Service Award from Rotary leaders Stephanie Urchick and Mark Maloney.

HANDBOOK

# It's called EPIC for a reason

Rotary + community volunteers = big impact

**When you're planning** a service project this spring, don't just think big. Think epic.

Rotary members in eight countries (and counting) are doing just that through a grassroots initiative dubbed the EPIC Day of Service when clubs invite community members to join them on local projects. Held annually on the third Saturday in May, this day of service energizes club members and draws the public's attention to Rotary in the process.

"Rotarians go out and do community service projects all the time," says Brianna Sherman, global expansion chair for the Rotarian-run EPIC Day of Service Foundation. "But what we're saying now is, don't just do that. Bring community members into service with Rotary. Show them how Rotary can help them make an impact in their own community."

In 2024, for example, Sherman's club, the Rotary Club of Denver Metro South, filled bags with food for children to eat during school breaks. By engaging with the community, the 27-member club gained an additional 25 volunteers. Two years earlier the Rotary Club of Suffield in Connecticut worked with community leaders to plan a park cleanup, attracting more than 100 non-Rotarian volunteers.

The EPIC Day of Service started in 2022 when two district governors from Connecticut, Joanne Alferi and Jeff Krause, responded to 2021-22 Rotary President Shekhar Mehta's call for clubs to organize a community-oriented service day. What they thought would be a one-time event was so successful that it continued to grow. Colorado Rotarians got involved when they decided to replace an annual bike ride fundraiser with a day of service and realized that clubs in the Northeast U.S. were already doing the same. From there, a global website and nonprofit board have propelled the day forward.

Sherman sees the EPIC Day of Service as supporting Rotary's Action Plan. For example, the service day has created new pathways for joining Rotary and garnered media attention, Sherman says. It has also enhanced member engagement. Clubs partner on projects and members who've gotten to know each other begin meeting up at district events too.

"Growing Rotary is something I'm deeply passionate about," Sherman says. "And the EPIC Day has the potential to make that vision a reality." ■



**1.** The Rotary Club of Broomfield Crossing in Colorado spruces up a children's center **2.** The Surrey club in British Columbia stages a cleanup **3.** In Australia, the Social Impact Network club tidies a playground **4.** Colorado's Summit County Rotarians construct a medical equipment storage unit **5.** Clubs in Connecticut and Massachusetts pack 46,000 meals for food pantries in Appalachia **6.** The Lahaina Sunrise club in Hawaii restores a cemetery damaged by wildfires **7.** Rotarians in Whitefish, Montana, assist Habitat for Humanity **8.** The Highlands Ranch club in Colorado rewires solar panels for Ukraine **9.** Vashon Island, Washington, Rotarians remove trash from the shoreline

2025  
EPIC Day of Service

# BY THE NUMBERS

**5**  
continents

**8**  
countries

**20**  
U.S. states

**57**  
Rotary districts

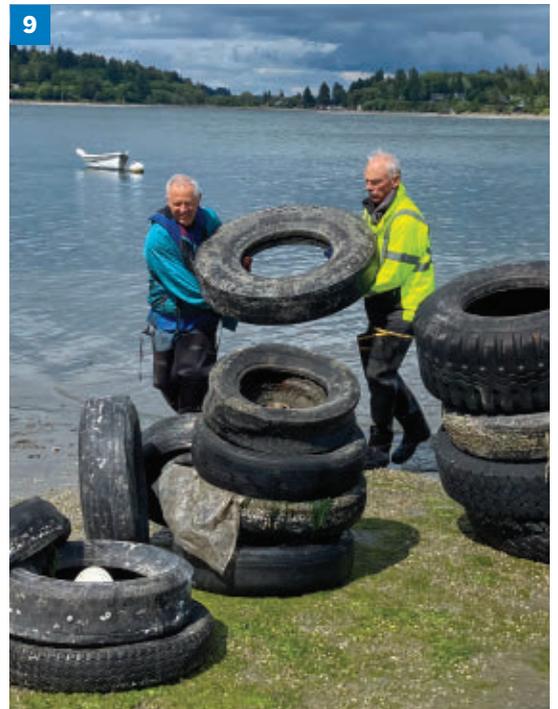
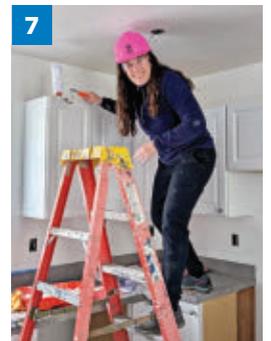
**539**  
clubs

**613**  
projects

**6,557**  
volunteers

**32,785**  
hours

**\$151,197**  
raised



**Save the date!** This year's EPIC Day of Service will take place on 16 May (clubs may plan a project as near to that date as possible). Find tips and resources to get started at [epicdayofservice.org](https://epicdayofservice.org).



TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

# Lasting transformation

When we think of global projects at Rotary, we often think of the cooperation between two clubs or districts that goes into Rotary Foundation global grants. These efforts form the backbone of our international grant activities. Yet we have also seen how larger projects can have even greater impact by attracting significant partners and long-term funding. These initiatives are measurable and visible, attracting yet more partners and new Rotary members who see the work in action.

Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria, one of the Foundation's Programs of Scale, embodies this vision. I asked **Dolapo Lufadeju**, a Rotarian from Nigeria and co-founder of the Rotary Action Group for Reproductive, Maternal, and Child Health, to share why this model has been so successful:

*Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria, which began in 2022, aims to reduce maternal and neonatal deaths by 25 percent. We focus on training doctors, midwives, nurses, and community health extension workers in emergency obstetrics, neonatal care, respectful maternity practices, and long-acting reversible contraceptives.*

*The most vital aspect is community engagement. We conduct dialogues with traditional, religious, and youth leaders. We are organizing joint medical outreach and home visitations. State ministries of health are increasingly adopting these*

*approaches as part of their primary health care interventions, using the template and methodologies Rotary developed.*

*Our electronic data-tracking system allows better monitoring of maternal and child deaths. Notably, our community-based system now tracks maternal deaths during home deliveries, something previously unmeasured.*

*Most significantly, maternal deaths dropped by 20 percent and neonatal deaths decreased by 28 percent in supported facilities, while postnatal clinic attendance increased by 10 percent.*

I am also a member of the action group and have followed this project for over 20 years, long before it was awarded a Programs of Scale grant. In November I observed the dedicated work there of the teams with midwives and health workers.

This evolution shows what's possible when Rotary dedication meets strategic partnerships. The program's success prompted Nigerian philanthropist Sir Emeka Offor to contribute \$5 million, allowing the initiative to expand. Other countries are interested in this model.

Every contribution you make to The Rotary Foundation strengthens its power as a global force for change that channels your generosity into lasting transformation.

**HOLGER KNAACK**  
Foundation trustee chair

## SERVICE ABOVE SELF

### THE OBJECT OF ROTARY

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

**First** The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service;

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

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

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

### THE FOUR-WAY TEST

Of the things we think, say or do:

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

### ROTARIAN CODE OF CONDUCT

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

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

## CALENDAR

# January events

### PEDAL OUT POLIO

**Event:** Ride to End Polio

**Host:** Rotary clubs of Daytona Beach West, Edgewater, New Smyrna Beach, and Southeast Volusia Golf, Florida

**What it benefits:** End Polio Now

**Date:** 10 January

Originally organized by the New Smyrna Beach club, this annual bike ride to raise money to fight polio is now a joint effort with three other clubs in District 6970. The ride begins at a park sponsored by the Edgewater club and continues along the scenic East Central Regional Rail Trail. Cyclists can choose among routes of 6, 20, and 30 miles.

### BACK AT THE RANCH

**Event:** Bourbon and Brisket

**Host:** Rotary Club of Cypress-Fairbanks, Texas

**What it benefits:** Guns to Hammers Construction

**Date:** 24 January

Held at a renovated barn on a 10-acre pasture, the club's second annual barbecue dinner features mouthwatering brisket alongside a range of bourbons and other libations. There will also be music, backyard games such as horseshoes and cornhole, and live and silent auctions. Proceeds benefit a nonprofit that remodels the homes of military veterans with disabilities to make their living spaces more accessible.

### WARM UP WITH A BOWL

**Event:** Chilly Chili Challenge

**Host:** Rotary Club of Blowing Rock, North Carolina

**What it benefits:** Local nonprofits and Coins for Alzheimer's Research Trust (CART Fund)

**Date:** 24 January

This chili cook-off is part of Blowing Rock's four-day WinterFest celebration. There are separate divisions for



### A RUNNING START

**Event:** 1st Day 5K

**Host:** Rotary Club of Fair Lawn-Sunrise, New Jersey

**What it benefits:** Local projects, nonprofits, and scholarships

**Date:** 1 January

Since 2003, the club has held a New Year's Day 5K run to promote healthy habits and community spirit, with last year's race attracting more than 400 participants. This year's doubles as the kick-off event for Fair Lawn's celebration of the 250th birthday of the United States. Those who prefer a more leisurely experience can take part in a 1-mile walk.

home cooks and professional restaurant chefs, with the chefs partnering with local nonprofits to raise awareness of the organizations' missions. Celebrity judges name the overall winners, while chili-sampling attendees determine the People's Choice Award by donating money to their favorite chef's nonprofit partner. The chef who raises the most wins.

### PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT

**Event:** Sheepshead Tournament

**Host:** Rotary Club of Whitnall Park, Wisconsin

**What it benefits:** Local projects

**Date:** 24 January

Sheepshead is a trick-taking card game that derives from the Bavarian game Schafkopf ("sheep's head" in German) and is especially popular in Wisconsin. This tournament takes place at the Greenfield Community Center and includes three rounds of play, a 50/50 raffle

during each round, and lunch and drinks for a \$25 admission fee. Cash prizes are awarded to the players who come in first, second, and third place.

### WALKIN' IN A WINTER WONDERLAND

**Event:** Skaneateles Winterfest

**Host:** Rotary Club of Skaneateles Sunrise, New York

**What it benefits:** Local and international projects

**Dates:** 30-31 January

The centerpiece of the club's annual midwinter celebration is the Taste of Skaneateles, featuring samples of food and drinks from about 20 area restaurants. Attendees can also stroll past ice sculptures, watch an ice carving demonstration, go on a scavenger hunt, and participate in an ice-cold plunge into Skaneateles Lake. The event kicks off Friday night with the ceremonial lighting of a bonfire inside an ice block chimney.

**Tell us about your event.** Write to [magazine@rotary.org](mailto: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.

ROTARY LEADERSHIP

## Larry Lunsford to be 2027-28 Rotary president

**Larry A. Lunsford, a member** of the Rotary Club of Kansas City-Plaza, Missouri, has been selected as president of Rotary International for 2027-28.

Lunsford attended what is now Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri, on an academic scholarship, earning bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting. He first encountered Rotary when he received a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholarship to spend the 1981-82 academic year at the University of Newcastle in Australia.

As a certified public accountant, Lunsford spent seven years working for the accounting firm Arthur Young and its successor, Ernst & Young. He joined a family-owned business, Bernstein-Rein Advertising, in 1990. He is the company's executive vice president and chief financial officer. He has held

positions on the boards of the Kansas City Spirit Festival and the Kansas City chapter of Variety – the Children's Charity, and he served as director of a local bank and as treasurer of the Epilepsy Foundation for the Heart of America Region. He has also served on Truman State University's alumni and foundation boards and received the university's Distinguished Service Award.

Lunsford joined the Rotary Club of Kansas City-Plaza in 1991 and has served as district governor (2001-02), RI director (2013-15), and trustee of The Rotary Foundation (2021-25, vice chair 2024-25). He has been a member of numerous RI committees, serving as chair of the Executive Committee, the Membership Growth Committee, and the Nominating Committee for President of RI. He also has chaired The Rotary



Foundation's Executive, Finance, and Participant Experience committees.

Lunsford has been awarded The Rotary Foundation's Distinguished Service Award and its Citation for Meritorious Service and the RI Service Above Self Award. He and his wife, Jill, have two children and one grandchild. They are Major Donors, Bequest Society members, multiple Paul Harris Fellows, Benefactors of The Rotary Foundation, and Sustaining Members. — ETELKA LEHOCZKY

PHOTOGRAPH: MONIKA LOZINSKA

**Rotary** 

**SUBSCRIBE TO ROTARY'S NEW WhatsApp CHANNEL!**

Rotary is now on WhatsApp! If WhatsApp is your choice for messaging, it's now easier than ever to keep up with all things Rotary.

Scan the QR code to view the channel. To follow it, click 'Follow' in the upper right corner of your screen. To read channel updates next time you open WhatsApp, click 'Updates' or 'Channels' in the menu bar.

**We can't wait to connect with you!**

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (required by 39 USC 3685)

1. Publication title: Rotary. 2. Publication no. 548-810. 3. Filing date: 19 September 2025. 4. Issue frequency: monthly. 5. No. of issues published annually: 12. 6. Annual subscription price: US\$18 domestic, US\$24 Canada, US\$36 foreign. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: One Rotary Center, 1560 Sherman Ave., Evanston, IL 60201-3698. 8. Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher: One Rotary Center, 1560 Sherman Ave., Evanston, IL 60201-3698. 9. Full names and complete mailing addresses of publisher, editor, and managing editor: publisher: Rotary International, One Rotary Center, 1560 Sherman Ave., Evanston, IL 60201-3698; editor: Wen Huang, Rotary International, One Rotary Center, 1560 Sherman Ave., Evanston, IL 60201-3698; managing editor: Jason Keyser, Rotary International, One Rotary Center, 1560 Sherman Ave., Evanston, IL 60201-3698. 10. Owner: Rotary International, an Illinois corporation not organized for pecuniary profit; Francesco Arezzo, president, Italy; John Hewko, general secretary, Evanston, IL, USA; Patrick Eakes, treasurer, North Carolina, USA. 11. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders: none. 12. Tax status: has not changed during preceding 12 months. 13. Publication title: Rotary. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: September 2025. 15. Extent and nature of circulation (average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months; actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date):

a. Total no. copies (net press run): 300,492; 286,735. b. (1) Paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions: 294,303; 283,248. (2) Paid/requested in-county mail subscriptions: 0, 0. (3) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other non-USPS paid/requested distribution: 0, 0. (4) Requested copies distributed by other mail classes through the USPS: 0, 0. c. Total paid/requested distribution [sum of 15b(1), (2), (3), and (4)]: 294,303; 283,248. d. (1) Nonrequested outside-county copies: 1,285; 1,253. (2) Nonrequested in-county copies: 0, 0. (3) Nonrequested mailed at other classes through the USPS: 0, 0. (4) Nonrequested distribution outside the mail (carriers or other means): 1,065; 1,055. e. Total nonrequested distribution [sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4)]: 2,350; 2,308. f. Total distribution (sum of 15c and 15e): 296,653; 285,556. g. Copies not distributed: 3,838; 1,179. h. Total (sum of 15f and 15g): 300,492; 286,735. i. Percent paid circulation (15c/15f x 100): 99.2%; 99.2%. 16. Electronic copy circulation: a. Paid electronic copies: 61,036; 62,251. b. Total paid print + electronic copies (sum of 15c and 16a): 355,339; 345,499. c. Total print distribution + paid electronic copies (sum of 15f and 16a): 357,690; 347,807. d. Percent paid (print & electronic) (16b divided by 16c x 100): 99.3; 99.3. 50% of copies paid above nominal price.

  
Wen Huang, editor in chief

# Rotary Action Groups

**Rotary Action Groups** help clubs and districts plan humanitarian service projects on various focused topics. The groups are organized by Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Rotary Peace Fellows with skills and interest in a particular field. Membership is open to people who want to share their expertise to make a positive impact or support action groups' projects and activities. Action group members have the opportunity to engage in meaningful service activities outside their clubs, districts, or countries. Clubs can draw on these groups to enhance projects, engage members, and attract new ones.



The Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group supported a river cleanup in India.

**Addiction prevention**  
rag-ap.org

**Alzheimer's and dementia**  
adrag.org

**Basic education and literacy**  
belrag.org

**Blindness prevention**  
bprag.org

**Blood and organ donation**  
ragbloodandorgandonation.org

**Clubfoot**  
rag4clubfoot.org

**Community economic development**  
ragced.org

**Diabetes**  
rag-diabetes.org

**Disaster assistance**  
dna-rag.com

**Endangered species**  
ragendangeredspecies.org

**Environmental sustainability**  
esrag.org

**Family health and AIDS prevention**  
rfha.org

**Food plant solutions**  
foodplantsolutions.org

**Girls' empowerment**  
girlsempowermentrag.org

**Health education and wellness**  
hewrag.org

**Hearing**  
hearingrotaryactiongroup.org

**Hepatitis**  
ragforhepatitiseradication.com

**Malaria**  
ram-global.org

**Menstrual health and hygiene**  
ragmhh.org

**Mental health initiatives**  
ragonmentalhealth.org

**Multiple sclerosis**  
rotary-ragmsa.org

**Peace**  
rotaryactiongroupforpeace.org

**Refugees, forced displacement, and migration**  
ragforrefugees.org

**Reproductive, maternal, and child health**  
rotaryrmch.org

**Slavery prevention**  
ragas.online

**Water, sanitation, and hygiene**  
wash-rag.org

Find out more by emailing or visiting the website of the group you're interested in or by writing to [actiongroups@rotary.org](mailto:actiongroups@rotary.org).

## Action groups at 20

**Last June marked the 20th anniversary** of Rotary Action Groups.

The program started in 2005 to differentiate Rotary Fellowships focused on humanitarian service activities from those facilitating networking around a common interest.

In the past two decades, more than 50,000 action group members in over 150 countries have supported service projects in critical areas like disease prevention, education, water, and the environment. Collectively, they have raised over \$10 million for more than 10,000 projects worldwide, helping transform small-scale projects into large-scale sustainable initiatives.

Below are a few highlights.

- **Rotary Family Health Days**, organized since 2011 by the **Rotary Action Group for Family Health & AIDS Prevention**, is one of the largest Rotary member-led health programs. The initiative, which has extended to more than a dozen countries in Africa and South Asia, offers free health screenings, testing, referrals, and counseling for disabilities and diseases at the program sites as well as guidance on nutrition and healthy lifestyle choices.
- The **Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Rotary Action Group** has supported various initiatives aimed at increasing Rotary's impact. Among them is the WASH in Schools Target Challenge, a Rotary-UNICEF pilot program in 2016-21 that motivated clubs to work with communities to provide improved water, sanitation, and hygiene services, stronger learning curricula, and teacher training.
- The **Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group** played a key role in Rotary's decision to add the environment as an area of focus and has supported clubs with guidance. To help clubs develop effective environmental projects, the group created a handbook with input from the United Nations Environment Programme in 2019.
- In 2022, the **Rotary Action Group for Reproductive, Maternal, and Child Health**, in partnership with Rotary districts, ministries of health, and two professional medical associations, received The Rotary Foundation's Programs of Scale award for the initiative Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria. The program significantly reduced maternal and neonatal mortality in targeted areas in Nigeria.

— HANNAH HERNANDEZ AND ZUHAL SHARP

2026 CONVENTION

# Your map of Taipei

**You'll be in the heart of Taipei** for the Rotary International Convention 13-17 June. It will be easy to travel between your hotel, the stadium for big-stage sessions, the convention center, and nearby must-see sites. A bus and train pass for the simple-to-navigate Taipei Metro, known as the MRT, is included in your convention registration.



**1**  
**TAIPEI DOME**

Convention general sessions

- Walk to nearby shops and parks

**2**  
**TAINEX**

House of Friendship, breakout sessions at the Taipei Nangang Exhibition Center

**3**  
**TAIPEI 101**

The skyline's signature tower

- See the city in its mountain basin from the observatory

**4**  
**NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM**

One of the world's premier museums

- Houses about 700,000 Chinese artifacts

CROSSWORD

## Global greetings

By Victor Fleming  
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas

**ACROSS**

- 1 Dip for chips
- 6 With 73-Across, happy new year, in Rome
- 10 Exploding cigar sound
- 14 "I think that I shall never see / \_\_\_ lovely as a tree"
- 15 Prefix with China
- 16 Thaw
- 17 Flintstone mom
- 18 Going \_\_\_ (bickering)
- 19 Dire sign
- 20 Happy new year, in Buenos Aires
- 23 Apply frosting
- 24 And so forth (abbr.)
- 25 Broken arm holders
- 28 Danson and Koppel
- 30 Boss on *Bewitched*
- 33 Coup \_\_\_
- 34 \_\_\_ Haw
- 36 Aesop's race loser
- 38 That, in Oaxaca
- 39 Happy new year, in Munich
- 44 Off-road wheels (abbr.)
- 45 Old Ford models
- 46 After-school org.
- 47 Big name in lawn care

- 49 Dynamic leader?
- 51 Allied political group
- 55 Change the decor of
- 57 "For indoor \_\_\_ only"
- 59 Sch. with campuses in Durham, Manchester, and Concord
- 60 "I double-\_\_\_ you!"
- 62 Happy new year, in Montreal
- 66 Shape of a notable office
- 67 DuVernay and Gardner
- 68 Tales of adventure
- 69 Baked Italian dish
- 70 Barbecue fare
- 71 Vote into office
- 72 "\_\_\_ I know that"
- 73 See 6-Across
- 74 Goes on and on

- 10 Low-budget flick
- 11 Sore throat soother
- 12 Andy Capp's quaff
- 13 Everest, e.g. (abbr.)
- 21 Bear witness (to)
- 22 First-born
- 26 Bad cut
- 27 Actor with top billing
- 29 "Be quiet!"
- 31 "Kids \_\_\_ days!"
- 32 H2O, to Henri
- 35 Hunted for morays
- 37 Lie at rest
- 39 Current rage
- 40 Google Maps rec.
- 41 Appraise too highly
- 42 Secrets-protecting doc.
- 43 Boxer's punch
- 48 Bring to shore
- 50 Totals, as a tab
- 52 Charges ahead
- 53 Like some plays
- 54 Bureaus
- 56 Barack or Michelle
- 58 Art stand
- 60 Take a nap
- 61 Tel \_\_\_
- 63 Amana appliance
- 64 Round bread of India
- 65 *The Lion King* role

**DOWN**

- 1 Deemed appropriate
- 2 Each, in pricing
- 3 Did nothing
- 4 Big truck
- 5 Astonish
- 6 Activist Jagger
- 7 "Do \_\_\_ others ..."
- 8 Asgard bigwig
- 9 "Them" alternative

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13	
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60	61						62	63	64			65			
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69							70				71				
72							73				74				

Solution on opposite page

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## Taipei, Taiwan

to attend the  
**Rotary International 2026 Convention**

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and more...

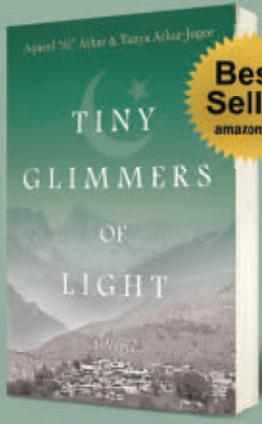


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# WHAT WILL YOU WATCH TODAY?



S	T	S	V	L	O	N	N	A	N	E	V	I	Z
E	L	E	T	M	E	I	L	I	T	Z			
S	A	V	S	A	V	L	A	V	L	O			
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R	H	J	S	U	E	S	N	H	O	H	E	H	
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A	P	M	E	L	I	D	O	N	M	A	P	O	
B	L	A	M	O	N	B	U	B	A	S	A	S	

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## Born of the mines

A coal miners' drink turns holiday tradition

**Boilo is a spiced** alcoholic drink and a cherished tradition where I come from in northeastern Pennsylvania's coal country. A modern American offshoot of the Lithuanian honey liqueur krupnikas, it is the creation of Eastern European immigrants who came to work in the coal mines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They adapted their old-world recipe to what was available, starting with moonshine and adding oranges and lemons for brightness. Over time, regional whiskey became a popular base, and today Four Queens is the staple variety. More bottles are sold in Schuylkill County than anywhere else.

Drinking boilo is more common in winter, and for some people, it's a big Christmas tradition. But you can enjoy boilo anytime. I know someone who made little jars of boilo and gave them out as wedding favors.

**HOW TO DRINK IT:** You usually enjoy it right out of the jar either at room temperature or warm. The best boilos have almost no alcohol flavor, and they can be consumed without even knowing that they contain spirits.

**DO IT YOURSELF:** Boilo isn't something that you buy. My colleague John Nonnemacher and I started making it because we thought it would be fun to enter a boilo competition held at the Schuylkill County Fair. We competed in three categories and ended up winning various top prizes. John and I shared our boilo with our colleagues and our friends and families. Everyone was excited to hear that they were drinking "award-winning" boilo. Making it has become a tradition. ■

**Mike Gaizick**  
Rotary Club  
of Hazleton,  
Pennsylvania

What food is your region famous for? Tell us at [magazine@rotary.org](mailto:magazine@rotary.org) and you may see it in a future issue.

ROTARY CLUB CENTRAL

# TRUE OR FALSE

**ROTARY'S MOST SUCCESSFUL CLUBS SET GOALS — AND NOT JUST FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR.**

**TRUE.**

When club leaders think about the future and plan beyond their year, they set their club up for long-term success.

**CLUB GOALS ARE ONLY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CLUB LEADERS.**

**FALSE.**

Every club member is responsible for their club's success. And as a Rotary member, you too can use Rotary Club Central to view your club's short- and long-term goals.

## NEED HELP?

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**ROTARACTORS CAN'T USE ROTARY CLUB CENTRAL.**

**FALSE.**

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**MORE THAN HALF OF ROTARY CLUBS USE ROTARY CLUB CENTRAL TO TRACK THEIR GOALS.**

**TRUE.**

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