

Rotary

FEBRUARY 2026

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Let action define us

At last month's International Assembly, President-elect Olayinka "Yinka" Hakeem Babalola called on members of the Rotary world to live out our presidential message for the 2026-27 Rotary year: *Create Lasting Impact*.

This February, as we observe Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Month, we have an opportunity to channel Yinka's call to action into real change.

Peace is not simply the absence of war. A life free from conflict but marked by hunger, instability, or the inability to care for one's family is not true peace. Peace requires liberty, opportunity, and respect for human dignity. Yet fear often blocks that path — fear of change, of cultural loss, of people we don't understand.

Fear isn't defeated through avoidance or aggression. Knowledge is the first step toward peace. Rotary embraces this idea. Our Rotary Peace Centers and their peace fellows, along with other peace education initiatives, demonstrate how knowledge builds trust and helps communities find solutions to conflict.

In Colombia, decades of conflict have left deep wounds. The 2025 Rotary Foundation Programs of Scale awardee, Pathways to Peace and Prosperity, partners with the United Nations World Food Programme to expand opportunity, improve conflict resolution, and connect people with social services. Its goal is to break cycles of violence, poverty, and food insecurity so peace can take root.

In Maharashtra, India, People of Action honoree Swati Herkal built peace through prosperity. Her

project confronted farmers' declining soil health, rising debt, and illness caused by chemical fertilizers. She and her Rotary partners launched a regenerative agriculture program that revitalized the land, lowered costs, and restored stability. More than 1,100 farmers now participate and over 50 villages have adopted the model.

Rotary also advances peace by restoring dignity. In Chad, Rotary Peace Fellow Domino Frank discovered that more than 1,500 women who fought in a rebellion had been erased from reintegration programs. His advocacy led to Chad's first Rotary Foundation global grant and the creation of Corridors of Peace. More than 100 women — triple the goal — completed literacy and vocational training and formed a cooperative to support their families.

From Colombia to India to Chad, the lesson is clear: Peace is not a dream. It is the result of sustained action with a focus on true, lasting impact. To replicate these successes, Rotary clubs can take three steps: Learn from peace fellows and other peace experts in our organization, apply a peacebuilding lens to community assessments, and prioritize impact over ceremony.

In a world filled with fear, Rotary cannot be satisfied with half-measures and empty words. If we are truly people of action, then action must define us. Together, we can *Create Lasting Impact* — across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.

FRANCESCO AREZZO
President, Rotary International



WELCOME



YOU ARE HERE: Ushuaia, Argentina

FINAL FRONTIER: At the tip of Argentina, Ushuaia is the southernmost city on Earth, giving rise to its nickname, “the end of the world.” It was built largely by prisoners sent there starting in the late 1800s to settle the remote Tierra del Fuego archipelago. Today the city is a hub for adventure tourism and the starting point for cruises to Antarctica, a two-day journey away.

THE PHOTO: Pronounced oo-SWY-uh, the city’s name comes from the Indigenous Yaghan term for “the bay that looks west,” referring to the Beagle Channel, a strait that cuts across the archipelago and forms the city’s waterfront. Illuminating part of the 150-mile passage is a lighthouse known by its French name, Les Éclaireurs, pictured here in a photo taken by Fred Koorey, of the Rotary Club of Coronado, California.

THE CLUB: Chartered in 1987, the Rotary Club of Ushuaia meets in a hall it recently built and named Casa de la Amistad, or House of Friendship, which it describes as a space for the exchange of ideas and community collaboration.

Rotary

MAGAZINE

February 2026

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The greatest Rotarian

Abraham Lincoln a member of Rotary?!? While history may say otherwise, Rotarians have long embraced the Rail Splitter as one of their own.

By Geoffrey Johnson

On the cover: India is arguably the most chess-obsessed nation, and Rotary members are helping grow the game. **Photograph by Siddharth Behl**



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STAFF CORNER

Na-Hyun Byeon

Senior annual giving officer, Korea office

I grew up in Seoul, and like many Korean students, my biggest challenge in high school was preparing for the Suneung, the intense, all-day national exam that determines university admissions and often one's career path. The entire country virtually pauses on exam day each November. Flights are temporarily grounded to reduce noise, businesses delay opening, and families across the nation offer prayers for test-takers.

My Suneung score was high enough to be admitted to Dongguk University, one of Korea's top-rated schools and one of the world's few Buddhist-affiliated universities. I majored in economics, a discipline that I felt offered clear answers to real-world problems. I later decided to double-major in political science because the two fields are often intertwined.

After graduation, I joined an international trading company specializing in brewery and beverage-dispensing equipment. I coordinated everything from import documentation and shipping logistics to arranging maintenance parts and deliveries. Since our clients were mostly overseas, the hours were grueling.

My next employer traded mine-clearing robots, but I later learned it was involved in weapons sales in conflict-affected regions. That discovery put me in a deep personal ethical dilemma. I didn't feel that my corporate jobs, whether tied to alcohol production or arms supplies, were contributing meaningfully to society. Burnout soon followed.

I left the corporate sector altogether and completed Korea's national social worker certification program. I began working at a long-term care center where I matched caregivers with older adult clients and made monthly home visits to assess their conditions and support the caregivers. Later, I joined a medical aid program, which provided essential care



Na-Hyun Byeon volunteers at dog shelters.

for marginalized groups, such as migrant workers and refugees. For the first time, I felt that what I did each day directly improved someone's life. But the job was also emotionally demanding and occasionally unsafe, especially when clients became agitated with the limited aid available.

In 2019, I came to Rotary as a fund development specialist. The role blends data analysis, fundraising, financial stewardship, and relationship-building, allowing me to draw on both my corporate background and my social work experience. It feels as if the different parts of my life have finally converged.

Outside of work, I volunteer at three animal shelters, where I clean, feed, and administer medication to dogs. In Korea, large dogs are often abandoned and rarely adopted because people have small apartments and the dogs are harder to train. I love Jindos, a native breed in Korea, and visit the shelters every weekend.

My husband and I spent an entire year traveling the world for our honeymoon. My favorite country was Myanmar. Its relaxed pace reminded me of Korea in the 1980s before rapid modernization transformed the rhythm of everyday life.

— AS TOLD TO SEOHA LEE

Letters to the editor

SAVE YOUR WORK

In the November issue, Holger Knaack presents a compelling case for the “undeniable impact” Rotary makes around the world [Trustee chair’s message]. He’s right. Our collective impact is a positive force in the world.

It is also undeniable that our continuing dependence on fossil fuels is warming the planet, putting in jeopardy all of the good work we have been doing. Rising global temperatures promise widespread drought, rising sea levels, mass migration, and an unstable world. The truth is there will be less peace and more conflict as long as we ignore this problem.

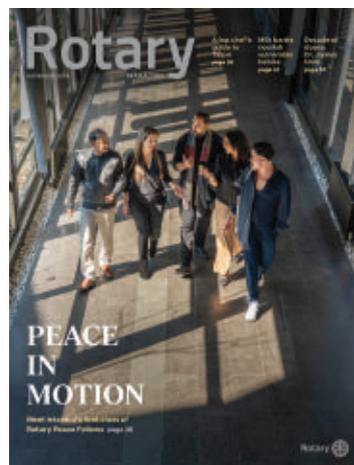
Rotary has adopted the environment as an area of focus. We are challenged to reduce carbon emissions, slow the rise of temperatures, and preserve the planet for future generations. Climate change is the truth. Taking action will be good for all concerned. There are few initiatives that have the potential of helping more people. If you or your club would like information on how you can help, visit the Rotary Climate Action Team network website at rcatnow.com.

Alan Anderson, Northfield, Minnesota

FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE

In 1985 we dared to make a solemn promise of a polio-free world. Forty years of perseverance have brought us to this moment where we are nearer to victory than at any other point in our journey — and yet some still question whether such a bold promise can truly be fulfilled.

Remarkable men and women have brought us thus far; they have saved millions of lives and brought polio to



near extinction. Despite the work of countless Rotarians before us, Rotary’s role continues to be a footnote rather than a headline. The remaining work requires our immediate and fervent attention [to ensure] that no child suffers death or the debilitating effects of polio and that the work of Rotarians before us has not been in vain.

I hope one day to be able to watch from afar to see our children’s children’s children find an old tarnished Rotary pin and inquire about its origin. I want to see their faces when they learn that Rotary is synonymous with the extraordinary work that brought an end to polio. Without the threat of polio, this will likely mean little to them. But I will smile. To benefit those whom we will never meet seems an apropos measure for the Service Above Self that we hold so dear.

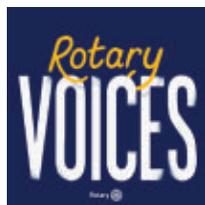
Tim Mulcrone, Prior Lake, Minnesota

OVERHEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In November, we wrote about milk banks, which provide donated breast milk for babies whose mothers are unable to breastfeed. The Rotary Foundation has awarded nearly 100 global grants toward milk bank projects around the world.

Loved this story! I had no idea of the need. Thank you for including this in the magazine.
Fran Finley
► [via Facebook](#)

This is such important work. Donated milk can be a real lifeline for vulnerable babies, and it is incredible to see how much difference these generous mums make.
Matt M.
► [via LinkedIn](#)



ON THE PODCAST

On a recent episode of *Rotary Voices*, broadcast journalist Jerome McDonnell sat down with leaders from the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, including Rotary International PolioPlus Committee member Valarie Wafer, to discuss recent developments in the GPEI action plan. Listen at rotary.org/podcast.



THE SPECIALIST

Like clockwork

For a watchmaker, keeping timepieces and their stories alive is meticulous work

I was working retail in high-end jewelry in Washington, D.C., in 2000 when I read an article titled “The Disappearing U.S. Watchmaker.” I did a bit of research and found a watchmaking school near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a pioneering city in American watchmaking. I gave my two-week notice and made the move.

Every watch has a legacy. People send in photos with their watches. One client sent a picture of himself sleeping on the deck of the USS Nimitz. Another was a member of the Air Force who wore his watch during a geological survey of Antarctica. I fix watches that have been passed down from generation to generation. What a joy to be able to keep those watches alive.

Horology is not just timekeeping. It’s human history, ingenuity, and engineering. People told time with sundials thousands of years ago. We used to lu-

bricate watches with whale oil and other animal fats. Here we are today with atomic clocks and watches with silicon hairsprings and diamond-coated wheels to reduce friction. Even since I graduated, the technology and craftsmanship of the industry have changed completely.

The hairspring is the heartbeat of the watch, moving the gears once every second. Typically in a watch you’ll have four gears, each with a smaller set of teeth, that create the division of time. Sometimes we must make parts that are no longer available. I even make my own tools when necessary. That’s the ingenuity of horology.

There’s no competition in the watchmaker business because there are so few of us. GIs returning from World War II were given free training to become watchmakers because the industry was so robust. Now, only one watchmaker graduates into the field for every 10 that retire. I’m a member of the Horological Association of Virginia, a tight-knit, diverse group of extremely talented clockmakers and watchmakers.

Watchmaking is a fantastic career if you have patience and like working with your hands. Many schools don’t charge tuition. You’ll never stop learning, and it’s heartwarming to know you can do something that is going to help somebody. Everything we do in watchmaking, just like in Rotary, comes back to purpose and passion. ■

John Polk
Rotary Club
of First Flight
(Kill Devil Hills),
North Carolina
Watchmaker



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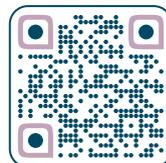


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ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT BY ASKING MEMBERS WHAT THEY WANT



Ensure that members know Rotary's full scope

Scott Learned attended his first Rotary meeting at age six. He came along to help his dad, a Rotarian, with a presentation about how useful computers could be.

Learned eventually became president of that club, the Rotary Club of Boise, Idaho, USA, and found that it, like many other clubs, sometimes faced challenges retaining members. While reviewing exit interviews for clues on how to keep people engaged, he realized that the familiarity he'd grown up with was missing.

"It seemed some exiting members didn't fully get introduced to the big picture of Rotary," says Learned, who is now District 5400's learning facilitator. "They didn't understand how they were part of something bigger and how their work, their gifts, could travel far beyond their club and actually impact lives in other communities and even on other continents."

Learned saw an opportunity to bridge that gap. As his district's Action Plan champion, he used resources from rotary.org/actionplan to guide conversations with members about what they wanted from Rotary, building on what he'd learned from the exit interviews. When club leaders ask members what they want from Rotary and then recommend relevant programs and activities, it creates a positive club experience that helps retain members and attract new ones.

Learned found that several clubs had already started revamping their introductory materials to address the situation. He combined the ideas he heard with the materials other Rotarians generously shared to create Rotary 101, a program that ensures that members have the knowledge they need to find meaningful ways to engage with all Rotary has to offer.



Programs and offerings empower members to make an impact

“Our goal is to educate and empower members,” Learned says. “We want every Rotarian to understand the avenues available to them to make an impact locally and globally.” Newer members might discover programs like Rotary Friendship Exchange or learn how to use resources like the Learning Center. And long-term members might find new ways to be people of action, like getting involved with their district resource network or the Cadre of Technical Advisers.

Through Rotary 101, members are introduced to essential aspects of our organization, including local club dynamics, Rotary International’s structure, and the work of The Rotary Foundation. By clarifying Rotary’s structure and highlighting transformative projects, members get a deeper understanding of our global impact.

Find opportunities to survey members on their satisfaction

A valuable component of this Rotary introduction is the participant survey. Through this questionnaire, the district can continue to refine its Rotary 101 content based on members’ interests and needs. This is similar to **Rotary’s customizable member satisfaction survey**. By asking members for feedback regularly and then

Scott Learned (left) with his dad, Kevin Learned

responding to it, clubs can identify what their members like and dislike about their club experience and develop plans to address those concerns and preferences.

That “take a leap and make it your own” mentality is one of the key ideas the Rotary introduction seeks to spark and nurture.

“If there’s a project or issue that interests you, it’s very likely there’s a Rotarian working on it, and you’re within an introduction or two from meeting them and taking action,” Learned says. “Rather than six degrees of separation, at Rotary it’s only two or three degrees, because our global network connects people all over the world with a common intent to do good. To me, that truly is the power of Rotary that club onboarding helps everyone to see.”

Visit rotary.org/actionplan to find the Action Plan Toolkit to help you enhance engagement, including the member satisfaction survey.

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MENTAL HEALTH

A phone call away

*How Lithuania more than halved its suicide rate with
helplines and other community-based approaches*

Taking phone calls from strangers wanting to share their life stories is not part of the typical job description for a nonprofit founder. But for Marius Čiuželis, it's all in a day's work. In 2016, he and his wife, Kristina, started *Sidabrinė Linija*, or Silver Line, an organization that offers free support to isolated older adults in Lithuania through regular phone calls with a “befriender” matched to their interests.

“On the first day we spoke for 10 minutes. The next time we spoke for nearly an hour, and she shared a lot about her life,” recalls Čiuželis, a member of the Rotary Club of Vilnius Lituania International from 2019 to 2023. “Her husband of 50 years died about six years ago, and she has no children. She is completely alone and in poor health. A social worker visits twice a week, but otherwise she’s basically locked in her house because she can’t move.”

Čiuželis says they discussed what bread she likes to eat and what kind of dessert he could bring if he visited. “She’s an extremely lonely woman who just wanted someone to talk to, like many elderly people, who don’t necessarily want to talk about big philosophies, just day-to-day things, rather than listen to the radio or watch TV all day.”

Sidabrinė Linija, which has befriended 6,000 older adults since its inception, has been just one of the many pieces of the puzzle to reduce Lithuania’s suicide rate, which is particularly high among older people due to a combination of isolation and a culture of keeping mental health issues bottled up.

Older adults, according to Čiuželis, account for more than 39 percent of all deaths by suicide.

In Lithuania, Čiuželis explains, asking for mental health support is still viewed with shame, particularly for older citizens who experienced Lithuania’s Soviet rule from the 1940s to 1990. Economic and political instability followed, which caused high levels of unemployment, inflation, and poverty.

“Many of those people are afraid that if they see a psychologist, especially if they live in a small, rural area, everyone will know their personal problems,” says Čiuželis. “The alternative is they are given a prescription for medicine, but it’s not what they need. We feel it’s important to encourage them to open up and talk — and once we build trust, we can refer someone to professional support, if needed.”

Sidabrinė Linija has received funding from the Lithuanian government as part of mounting efforts over the past 20 years to recognize the drivers behind the country’s high suicide rate and move away from a culture of hiding problems toward one where it’s considered OK to talk about them openly.

When Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004, it recorded a suicide rate of around 44 per 100,000 residents, one of the highest in the region. Since then, it has worked to reduce its suicide rate, which is now at about 19 people per 100,000.

In 2007, the Lithuanian government published its first National Mental Health Strategy, followed by the launch of its Suicide Prevention Bureau in 2015 and a Suicide

Visit the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives online at rotary.org/rotary-action-groups.



PHOTOGRAPH: (VILNIUS) GETTY IMAGES; (ČIUŽELIS) COURTESY OF MARIUS ČIUŽELIS

Left: A view of Vilnius, Lithuania's capital.
Right: Marius Čiuželis co-founded the Sidabrinė Linija nonprofit with his wife, Kristina.

Prevention Action Plan in 2016 with an emphasis on providing more community-based services and shifting away from an overly medicalized approach.

A national suicide prevention algorithm was launched in 2018 across all medical and social services to more easily identify at-risk individuals and offer specialist support. Last year, this algorithm led to 600 people receiving a full package of mental health support services and 1,200 undergoing comprehensive assessments, which is not insignificant in a country of just 2.9 million people.

Another cornerstone of Lithuania's campaign has been its mental health ambassador program. Launched in 2022, this initiative has deployed 100 ambassadors across the country who share their stories of seeking help for thoughts of suicide, to change attitudes and behaviors around mental health.

More generally, accessible mental health support is also expand-

ing nationwide. Since 2020, free psychological well-being services have been available at centers in every one of Lithuania's 60 municipalities, providing drop-in access without a doctor's referral. These centers serve over 30,000 people annually, addressing issues such as stress, depression, and anxiety, with the aim of offering support early, before someone's mental health issues escalate into suicidal thoughts.

Beyond direct mental health interventions, stricter alcohol control laws have played a part. Tackling this has been crucial as alcohol use disorders correlate strongly with the highest-risk groups for suicide in Lithuania: middle-aged and older men in rural areas.

"We do have a lot of mental health problems compared with other countries, so we need unique solutions to solve them," says Ignas Rubikas, head of the Lithuanian government's mental health division.

"We have now destigmatized

"We have now destigmatized mental health so much that our specialists are becoming overworked."

mental health so much that our specialists are becoming overworked," Rubikas adds. "But I think that's a good sign that we're acknowledging and accepting the problems, and that we have taken the first step towards solving them at a systemic level."

Another of those first steps is government-funded suicide prevention and intervention training for people to become "gatekeepers" who can more readily recognize and help someone who may have suicidal thoughts.



BY THE NUMBERS

55%

Reduction in Lithuania's suicide rate since 2004

1,370

"Gatekeepers" trained in Rotary project to recognize suicide risks and intervene

\$91,700

Rotary Foundation global grant to support gatekeeper program

Nearly 1,400 of these gatekeepers, drawn from local first responders, medical staff, teachers, and other community leaders, were trained through a project by Lithuanian Rotarians. Supported by a \$91,700 Rotary Foundation global grant, the project took place in nine communities from 2018 to 2020 and included the creation of local suicide prevention groups and additional psychological evaluations for at-risk individuals.

Throughout the country, around 10,000 people have become gatekeepers, half of whom have a mental health professional background. Among them is clinical psychologist Mantas Jeršovas, who has taken two free training programs — Safe

Talk, a community-based program, and ASIST, or Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, a more advanced two-day course on how to engage in deeper conversations with someone who is having suicidal thoughts. He is now a trainer himself, delivering free programs several times a year.

Challenges continue. The Lithuanian government has committed to support the influx of around 42,000 Ukrainian refugees since the Russian invasion in 2022, offering counseling and group therapy services.

And Sidabrinė Linija's Čiuželis wants to be sure the country's older people are not being left behind amid an emphasis on digital services and online communication

campaigns and what he perceives as an overall government mindset to prioritize the young at the expense of the old.

But amid the progress there's optimism from gatekeeper Jeršovas. "The government is really taking the high suicide rate in Lithuania seriously, and the numbers are going down," he says. "It's important to recognize that it's human to struggle when times are tough, but it's possible to work through it, if people know they have support and are not alone." — MARYLOU COSTA

A version of this article was originally published by Reasons to be Cheerful, a nonprofit solutions journalism outlet.

Sidabrinė Linija volunteers gather in a park. The nonprofit has befriended 6,000 older adults since its inception almost a decade ago.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health emergency, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S. by calling or texting 988 or going to [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org). If you are outside the U.S., visit [findahelpline.com](https://www.findahelpline.com) to get connected with a service in your country.

Short takes

Rotary members joined global health leaders in a discussion of polio eradication at an event held alongside the United Nations General Assembly in September.

For the 17th consecutive year, The Rotary Foundation received the top rating of four stars from Charity Navigator, an independent evaluator of U.S.-registered charities.



PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF MARIUS ČIUŽELIS; ILLUSTRATIONS: GETTY IMAGES



PROFILE

Outbreak breaker

Rotary set this doctor on a mission to finish polio

Dr. Siniki Fandebnet
Rotary Club of
N'Djamena, Chad

Almost 30 years ago, a Rotarian asked Siniki Fandebnet if he'd like to be part of a new Rotaract club in Chad. He joined immediately. "Rotary International's humanitarian goals were a perfect match for my aspirations as a medical student," he says.

Growing up in Chad, Fandebnet was no stranger to polio. "I had friends with polio, some of whom were disabled for life," he recalls. But Rotary helped him understand the power of a collective commitment against the disease. As a Rotaractor, he participated in polio immunization campaigns, explaining the benefits of vaccination to parents who had heard conspiracy theories or thought their religion prohibited it. The work convinced him to specialize in orthopedic surgery and devote his thesis to the fight against polio in Chad. His final medical training topic was the importance of National Immunization Days.

After medical school, Fandebnet joined a Rotary club and continued his work with people disabled by polio through free medical caravans. As a professor of surgery, he also travels to other countries to operate on children to improve their mobility and train health professionals to treat people affected by polio.

In September, Fandebnet was appointed Chad's polio incident manager. In this role, he coordinates the work of experts in Africa's Lake Chad basin as their countries pool efforts to stamp out poliovirus outbreaks and end the disease.

"Rotarians in Chad remain fully engaged in the fight against polio through action, supervision, and advocacy," he says. "Their dedication embodies Rotary International's core values of service, integrity, and humanity." — DIANA SCHOBBERG

This month marks the centennial of Rotary in Hungary and Sweden, where the first clubs were chartered in Budapest and Stockholm, respectively.

The 2024-25 Rotary Annual Report is available at rotary.org/annualreport.

Rotary Peace Fellowship applications will be accepted through 15 May. Learn more at rotary.org/peace-fellowships.



People of action around the globe

By Brad Webber

Jamaica

Called Jamaica's storm of the century, Hurricane Melissa swept across the island in October, devastating southwestern coastal communities. "Trees and power lines had fallen, roofs had been blown away, and some buildings had collapsed," says Dominica Pradère, a past president of the Rotary Club of Montego Bay, one of the worst-hit areas. Two members' homes were severely damaged, and all were left without electricity or running water for weeks. "Once we were able to communicate, we began to explore ways to assist people whose situations were far worse than our own," Pradère says. Club members provided relief packages to several communities, working in partnership with the Rotary clubs of Kingston and Ocho Rios, and ShelterBox and Food For The Poor. "Fortunately," Pradère says, "we have a network of Rotary friends and other organizations around the world who want to assist as we help communities and institutions to get back to normal."



185 MPH

Hurricane Melissa's wind speed in Jamaica



United States

For more than a decade, Iowa Rotarians have conjured up a frightful tradition for people seeking a Halloween scare. The undertaking started in 2012, when the Rotary Club of Eldora leased an abandoned city-owned hospital and turned it into a haunted fundraiser attracting visitors from across the state and new interest in the club. When the hospital was sold in 2023, the Rotarians created a new spooky attraction, an outdoor haunted trail. Costumed actors, including high school thespians, line the half-mile wooded path. "Honestly, the area is creepy enough without any props or decorations," says Marc Anderson, club president. Proceeds are donated back into the community, primarily to the high school boosters. The club's dozen members all pitch in to handle crowd control and ticket sales. "Most importantly," Anderson says, "one Rotarian has to pick up pizzas to feed our actors at the end of each evening."

500

Visitors spooked nightly by Eldora Rotarians



PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF ROTARY CLUBS

1571

Earliest written reference to Hungary's Tokaji Aszú dessert wine

Hungary

A charity wine auction by the Rotary Club of Budapest-Margitsziget in November sold off over 100 bottles. Local wineries and three other clubs — Berlin-Gendarmenmarkt, Milano Sud-Ovest, and Paris-Quai d'Orsay — donated signature wines from their countries. The fundraiser's attendance nearly doubled from 2024 and helped raise about \$17,000 for the Fellegajtó Nyitogatók Foundation, which is constructing a residential home for children with disabilities. "We are delighted by the outcome, which far surpassed our expectations," says Ferenc Szénási, the club president. "It is a great joy to see how the strength of community can bring real change."



Club of Budapest-Margitsziget

1 in 100

Children worldwide born with heart defects



Vietnam

The Rotary Club of Saigon International participated in two global grant projects with District 3740 in Korea that have corrected congenital heart disease for 100 Vietnamese children since 2023. The \$125,000 Heart-to-Heart project helps low-income families bridge the gap between what the government covers and what they're able to pay out of pocket. "We chose pediatric heart surgery because, with a relatively small contribution of \$1,500 from us, we can quite literally save a child's life," says Hoa Nguyen, president-elect of the club. Rotary contributions are matched by the VinaCapital Foundation and the Vietnamese government. The impact on livelihoods is significant, Nguyen notes, as caregivers are able to return to the workforce after their child's recovery.



Club of Saigon International

Mauritius

On the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, Rotarians are helping the country shift from an agricultural economy dominated by sugar to one centered on technology, banking, and tourism. The Rotary Club of Haute Rive joined the Ministry of Education to coordinate a job and education fair to connect job seekers with employers in hospitality, financial services, information technology, manufacturing, education, retail, and other industries. "For many, it was a first-time experience of being seen, heard, and valued in a professional setting," says Deeksha Bundhoo, a member of the club, which has since established a mentorship program. Government officials lauded the outreach. "The fair represents a bridge between the aspirations of our youth and the evolving needs of our industries," says Mahend Gungapersad, the country's minister of education and human resource, who attended the fair with other senior officials and members of Parliament.

\$12,000

Average annual earnings of Mauritians at businesses with 10+ employees



Club of Haute Rive

GOODWILL

It's foundational

Can these eight pillars support more than just peace?

By Alison Sutherland

As a longtime Rotarian, I've watched as members have embraced Positive Peace — not just working toward a lack of conflict but creating and sustaining the building blocks of more peaceful societies. The Institute for Economics and Peace has developed eight Pillars of Positive Peace, those elements that have the strongest correlation with peacefulness. When you look at the way Rotary operates, it's not a stretch to think these pillars could be incorporated not just into our peacebuilding efforts but into any of our service projects. Let's take a closer look.

1. Free flow of information

Service projects often come about because a Rotary member with a big heart has seen a need somewhere and brought it back to their club. But what is really required is a community assessment. Members might think the need is a means of cooking, whereas the community says no, it's clean water to put in the cooking pots. If the assessment is done well, that's more or less your whole project in one paragraph because you've engaged with community members, determined what their priorities are, learned about their strengths and resources, and identified other collaborators to tackle the problem. But more importantly, you've brought everyone to the table and listened to them.

2. Equitable distribution of resources

This comes up again in the community assessment as you ensure you don't overlook a group of people. Who are the people that benefit? Are some of those groups excluded from the conversation? Will some be disadvantaged as a result of this project? Don't disregard any groups because you think they're not involved. Get them involved so they have ownership and a voice.

3. Acceptance of the rights of others

This is embedded in The Four-Way Test and something you see in Rotary's culture of belonging. Everyone is welcome. This is underpinned by Rotary's diversity, equity, and inclusion statement, which celebrates the contributions of people of all backgrounds and values differences in ideas, thoughts, and beliefs. You need to make sure that everyone has that equal voice.

4. Good relations with neighbors

This is seen in the way Rotary operates on the world stage. It advocates for international understanding, goodwill, and peace. It does not take sides. It is non-political and nonreligious. With service projects, I also think of this as the principle of "first, do no harm."

If you're drilling a water well, you might decide to put it in a particular village just because somebody had visited it. But what if the adjoining village doesn't have water either? Is that going to create difficulties between the two? Could you put it on the boundary? But then who's going to have ownership, maintenance, and access? If you don't think about some of those things, you could bring friction.

5. Well-functioning government

Rotary is founded on good governance from our directors and trustees down through the zones, districts, and clubs. There are teams, committees, and boards to handle the work of Rotary in a synchronous way. Likewise, when you're planning a project, you have to make sure it's clear

who is doing what and whether the necessary structures are in place.

6. Sound business environment

Rotary hires consultants and experts to advise on the safekeeping or investment of Rotary funds. Clubs have officers who follow this practice of maximizing assets and adhering to the ethical values of Rotary. When preparing a global grant request, ask yourself, Does any party involved have a conflict of interest or stand to make personal gain? Are the people you're partnering with in alignment with Rotary values? Global grants should have measurable outcomes. What are the inputs and the outputs? Are the monitoring and evaluation in place with specific milestones and deliverables identified? These same principles apply to any project undertaken by clubs and districts.

7. High levels of human capital

This is at the core of what we do at Rotary, with many programs designed to develop leadership abilities such as Rotary Peace Fellowships, Rotary Scholarships, and Rotary Youth Leadership Awards. Within a service project, look for opportunities for capacity building. Will folks be gaining new skills as a result? Think about how you could make the project stronger and bring in sustainability.

8. Low levels of corruption

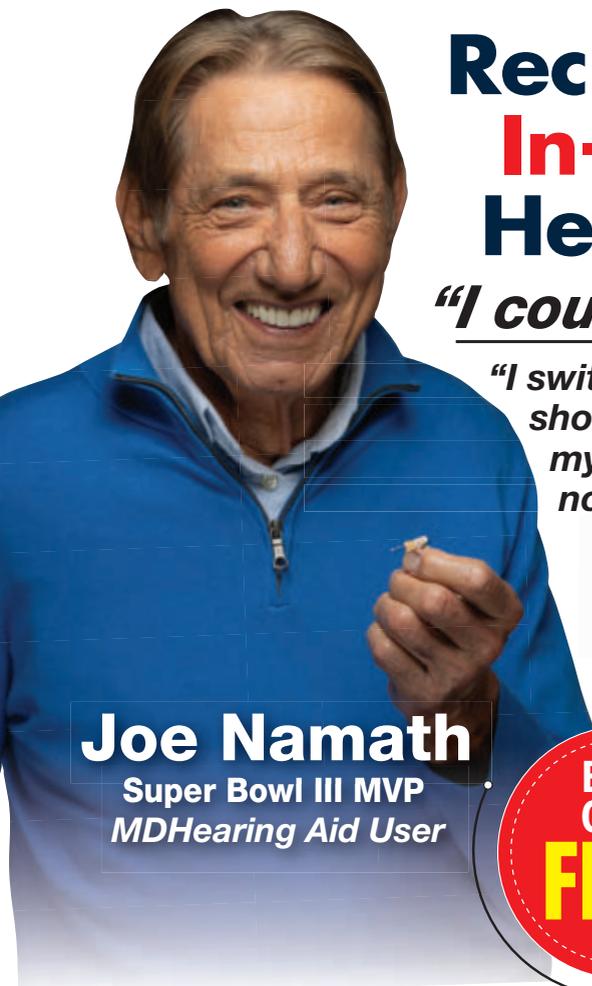
The fact that Rotary has received the highest rating from Charity Navigator for years is an indicator of its transparency. Its checks, measures, and stewardship mechanisms

at every level of the grant and investment cycle are second to none. Apply similar levels of transparency in all of your service projects. ■

Find a Positive Peace design checklist at on.rotary.org/peacechecklist.

Alison Sutherland, a member of the Rotary Club of Cardiff Bay, Wales, is a former chair of the Rotary Action Group for Peace and a member of The Rotary Foundation Cadre of Technical Advisers. This article was adapted from the newsletter of the Rotary Action Group for Peace. Subscribe at rotaryactiongroupforpeace.org.

Learn how The Rotary Foundation Cadre of Technical Advisers can help shape your projects at rotary.org/cadre.



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ESSAY

Heart and soul

As he laments his brother's death, a Rotary program officer celebrates those who selflessly pursue peace

By Moh Eid



Though not a Rotarian, Ibrahim Eid (above) was always ready to serve others. Left: The two brothers, Ibrahim and Moh, shared a close bond as boys and young men.

I do things from a different place in my heart now.”

Those were the last words that Ibrahim, my younger brother, ever spoke to me. He said them in May 2025 during what would be our final phone call. I was calling from the United States. An employee of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ibrahim was resting on a narrow cot in a tent at the field hospital in Al-Mawasi, Rafah, in the Gaza Strip. It was not a patient’s bed but what had become his makeshift office. Outside, drones buzzed overhead, their sound constant and loud.

We started, as always, with small talk. In the Middle East, we break the ice by asking, “What did you have for lunch today?” A nice way to check on each other.

But for over a year now, when Ibrahim asked me that, I didn’t know how to answer. It had been months since I could bring myself to describe a plate of food. How could I when he was telling me that he and his colleagues were sharing another can of beans, if they were lucky enough to find one? I would ask him how our family in Gaza was doing, and he’d tell me that our parents were surviving on what little they could get. No medicine. No clean water. No clothes or shoes. People had lost everything.

Yet Ibrahim spoke with a calmness that puzzled me. Maybe it came from his new role as a weapon contamination officer, responsible for treating unexploded bombs scattered across neighborhoods. To protect life, he daily dealt with the tools of death. “If we do not do it,” he said, “children will end up finding them.”

Ibrahim was four years younger than me. Ever since we were kids, he liked to follow in my footsteps. We went to the same college, took similar classes, even shared the same professors four years apart. We learned to dive together, watching lessons on YouTube and then practicing in open water. We were each other’s safety buddy. He was taller and bigger than me — much bigger — and I used to joke when introducing him to friends that he was my little brother. People would burst out laughing instantly. Even relatives visiting us from abroad often thought he was the eldest son.

Ibrahim was very ambitious and hardworking; even during the war, he

enrolled in an online MBA program at a national university. He believed in education and the power of knowledge to uplift communities.

In October 2023, on the second day of the war, a jet dropped what seemed to be a one-ton bomb on our family’s neighborhood in Rafah. The house collapsed while Ibrahim was asleep. Neighbors clawed through the rubble to reach everyone. He came out bloodied, his right arm torn by shrapnel. At the hospital, doctors stitched up his wounds on the floor and sent him away. The beds were for those less “fortunate.” That same day, Ibrahim went back to check on our family and neighbors, making sure everyone else was safe.

For the next 19 months, Ibrahim, along with our brother Ayman, became the protector. He moved our elderly parents, two sisters, and our baby niece, Susu, from place to place, 10 times in all, trying to escape airstrikes, drone attacks, and the ground invasion. Sometimes they slept in the open. Sometimes there was no food or water for days. When the internet worked, we talked over WhatsApp. When it did not, I stayed awake through the night staring at the screen, waiting for their names to light up again.

Ibrahim had a great sense of humor. Humor was our armor. Even when everything around him was breaking, he could find something to make everyone smile. He did not use humor to escape reality; it came from a mature and caring place, meant to lift others and help them face a difficult day.

I left Gaza in 2017. I had been accepted as a peace fellow at the Rotary Peace Center at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the United States. The night before I left, I was deeply sad knowing I would be away from my family for two years. The thought of leaving them felt

Humor was our armor. Even when everything around him was breaking, Ibrahim could find something to make everyone smile.

unbearable. “Do not think twice,” said Ibrahim. “Go learn. We will be here when you come back.”

The next morning, Ibrahim grabbed a decorative drum we had at home and used it to give me a zaffa — a jubilant wedding-style procession — to send me off. Our last morning together was filled with laughter, dancing, and tears. That was Ibrahim. He made sure that even in goodbye, there was joy.

In the United States, life moved forward. I studied international development at Duke and global studies at UNC. After graduating, I worked with a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., then returned to UNC to teach courses in conflict analysis and civil society. When Rotary announced that it wanted to hire someone to help establish a new peace center in the Middle East and North Africa and support the Rotary Peace Centers program, I knew immediately that I wanted to apply. It was the dream job Ibrahim had encouraged me to chase.

IN JULY 2025, I RECEIVED a phone call from Linda Low, a friend and a past president of my former Rotary club. “Moh,” she said, “we had a guest speaker who just returned from Gaza. When he spoke about one of his colleagues, we realized he was talking about your brother.” During the club meeting, the guest speaker fondly recalled Ibrahim’s remarkable laughter, and he spoke warmly of their time together. Though this was someone I had never met, it brought me great comfort to know that my brother’s spirit and character had touched others in such a meaningful way.

That guest speaker was Henrique Garbino, a Rotary Peace Fellow from Brazil. He had been deployed to Gaza with the International Committee of the Red Cross. I reached out immediately. When we met over Zoom, Henrique described setting up the field hospital in Rafah, the same hospital where my brother worked. Their interaction was brief, but the fact that they had worked together in such a challenging situation made the connection deeply meaningful to me and my family. Knowing that another Rotary Peace Fellow had crossed paths with my brother, that their lives had intersected under the same banner of service, was overwhelming. I wept and felt a deep sense of gratitude.



Ibrahim with Moh in Istanbul in 2022, the last time the brothers would be together, and with their niece Susu.



Ibrahim was my younger brother, my shadow, my mirror, my buddy. Today, I carry his voice with me into every conversation about peace.

My conversation with Henrique brought me a fragile sense of peace. Yet even as I held onto that comfort, the memory of the day we lost Ibrahim still returns with the same clarity, as if no time has passed. It was 24 May 2025. Ibrahim had come back from his work with the Red Cross to the temporary shelter where our family was staying. It was his 32nd birthday. He had invited a friend over, and later that day he planned to visit the family of the woman he loved to ask for her hand in marriage. My mother had prepared food for Ibrahim and his friend, and they sat on the roof, sharing lunch before heading out.

A sophisticated military drone spotted them and struck the roof with a missile. The explosion tore through the concrete, sending shrapnel in every direction. The blast pushed downward through the ceiling and into the floor below, injuring my father. As everyone screamed in shock, they realized the explosion had originated on the roof. My mother called Ibrahim's name and, together with my sisters and wounded father, ran upstairs. They found Ibrahim and his friend in their last moments of life. They tried to keep them alive, but there was nothing

they could do. Both died in their arms as my family wept.

Neighbors arrived and helped take the bodies to the hospital. Because of the ongoing bombardment, the hospital urged the family to arrange the burial without delay. There was a short prayer, then a hurried funeral at a nearby cemetery. Though they lived only a few steps away, my mother and sisters were denied a last embrace. It was too dangerous for them to venture outside.

In the days that followed, I found myself sending messages to Ibrahim's phone, hoping somehow to hear his voice again. I replayed our last call over and over in my head. I remembered that, when I told him I was worried about his new work responsibilities, he had replied, "People need all the help they can get. I don't do this as a job. I do things from a different place in my heart now."

Ibrahim was not a member of Rotary, but he lived Rotary's spirit: serving others, lifting those around him, and believing that compassion can exist even amid rubble. He used his own money to buy food packages for neighbors and delivered supplies to families who had nothing left, and every day he risked his

life to make the streets safer for children.

Ibrahim was my younger brother, my shadow, my mirror, my buddy. We helped each other out of trouble, and we got each other into it too. He believed in the power of knowledge, the courage of kindness, and the duty to act when others cannot. Today, I carry his voice with me into every conversation about peace. His story is not only mine; it belongs to every family that has lost someone who simply wanted to live.

If you are reading this, I ask you to honor Ibrahim by supporting the Rotary Peace Centers program. This fellowship gave me, Henrique, Linda, and others like us the tools to serve where peace feels most fragile. It trains people to listen where anger speaks loudest, to rebuild what violence tears apart.

That is how I choose to honor my brother, by continuing the work he believed in. Because even after everything, I still believe, as he did, that peace begins in the heart that refuses to give up. ■

A Rotary Peace Fellow and a member of the Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse (in Illinois), Moh Eid is a program officer for the Rotary Peace Centers.



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Ashirwad Tupe (left), president of the Rotary Club of Hadapsar Central, India, smiles as student Pavani Sachin makes her move.



The gambit

In India, a chess renaissance draws players to the game and its gifts

By Geetanjali Krishna

Photography by Siddharth Behl



It's 9 o'clock on a Sunday morning

and the temperature is soaring toward the 90s as hundreds of children make their way toward Marina Beach in the southern Indian metropolis of Chennai. Yet there's not a towel or sand pail in sight — only water bottles and chessboards tucked under arms as the kids veer toward a college along the shore. Here, over the next several hours, knights will be sacrificed, pawns queened, and kings toppled at this fiercely competitive tournament — one of hundreds held almost daily in what is arguably the most chess-obsessed country in the world.

On this morning in September, some of the younger players are so small they have to stand at the tables to reach across the chessboards. Around the venue, inspirational posters feature local and international grandmasters. A wide-eyed 6-year-old approaches a large photograph of Gukesh Dommaraju, the teenage prodigy from Chennai who at 18 became the youngest world chess champion ever in 2024. "Maybe one day I can be like him," the child says, an aspiration unquestionably held by children — and parents — all over the country.

From its roaring metropolises to its bucolic villages, India has an enthusiasm for chess on par with that for professional basketball in the United States or for Premier League football in England. And like these franchises, competitive chess is coming to be seen as a golden ticket to international stardom and prestige for young players with the talent and drive to make it to the top. Children carrying rolled-up chessboards through city streets are a common sight. Elite acad-

emies nurture budding prodigies, and high-stakes tournaments offer the prospect of cash prizes, corporate sponsorships, and social media fame. Among those nourishing this chess renaissance, it turns out, are legions of Rotary members.

At the Victorious Chess Academy in the western city of Pune, in a little shrine decorated with flowers and incense, instructors have made a traditional *rangoli* — a drawing with colored powder — of the Hindu god Ganesha. But there is a twist: Ganesha, a popular patron of letters and learning, is reading a book of chess rules. For the students here, says founder Kapil Lohana, "chess is a religion."

Seeking to tap into that passion, Rotary members, clubs, and districts around India are sponsoring tournaments and collaborating with chess academies to expand access to the game, recognizing it presents a pathway to educational advancement, connection, and potential prosperity for the communities they serve.

Lohana regularly organizes tournaments sponsored by Rotary clubs. His academy coaches students in more than 30 countries; one student, Harshit Raja, became India's 69th grandmaster in 2021. Playing chess competitively helped Lohana find a route out of poverty. He grew up on a cotton farm in central Maharashtra state's drought-prone Yavatmal district, known tragically for its high rates of farmer suicides.

"In 2003, I told my father that I didn't want to be a farmer and came to Pune to participate in my first chess tournament," he recalls. His father disapproved, but Lohana won a small cash purse and spent the next few years competing and living off his winnings. "My own experiences helped me realize that in order to develop international-level players we need to provide the right atmosphere, quality coaching, opportunities to compete and, most of all, financial support to needy players." With this aim, he founded Victorious Chess Academy and started a special grandmaster train-

Clockwise from top:

Playing chess helped Kapil Lohana, director of Victorious Chess Academy, find a route out of poverty; his student Om Ramgude, 12, already has his eye on the grandmaster title; Rota Chess 2025 in Chennai drew hundreds of kids.





ing program for advanced players, offering discounts for rising stars who couldn't afford tuition.

One of those rising stars is 12-year-old Om Ramgude. Rated an 1,836 by the International Chess Federation, Om already has his eye on the grandmaster title. He was barely more than a toddler when he began playing chess online. "I'd downloaded the chess app for myself, but it was Om who quickly began solving puzzles and winning games online to advance to the highest level," says his mother, Manisha Dayanand Ramgude, a software developer in her 40s. "Can you imagine? He was only 5 at the time!" Marooned at home during the pandemic, little Om immersed himself in online matches, often challenging — and besting — players far older.

Meanwhile, more and more people, especially parents, are coming to view chess as a way to improve academic performance, decision making, critical thinking, and memory skills. In Pune, Aparna Bodhe has been bringing her 5-year-old twins, Parikshita and Aradhita, to the White Knight Chess Academy for coaching. "Playing chess has definitely calmed them down," she says, as her girls play and giggle at a chessboard. "Earlier, it was impossible to make them sit, but three months of chess has made them a little more focused and able to sit down and concentrate."

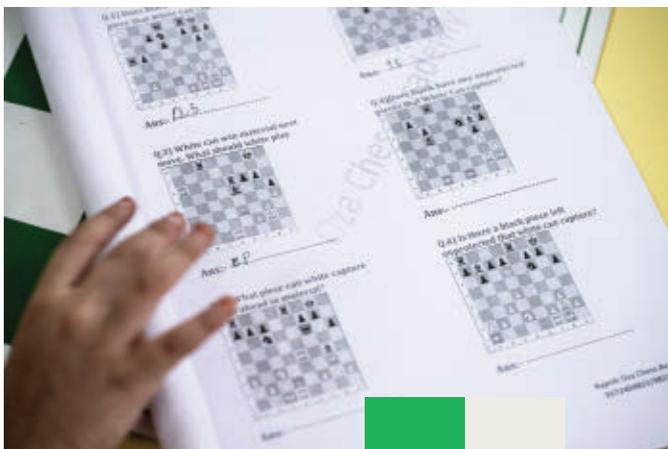
Many of the young players have improved their grades at school, says Ashirwad Tupe, a member of the Rotary Club of Hadapsar Central who founded the White Knight Chess Academy in Pune in 2019. He says each international win echoes through the halls, with students as young as 4 seemingly able to recall every move of those top matches.

SP Sethuraman, a two-time national champion who practices



Clockwise from left:

Anaaya Mayur plays a game of chess at the Rajesh Oza Chess Academy; trophies await winners at Rota Chess 2025; Ajay Chitnis, of the Rotary Club of Pune Central, visits the Rajesh Oza academy; Anaaya studies her workbook.

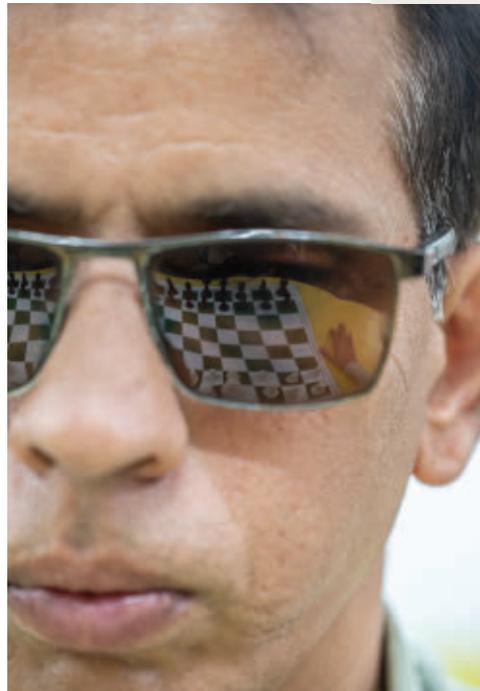


over six hours a day and became a grandmaster at 17 in 2011, agrees the game uniquely challenges the mind. “There are only 64 squares on the board, but every game I play, there are new challenges,” he says. “Playing chess makes your memory razor-sharp.”

The link between chess and academics is backed by research. One study found that rural Indian school children who received a year of chess training significantly improved their academic performance in subjects like math and science compared with a control group. The researchers observed that the game helped students focus, visualize, think ahead, weigh their options, and juggle multiple considerations simultaneously. A 2019 study that focused on school children in Bangladesh found chess training not only improved grades but taught them to evaluate risk. In chess, successful players think several moves ahead, sacrificing pieces to open paths to victory. “And yet, there’s the danger that if they miscalculate, they could lose not only that piece but the game itself,” Tupe says. “The game teaches players to strategize, adapt, and take hard decisions under pressure.”

Indians have been using chess as an instrument of strategy since at least the seventh century, when the ancient Indian game of chaturanga first appears in the historical record. The name chaturanga translates to “four parts,” referring to the military divisions of infantry, cavalry, elephants, and chariots — which later evolved into the pawn, knight, bishop, and rook pieces of the modern game. By the ninth century, the Persians were playing the war strategy game, and it evolved into shatranj. From there it spread across the world as chess. Legend has it that some kings played chess using live human beings — often their vanquished enemies and slaves — as the pieces.

Chess in India has come a long way since, with the nation emerging as a modern-day world chess power. India has about 90 grandmasters (up from five in 2000) and



Clockwise from top left: N. Krithika (right), of the Rotary Club of Chennai Harmony, plays chess with Mahashri K.; Rajesh Oza (standing), blind since he was 15, teaches players to visualize the game in their minds like he does; players compete at a tournament at Krithika's Phoenix Chess Academy; a chessboard is reflected in Oza's glasses.



over 30,000 players rated by the International Chess Federation, known as FIDE. Among them is a 3-year-old who late last year became the youngest player in chess history to earn a rating after beating opponents in their 20s and edging out the previous record-holder: another toddler from India who was just a month older at the time. At the end of last year, India's top 10 male players boasted an average rating of 2,714, not far behind the highest individual rating ever achieved, a 2,882 first held by Norway's Magnus Carlsen in 2014. Only the U.S. had a higher average men's rating. India's

Indians have used chess as an instrument of strategy since the 7th century.

top 10 women, meanwhile, averaged 2,404, just behind China.

Behind these statistics are dazzling personal stories: Viswanathan Anand, the five-time world champion who ignited India's

chess renaissance by becoming the country's first grandmaster in 1988; Gukesh Dommaraju, the teenage prodigy who claimed the world title at just 18; Praggnanandhaa Rameshbabu, who stunned the world at 18 by defeating Carlsen in 2024; and his elder sister, 24-year-old Vaishali Rameshbabu, who made history in Uzbekistan in September by winning the FIDE Women's Grand Swiss for a second time.

Today, chess remains a prized tool for building resilience and fortitude. "On the board, one wrong move can change the game, but chess teaches you how to defend, to stay calm, to learn, and to fight back with focus," says Chennai-based chess coach N. Krithika, a member of the Rotary Club of Chennai Harmony. These are all skills that can resonate far beyond the chessboard and have the power to change the trajectories of not only individual lives but entire communities.

Marottichal is a remote village in the southern state of Kerala

known for its verdant hills and breathtaking waterfalls, but its true claim to fame is chess. Over 4,500 of Marottichal's residents — some 75 percent of its population — are active chess players. In 2016, the village hosted an event in which more than 1,000 people played chess simultaneously.

This is a far cry from the 1970s and early '80s, when the village was a regional hub for illicit alcohol production. Marottichal's farmers found that making alcohol required less labor and provided an easy income. The combination of more money, more downtime, and the omnipresence of booze contributed to a rise of vice economies. Alcoholism surged, as did gambling.

In the late 1980s, Charaliyil Unnikrishnan, a former Maoist rebel and a Marottichal native, returned home and was dismayed by what he saw. With help from the wives and mothers of liquor producers, he led a group that raided gambling dens and destroyed illicit alcohol supplies. Then, when he realized that the men needed an alternative pastime, he introduced them to chess.

Incredibly, the game caught the collective fancy of the village. Cases of alcohol addiction began to decline as dropouts went back to school, farmers returned to their harvests, and many local chess players, including Unnikrishnan himself, began playing competitively. Today, he runs a popular chess-themed tea shop in Marottichal, and across the village, from bus stops to rice paddy fields, players can be found hunched over chessboards. The village has its own chess association, hosts local and regional tournaments, and teaches its young residents chess as part of the school curriculum.

Unnikrishnan — or *Unni maman* (uncle), as he is locally known — says that by teaching players the power of good decision making, chess has become an alternative to destructive behavior. Much like chess taught Aparna Bodhe's twins to sit still and focus, the game has been shown to improve planning and cognitive reflection tasks in adults as well. In 2025, researchers

found chess players showed greater preference for future rewards over short-term gains, reflecting a delayed gratification that is essential to winning a chess match.

Coach Rajesh Oza paces up and down a classroom filled with teenage chess players, teaching them a highly unusual style of play, one that unfolds not on the board in front of them but on a chessboard in their minds. It's a technique born of necessity: Oza has been blind since he was 15.

The passionate teacher credits chess with lifting him out of the depression that enveloped him when he lost his eyesight suddenly in 1993. "When I played chess, I realized I could visualize the board better than most sighted players and this gave me an edge," he says. "Winning competitions gave me the boost I needed."

In 2002, he became the national blind chess champion and the first blind chess player in India to earn a FIDE international rating. Today, he teaches his students to visualize the game in their minds like he does, though they can see perfectly well. "This frees their mind of clutter,

leaving room only for strategizing on the board," he says. "I could have never imagined that someone who can't see would get a life, career, and even the perfect life partner because of chess!" (He met his

wife in a chess competition.) "I may be blind, but chess has given me a vision for a bright future."

Krithika, the Chennai coach and Rotarian, has been instructing students with mental and physical disabilities for years at Phoenix Chess Academy, which she founded. She finds that playing chess competitively helps these students develop confidence and mental clarity. Recently, she organized a well-attended chess tournament in a Chennai school for some of these students.

The link between chess and academics is backed by research.



In Pune, 5-year-old twins Aradhita (left) and Parikshita Bodhe giggle at a chessboard.



One of the tournament competitors, 49-year-old P Prema, says she enjoys the level playing field chess affords. “What attracts me to chess is that I don’t need to play it as a para sport,” she explains, drawing a contrast with sports that demand physical ability, though she does those too. Using a wheelchair since she contracted polio in childhood, she is an accomplished para table tennis and badminton player. She is working on improving her chess game so she can get a FIDE rating.

For Krithika, training these players is especially rewarding. “Chess tournaments are a great way for Rotary clubs to help players from disadvantaged backgrounds to build their game, improve their self-confidence, and find new avenues to succeed,” she says.

Some players leave Krithika’s tournament early — so they can play in *another* tournament. Chennai is not known as India’s chess mecca for nothing: This particular September weekend alone, the city is hosting almost 100 tournaments. But players aspiring to improve their FIDE ratings say that even this is not enough. Swathi Kumar KP and Sujay Remileon S, participants in an under-21 tournament organized by Rotary members in Chennai, say they need to play in at least 100 tournaments to improve their FIDE ratings. It can be a long, hard slog.

Meanwhile, in Pune, the 5-year-old Bodhe twins, Parikshita and Aradhita, refuse to sleep before one last game of chess. The spirited girls even work references to chess into everyday moments. “The other day, when I asked them to sit with me in front of the family puja [altar], Parikshita asked me to seriously think what my ‘endgame’ was,” their mother says with a laugh.

So what is the endgame for her twins? “I don’t know how far they’ll go in chess,” she says. For now, she’s simply happy the game is helping them to focus and to know that their choices have consequences. As any chess player will tell you, your next move, in a game or in life, can lead to a costly blunder or momentous opportunity. ■

THE

GAME CHANGER

Meet your
2026-27
Rotary
president,
**OLAYINKA
HAKEEM
BABALOLA**

Photography by
Monika Lozinska



Olayinka “Yinka” Hakeem Babalola is sitting on the wrong side of his desk, staring at the tiny squares on the laptop perched in front of him. He’s just finished speaking on a call with 300 Rotaractors from the African continent and other parts of the world, Rotary’s president-elect explains as he turns down the volume. “They held a celebration for me because I’m a past Rotaractor,” he says. By seeing Babalola, himself once in their shoes, embarking on the highest position in Rotary, who knows how many of the 300 he will inspire.

It’s early October, less than two months since the Rotary International Board of Directors selected Babalola to lead Rotary, in a special session in late August after the resignation of RI President-elect SangKoo Yun, who died shortly after, following months of cancer treatment.

It’s only the second trip to Rotary headquarters for Babalola, of the Rotary Club of Trans Amadi in Nigeria, since his selection. His office is nearly empty, void so far of all the gifts Rotary leaders tend to accumulate during their travels as an incoming president.

While he’s new to the position, he has a long history with Rotary, starting as a Rotaractor in 1984 and then as a Rotarian in 1994. “One thing is for certain, preparing me for this role are my many years of engaging with Rotary” — over four decades, he says. “Not many people who get to this position have that privilege.”

In that time, he’s served not only as RI vice president and a member of the RI Board of Directors but also as an active leader and participant in RI committees such as the End Polio Now Countdown to History Campaign Committee and the Nigeria PolioPlus Committee. Babalola was a trustee of ShelterBox. His Rotary honors include the Regional Service Award for a Polio-Free World, the Service Above Self Award, and a Rotary Foundation Citation for Meritorious Service. He and his wife, Preba, a member of the Rotary Club of Port Harcourt Passport, are Arch Klumph Society members.

That’s all on top of his professional life. He worked for 25 years in the oil and gas industry, holding senior positions with Shell. He is the founder of two companies: Riviera Technical Services Ltd., an oil and gas infrastructure delivery company, and Lead and Change Consulting, an executive coaching and organizational performance advisory group.

Rotary magazine senior staff writer Diana Schoberg sat down with Babalola to find out more about the president-elect.

He was inspired to join Rotary because of something he saw on TV.

On summer break between his last year of high school and his first year of college, Babalola was hanging out at home watching TV when a well-dressed man on the screen caught his eye. The man was wearing all white, and “his English was something else,” Babalola recalls. Curious, he listened more closely. The man was talking about Rotary. “It was the first time I heard anything about Rotary,” Babalola says. “Like with most TV interviews, it probably lasted one or two minutes, but he made an impression on me.”

Fast forward to Babalola’s second year at the university, when the school’s public image director, a member of the Rotary Club of Bauchi, approached him with a proposal: Would Babalola like to help organize a Rotaract club at the school? “I still tell people I have no idea why he approached me,” Babalola says. He recalled the well-spoken man in white and asked if the director was somehow connected. It turns out the director knew the man on TV, who was the past district governor. Babalola was sold on the connection and went on to become the Rotaract club’s charter president.

He met his wife at a Rotaract meeting.

After finishing up his university education, Babalola moved to Port Harcourt and joined the community-based Rotaract Club of Trans Amadi. At one event, he recalls noticing a beautiful woman, the president of a university-based club. He pointed her out to a friend and said, “That’s the one.” He was right.

But Yinka and Preba aren’t the only members of their family who have been involved in Rotary. Their oldest daughter was the charter president of the Interact club at her secondary school. She moved to North America for college and today belongs to the Rotary Club of Winnipeg in Manitoba. Another daughter was the president of her university’s Rotaract club.

His nickname is “the game changer.”

Babalola served as district governor in 2011-12 while employed by Shell, a multinational energy company. This was unlike his predecessors, who were either retired or running their own businesses while they held that role. He knew things had to change for him to be successful.

At his first meeting with the assistant governors and committee chairs, he asked them to include what would be the “game changer” in their proposals: how they used to do things, and how their approach would change going forward. “If they have no answer,” he says, “the proposal is thrown away. They need to present it again.”

“It occurred to people that this guy actually wants something different,” he continues. “I’m called the game changer, but the ideas that changed the game were not mine.”

He raised \$80,000 with a text message.

Part of Babalola’s effort to make changes as district governor involved his use of technology. On 1 November, the start of Rotary Foundation Month, he woke up around 3 a.m. and sent a request to a district group on a BlackBerry messaging app asking everyone on the platform to give something to the Foundation that day, no matter how small. Then he went back to sleep. When he woke up a few hours later, he made his own donation and posted the evidence. Within a few hours, the group had raised \$80,000. “Usually, you would gather people together, you’d talk to them, and ask for it,” he says. “But with technology, you could ask virtually.”

That year, every club throughout the district gave something to the Foundation. The nearly \$1 million raised was, he says, the highest amount ever from a district on the African continent for The Rotary Foundation.

He wishes he had more time to go scuba diving.

Babalola is certified to dive to 30 meters and has done some diving in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Atlantic. He’s looking forward to someday diving in Hurghada, a resort city on Egypt’s Red Sea coast that’s known for its marine life, iconic wrecks, and high visibility in the water. “The reefs are wonderful,” he says.

He also enjoys other outdoor pursuits including swimming, gardening, and bird-watching. One of the most interesting birds he’s seen is the Ibadan malimbe, a rare songbird with bright red



President-elect Olayinka Hakeem Babalola stands outside Rotary's headquarters building with Rotary Foundation Trustee Martha Peak Helman and RI Vice President Alain Van de Poel.

feathers around its head and face that is found only near his hometown.

The 2026-27 presidential message is *Create Lasting Impact*.

If you need it, here's a refresher on Rotary's vision statement: "Together, we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change — across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves." This Rotary year, Babalola explains, RI has been focusing on that first word, "together," through the message *Unite for Good*. In 2026-27, members will tackle the next part of the vision statement: creating change that lasts.

Lasting change across the globe is an easy idea for most Rotary members to understand, he says. "They can give you examples: our polio eradication work, our peace centers, global grants," he says. "When you talk about lasting change in communities, they know because they do things in their own communities. But each time I've been in a gathering of Rotarians and asked them about lasting change in themselves, usually the room goes quiet."

He thinks a key to growing Rotary is realizing the effect it has on you.

While members can and should measure the impact of a project, Babalola wants to see that idea flipped, too. "How has doing all of that impacted you?"

"We must let people understand how membership can make a lasting impact on their own lives."

He can clearly see how Rotary has changed his own life. "I had a privileged upbringing — a good education in a place where many did not have that opportunity," he says. "Rotary grounded me. It pulled me out of my privileged world and put me in touch with the realities of my community."

Many Rotary members have their own stories about how their membership has changed their lives for the better, how it humbled them or brought them closer to their fellow human beings. Babalola encourages them to share those stories. "If we are going to grow this organization, we must let people understand how membership can make a lasting impact on their own lives," he says. "That's one of the things I'm hoping that I can help communicate."

Rotary made him a diplomat.

As a Rotary director in 2018-20, Babalola represented more than 80 Rotary countries and geographical areas — over a third of the Rotary world — including countries in Africa (where at least 1,000 languages are spoken), the Middle East, and parts of Europe. The zones he represented included politically sensitive areas such as Israel, Lebanon, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. "There are certain skills you end up building," he says.

For example, at a Rotary institute he convened in Egypt, he received a phone call from a senior government official about a map of Africa used at the event. The map, which he'd found on the internet, showed Western Sahara as a separate country, which Morocco does not recognize. Egypt supports the position of Morocco. "That kind of situation brings a certain awareness straight to you," he says.

He's the second president from Africa.

"It means a lot for the people of that continent," he says. And, he adds, everyone seems ready to do the work to support him. "I'm used to delivering results. We need to deliver results," he says. That's what he's been preaching at the Rotary institutes he's attended. "I've told them, stop talking about things. Just do it. If it works somewhere, copy it shamelessly. Don't be afraid to fail — be afraid not to try." ■



Abraham Lincoln
a member of
Rotary?!? While
history may
say otherwise,
Rotarians have
long embraced the
Rail Splitter as
one of their own.

The
GREATEST
ROTARIAN

By
Geoffrey Johnson





A boy, a bike, a burial

It might have happened something like this.

On 26 September 1901, 14-year-old Fleetwood Lindley is sitting in class at his high school in Springfield, Illinois, when Lucius Castle, the school's principal, walks into the room. Castle exchanges a few whispered words with the teacher and then asks Fleetwood to join him in the hallway. Your father phoned, says Castle, and asked that you be excused from school. He wouldn't be specific, but he said you should get on your bike and ride as fast as you can out to the Lincoln tomb. He promises there is something interesting you will want to see.

Fleetwood hesitates until Castle shouts Go! and the boy is out the door and on his bike, pedaling like crazy two miles north to Oak Ridge Cemetery, where Abraham Lincoln had been seeking his eternal rest, in a variety of locations both known and unknown, for the last 36 years. When he arrives, there is a crowd of about 200 people

gathered around the tomb. He also sees some heavy machinery, several workmen, and ample evidence that something has been recently dug up.

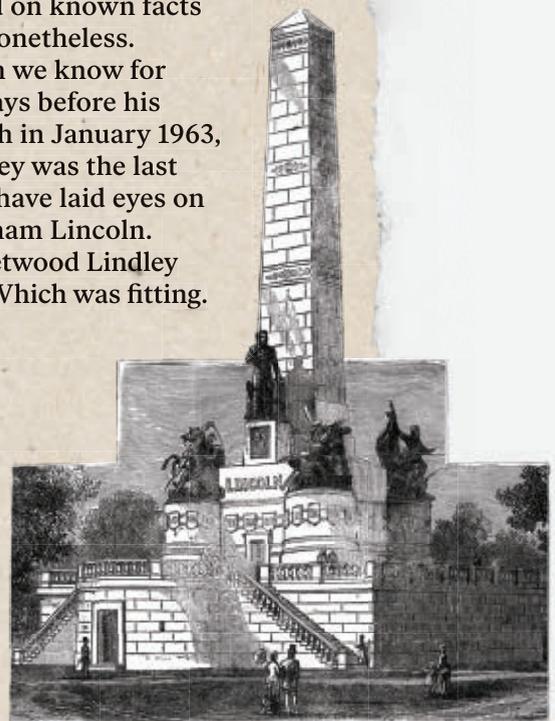
The windows in the door leading into the tomb are papered over so no one can see inside. Members of the crowd shout angrily to be admitted. Their cries are ignored, but when Fleetwood knocks, the door is opened and he wheels in his bike and leans it against the wall. There are 22 people inside — 20 men and two women — and a coffin sitting atop two sawhorses. There is a quiet conversation going on, a subdued but intense debate of some sort. Fleetwood takes no part in the discussion. Instead, he stands quietly in the corner and he waits.

While the basic details of this story — young Fleetwood in school, the message from his father, the hurried trip by bicycle to the cemetery, the discussion inside the tomb — are well established, the embellishments are conjecture. Reasonable conjecture based on known facts but conjecture nonetheless.

But this much we know for certain. In the days before his unexpected death in January 1963, Fleetwood Lindley was the last living person to have laid eyes on the face of Abraham Lincoln.

And this: Fleetwood Lindley was a Rotarian. Which was fitting.

The Lincoln Tomb



Pages from history

Both poems, along with 94 others, had appeared a year earlier in *The Poets' Lincoln*, a book released by the Chapple Publishing Co. Among the “poems” included: the Gettysburg Address.

The Saint-Gaudens statue, or, more accurately, a later iteration of it, made another appearance in *The Rotarian* in February 1951. Under the headline “Abe Lincoln Walks Abroad,” California Rotarian Harold F. Humbert wrote about his encounters with Lincoln devotees in 27 countries. Following a Rotary lunch in Leicester, England, a guest explained to Humbert how he had supervised the erection of London’s Standing Lincoln in 1920. “He described the care with which the replica of Saint-Gaudens’ sculpture [a gift from the people of the United States] was shipped, and the deep emotion that stirred him as he guided its unwrapping and placement.”

Situated in London’s Parliament Square, the statue, said Humbert, embodied Lincoln’s aspiration, as expressed in his second inaugural address, that we “do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.”

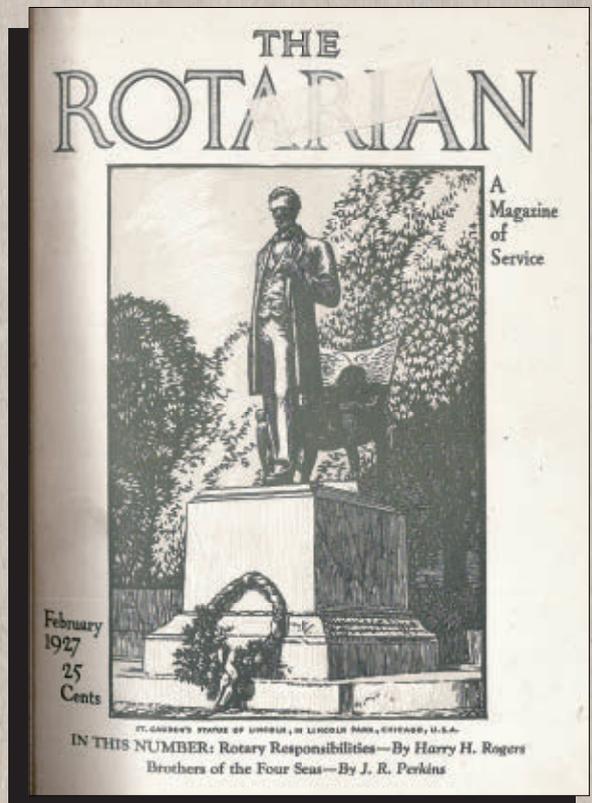
A pilgrimage into the past

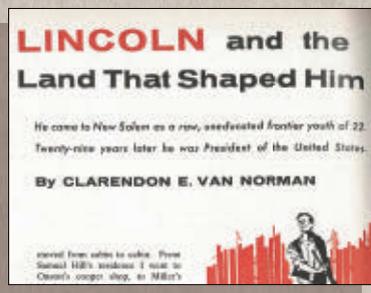
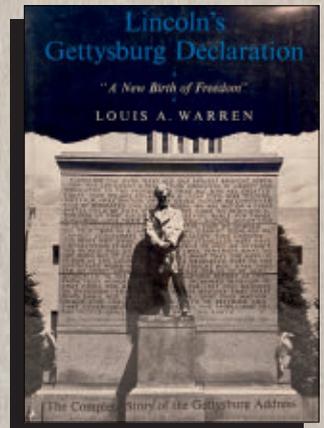
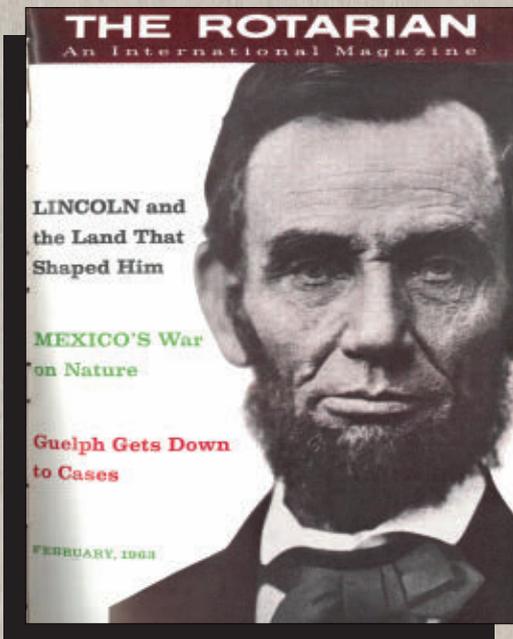
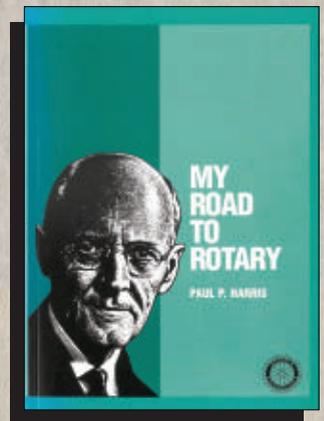
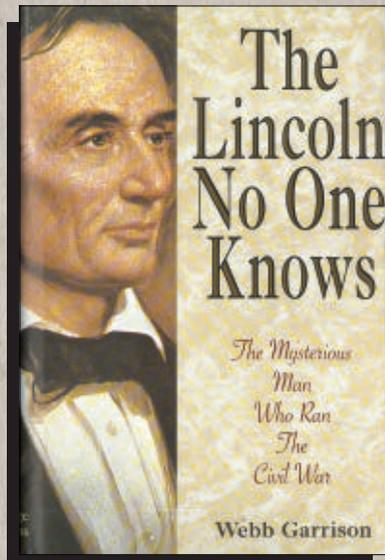
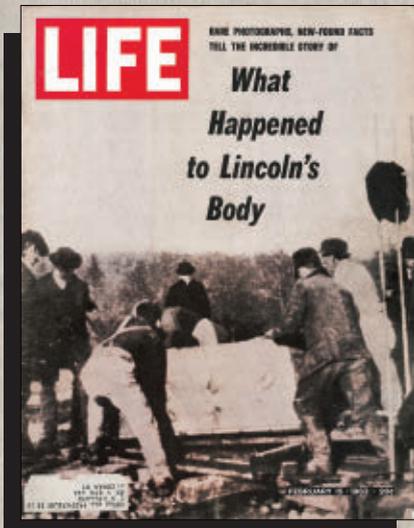
Not all *Rotarian* articles spouted such noble sentiments. Sometimes they simply told a good story. A February 1929 article recounted the time in 1842 that Lincoln nearly fought a duel. A diminutive Illinois official, insulted by satirical letters written by Lincoln and his future wife, demanded satisfaction; the tall, muscular Rail Splitter chose cavalry broadswords to settle this affair of honor. Cooler heads prevailed, and as it was about to commence on a Mississippi River sandbar, the duel was avoided.

Thirty-two Februaries later, in 1961, a more sensational *Rotarian* story, set in the South Pacific, involved vengeful cannibals and a captured American sailor. This true tale ended happily with the sailor rescued by a Hawaiian missionary, who received as reward a gold watch from President Lincoln.

When it wasn’t able to tell Lincoln’s stories itself, *The Rotarian* alerted readers to books that could. In March 1965, with apologies to “Lincolnianists” for not posting the announcement a month earlier, the magazine heralded the arrival of Louis Warren’s latest book, *Lincoln’s Gettysburg Declaration*. And in December 1993, just in time for Christmas, it recommended Webb Garrison’s *The Lincoln No One Knows*.

A former pastor and college dean, a prolific author — he’d write more than 50 books before his death in 2000 — and a Rotarian from North Carolina, Garrison devoted his 1993 book to answering 38 questions about Lincoln. Some of his conclusions were startling. Consider question 26: “A racist by today’s standards, how did [Lincoln] become the Great Emancipator: a crusader for racial equality?” After examining that query for 10 pages, Garrison concluded that the “hope and freedom given to slaves and ex-slaves” by the Emancipation Proclamation “were almost incidental,” and that this document, “which brought freedom to multitudes, has had the long-range effect of reducing





From the cover of and articles in *The Rotarian* to club lunch programs and books by members of Rotary — and by Rotary's founder — Abraham Lincoln is a looming presence in the Rotary zeitgeist. *Life* magazine even included an interview with a Rotarian in a memorable 1963 issue.

the personal freedom of every American who is subject to the still-expanding power of the chief executive.”

After nearly 300 pages of such speculations, what great truth had Garrison garnered? “This odyssey has not produced greater understanding of [Lincoln’s] inner man, but less.” Time to turn elsewhere.

When *The Rotarian* wasn’t revisiting the past on the page, it was in the present exploring places associated with Lincoln. Acting as tour guide for these excursions was Clarendon E. Van Norman of Galesburg, Illinois. In February 1954, when Van Norman was governor of Rotary’s District 212, he wrote an article for the magazine entitled “A Rotarian in Lincoln Land.” He followed that, in February 1963, with “Lincoln and the Land That Shaped Him.” While visiting the Illinois towns where “Honest Abe still walks,” Van Norman kept bumping into the similarities between the precepts of Rotary and Lincoln’s own thinking. As he considered the amicable sentiments expressed by Lincoln in an 1842 speech in

Springfield, Van Norman wondered, “Isn’t that where we start in Rotary — with acquaintance, friendship?”

But why read about the Lincoln sites when you could visit them for yourself? In the April 1923 issue of the magazine, the Rotary Club of Springfield, which “long ago recognized that the ideals of Rotary are the ideals of Lincoln,” extended a full-page invitation to “all Rotarians and friends attending the St. Louis Convention [in June] to make a pilgrimage to the city where Lincoln lived and which Lincoln loved and where all that is mortal of him now reposes.”

Hundreds of Rotarians accepted the invitation and traveled to Springfield, where they received a special bronze medal with Lincoln’s profile on one side and the Rotary wheel on the other. The highlight of their visit was a 23 June picnic followed by a procession to Oak Ridge Cemetery, where Lincoln was eulogized as “the greatest Rotarian of all time.” “Long after many of the details of the convention in St. Louis have faded from my mind,” said a Rotarian from New Zealand, “I will remember the Rotary services at Lincoln’s tomb.”

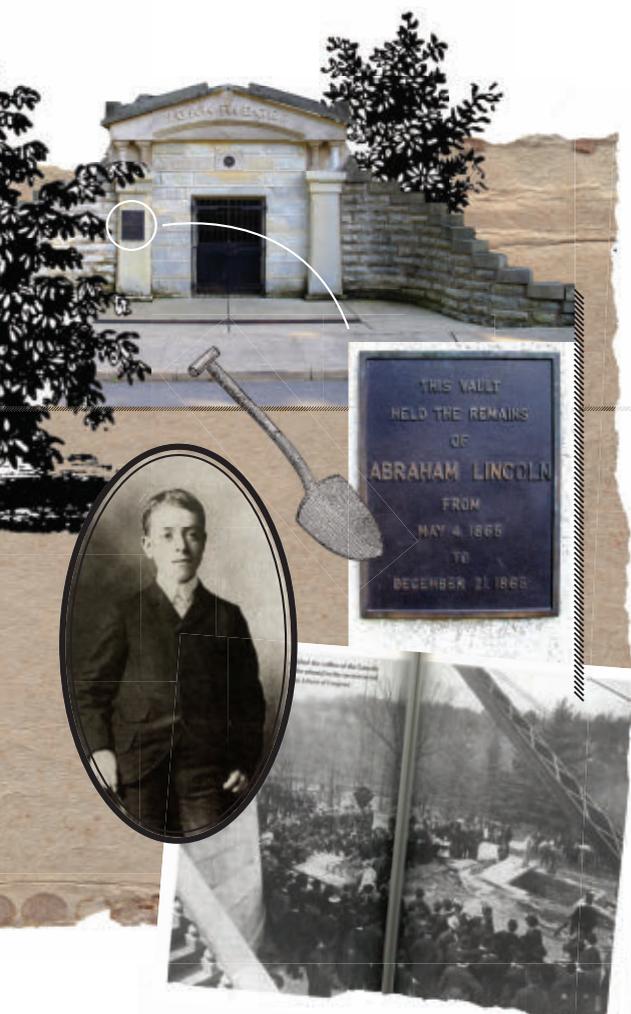
Returning to the realm of reasonable conjecture: Were you to look closely at the Rotary pilgrims clustered around Lincoln’s tomb, you might very well expect to glimpse 36-year-old Fleetwood Lindley standing among them.

“Something I’ll never forget”

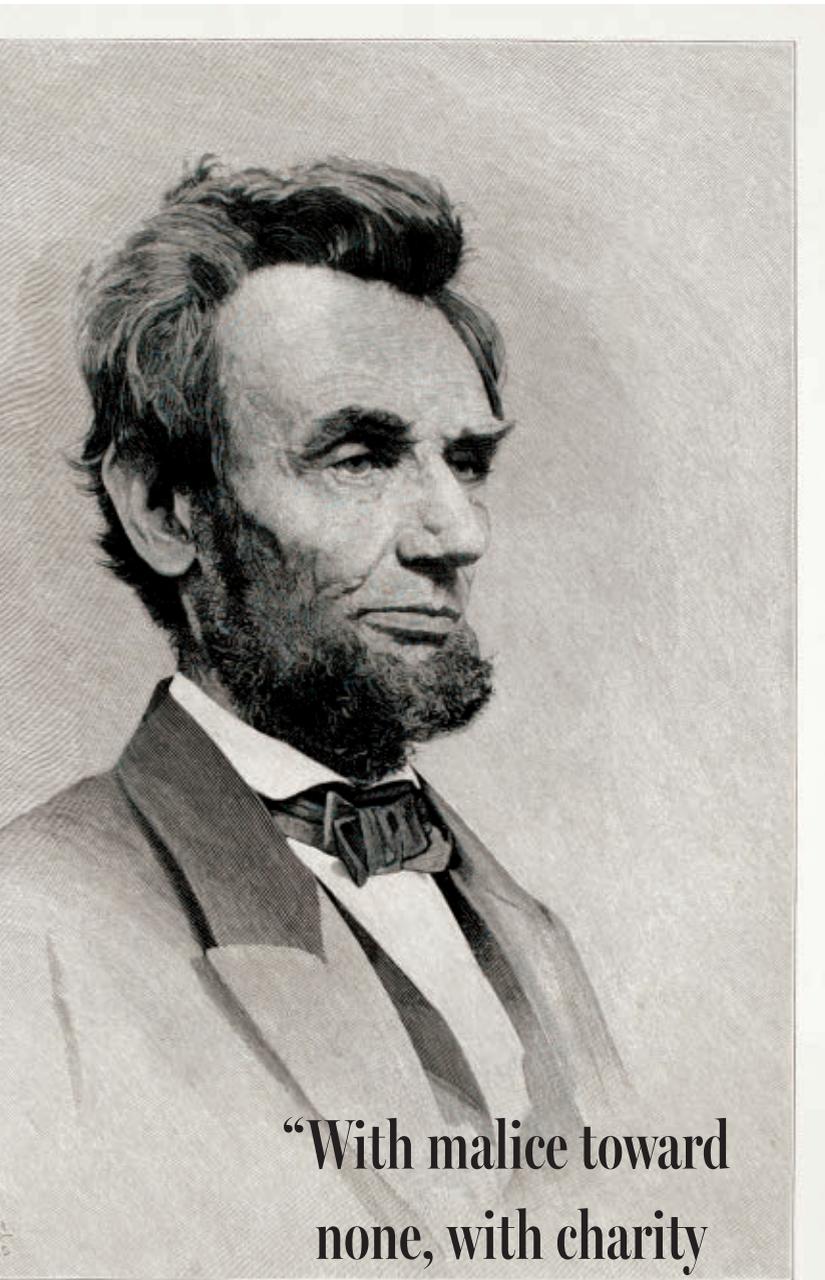
On 23 May 1901, Robert Todd Lincoln, the last surviving child of Abraham Lincoln, was in Springfield to arrange for the reburial of his father for what he must have hoped would be the final time. After his assassination in April 1865, Lincoln had been interred in a temporary holding vault at Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield. Over the next 36 years, his body had been moved, often furtively, one might even say appallingly — picture the coffin of the martyred president hidden for two years beneath a pile of lumber — more than a dozen times.

Some of those moves were orchestrated by a group of apprehensive Springfield worthies known in their last incarnation as the Lincoln Guard of Honor. Their apprehension was not without cause: In 1876, an attempt to steal Lincoln’s body had been foiled at the last minute, and the threat that another attempt might follow loomed large in the minds of the nine members of the honor guard. Their members included a railroad ticket agent named Joseph Perry Lindley. And Joseph was the father of Fleetwood, whom we last saw waiting patiently inside the Lincoln tomb alongside a red cedar casket and a group of people engaged in quiet debate.

In 1900, during extensive renovations of Lincoln’s Springfield tomb, his body, as well as those of his wife and children, were removed to a temporary underground burial vault. During his May 1901 visit, Robert gave specific instructions for his father’s burial. Rather than keep Lincoln’s coffin in the marble sarcophagus where it had ostensibly lain for decades, Robert instructed that it be buried 10 feet below the



Clockwise from top: the receiving vault at Oak Ridge Cemetery where Lincoln was first interred; a plaque on the vault; a crane lifts the coffins of Lincoln and his family from yet another temporary grave in 1901; Fleetwood Lindley.



**“With malice toward
none, with charity
for all ... to do all
which may achieve
and cherish a just
and a lasting peace.”**

— *Second inaugural address*

tomb’s tile floor, enclosed within a steel cage and encased by 20 inches of Portland-cement concrete.

Furthermore, because the coffin had been opened in 1887 (and on three other occasions before that) to ensure his father’s body lay within, Robert instructed that it was not to be reopened again. Which, on 26 September 1901, was the cause for the debate inside the tomb. With Robert not present, the group ultimately decided to open the coffin. “They said it was for identification,” said Fleetwood years later, “but I think curiosity had a good deal to do with it.”

A plumber and his assistant came forward with their tools and cut away an oblong portion of Lincoln’s lead-lined casket. “A pungent odor rose from the casket as they lifted the plate, and there was the head and chest of Mr. Lincoln,” recalled Fleetwood. “His face was readily recognizable. It seemed to be covered with a moss-like mold, the color of frost. I was not scared at the time, but I slept with Lincoln for the next six months.”

After about 25 minutes, the plumber resealed the coffin. “I was allowed to hold one of the leather straps as we lowered the casket [within its steel cage] into the vault,” Fleetwood said. “Concrete was then poured over the casket and the vault filled to floor level.”

Life went on. In 1909, Fleetwood graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in business administration and toured Europe for 13 weeks with his cousins. In 1918, after the United States entered World War I, he was commissioned a second lieutenant, trained in Georgia with a company of machine gunners, and was discharged without seeing action following the armistice. He served on the county draft board, as Springfield’s city clerk, and as president of the board of managers at Oak Ridge Cemetery.

Most of all, Fleetwood was a florist, running a beloved store with a big adjoining greenhouse on the outskirts of Springfield. Even today, years after Lindley Floral closed, the place stirs fond memories. “It was one of my favorite places to visit as a child,” recalled one man in 2024. “I remember the wonderful scents and fragrances, the tiled wall fountain with goldfish swimming beneath it in the pool, and what seemed like endless rows of plants in the greenhouse.”

One more biographical detail: Fleetwood was a joiner. He was, among other things, a Shriner, an Elk, a Mason — and a member of the Rotary Club of Springfield, and on at least one occasion, in speaking to his fellow Rotarians, he told them the story of what happened inside Lincoln’s tomb on that September day in 1901. “What I saw,” he said, “was something I’ll never forget.”

In late January 1963, while awaiting gall bladder surgery at Springfield’s St. John’s Hospital, the last living person to have laid eyes on the face of Lincoln told his tale to a reporter from *Life* magazine. “[Lincoln’s] face was chalky white,” he said. “His clothes were mildewed.” Suffering from a heart condition, the tale-teller died two days after the interview. On 2 February, he was buried at Oak Ridge Cemetery, where, like Lincoln himself, the Rotarian Fleetwood Lindley now belongs to the ages. ■

OUR CLUBS

VIRTUAL VISIT

Calling all leaders

Rotary E-Club of Southern Scotland

Khumbo Chilimira Ndovi, a 25-year-old university lecturer in Malawi, has impressive leadership credentials as an accomplished young professional in the south-eastern African country. She also knows how to have fun for a cause.

As president of the Rotaract Club of Blantyre, Chilimira Ndovi organizes lively fundraisers like karaoke parties and trivia nights to raise money for blankets for babies born to mothers in need. Now, she's thinking about how to make an even bigger impact. "I want to move on to a bigger project where we're maybe building a hospital wing or where we're building a library for a school," she says.

To help her get there, Chilimira Ndovi found a mentor in a seemingly unlikely place: 5,000 miles away in Scotland. Specifically, the Rotary E-Club of Southern Scotland, which recently started a virtual leadership development program that pairs Rotarians who are industry leaders with younger professionals for online workshops and one-on-one mentorship.

The four-month program included lectures on everything from ethical leadership to managing conflicts. The club, whose members are from Europe, Africa, the U.S.,

and Australia, introduced the leadership program last year in a pilot phase with hopes it will spread districtwide. Besides giving the club a meaningful focus, members hope the program will also familiarize young professionals with the kinds of career and leadership development opportunities that are available to Rotary members.

Early signs are positive. Chilimira Ndovi found a new respect for Rotary and is planning to transition to Rotary membership after her Rotaract presidency. She was paired with mentor Denis Robson, a Rotarian based in Innerleithen, Scotland, for conversations that often focused on navigating change in the workplace. "I want to know how I can manage change, manage differences, where I don't just spiral because something is not going according to plan," Chilimira Ndovi remembers telling him.

Robson, a former director of African affairs for Johnson & Johnson and an honorary fellow of the College of Surgeons of East, Central, and Southern Africa, has navigated plenty of change. He quickly established a good rapport with Chilimira Ndovi. "She is a very confident young woman who enjoys challenges," he says. "She is also a great team player."

In his role with Johnson & Johnson, Robson traveled to Malawi frequently. His familiarity with Chilimira Ndovi's country, known as the Warm Heart of Africa for its reputation for kindness, put her at ease. "Her openness to sharing her thoughts in a trusting and open environment was a delight," he says. He hopes to stay in contact with Chilimira Ndovi and work on projects together in Malawi.

Chilimira Ndovi, for her part, built a network through the experience with participants from Europe, where she's hoping

HOW TO START A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Tips from the Rotary E-Club of Southern Scotland

Go virtual. An online program via videoconferencing will allow you to cast a wider net for participants and facilitators while enabling flexibility in scheduling. Pick a time that works for everyone.

Start small. A relatively small cohort of six to 10 participants should be manageable yet large enough for good discussions, teamwork, and innovative outcomes.

Invite expert facilitators. Root the curriculum in Rotary themes and values and invite expert "faculty" from around the world.

Focus on mentorship. Anchor the program around facilitator-led sessions but put mentorship at the heart of the program. Mentoring creates trust, connection, and friendship.

Challenge participants. Group them in teams and ask them to propose an actionable Rotary project. You'll be surprised by what they come up with.

Stay organized. Use digital tools like Google Drive, Signal, and WhatsApp for communication and collaboration spaces.

Celebrate graduates. Offer recognition with intention and real enthusiasm and provide digital certificates they can attach to their LinkedIn pages if they wish.



to travel to one day. “We need to find ways to meet!” she says.

The leadership program is part of a rebirth for the club, which was originally chartered in 2010 as the Rotary Club of Edinburgh Park. Member Lynne Nelson remembers that in those early days the club was based in a business park in Edinburgh and had about 25 members. But many of the club’s members moved abroad for work. When the club got down to 14 members, they realized that they had to do something. They switched to an e-club in 2014 in hopes of growing their membership internationally.

The leadership program was the brainchild of two Rotary members in Switzerland, Tetiana Moroziuk and Juliet Beckwith. The two women were working together at the cancer prevention and screening company Exact Sciences when Beckwith suggested Moroziuk join the e-club.

The two came up with the idea for the leadership program as the group was casting about for projects to do as a club. Originally from Ukraine, Moroziuk is a senior human resources director and has

a passion for helping people grow in their careers. “I love doing this. It’s something I know how to do,” she says.

She also wanted to do something to help her country amid the war with Russia. “The war will be over one day, and to rebuild Ukraine we will need good leaders,” she says. “Investment in the right leadership, leaders with values, leaders who will have this mission to serve, who will have Rotary values and a Rotary mindset — it’s a huge opportunity.”

The club recruited eight young leaders from all over the world. Moroziuk used her connections to promote the program to the Rotary Club of Kharkiv-International in Ukraine. Four young Ukrainians participated, including Pylyp Moskalenko.

Like Chilimira Ndovi, Moskalenko was already in a Rotaract club. “I thought that it would be a really great opportunity for me to gain skills and knowledge about leadership,” he says.

A translator, Moskalenko is his district’s Rotaract representative. He was paired with mentor Chad Campbell, a certified financial

planner and longtime Rotary member from Salem, Oregon, who is now president of the e-club. The two met regularly on video calls over the summer. Many of their conversations revolved around how to succeed in Rotary leadership roles. “Pylyp would come with challenges about what’s going on in the Rotaract world,” Campbell recalls. “He and I would talk about his challenges, and I would share with him how I’ve resolved and managed conflict or disputes or realized opportunities in my 19 years of being a Rotarian.”

Campbell benefited too, taking inspiration from his mentee’s resilience in the face of war. During some of their meetings, Campbell could hear drone attacks in the background. Yet Moskalenko just carried on. Campbell was astonished.

He’s not the only club member drawing inspiration and motivation from the program. It has infused “tremendous energy and optimism” into the club, he says. “Along the way,” he adds, “we’ve built new friendships, new connections, and a level of fellowship that surprised even us.”

— HANNAH WALLACE

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Tech founder

A Rotary Peace Fellow's school helps refugees land jobs



Being a pacifist in Nazi Germany meant being labeled as a traitor.

That's why Anne Kjær Bathel's grandfather and his family uprooted in 1933, rather than submit to the demands of Hitler's regime. They fled to Denmark, where they found work and a home and could sustain their convictions of non-violence. "Had they not left, they would have landed in the concentration camps and I wouldn't be alive, that's for sure," she says.

Today, her family history inspires her work to help refugees restart their careers as they settle into a new home.

About a decade ago, Bathel, 43, co-founded the ReDI School of Digital Integration to help refugees land tech jobs. Since then, the school has expanded to multiple locations in Germany, Denmark, and Sweden and has served more than 30,000 people, providing free coding and computer courses as well as career and mentorship opportunities in partnership with over 100 businesses and public entities. In February 2025, Bathel was honored as one of six Rotary People of Action: Champions of Peace.

Rotary programs helped shape Bathel's worldview starting at age 16, when she traveled from her family's home in Norway to Australia as a Rotary Youth Exchange student. She remembers meeting other students from around the world through coordinated tours and beginning to understand how people could live in peace despite differing cultures and languages.

At 18, she participated in a Rotary Youth Leadership Awards program at a military base in Norway. Coming from a pacifist family, it was a unique opportunity.

"Even to this day, I remember a very serious conversation about if everybody, especially young males, should serve in the army. I was very much against this, and I was discussing this with a general in the Norwegian army," she says. "What has stayed with me was, of course we disagreed, but he listened and I could also therefore listen to him."

2015-2025

DECADE
of
DOERS

Celebrating 10 years of People of Action Honors

Her studies took her to International Christian University in Japan, where she researched open social innovation as a Rotary Peace Fellow. She wrote her master's thesis in Silicon Valley with OpenIDEO, a platform that aims to build solutions for societal problems.

“My focus has always been on social innovation and social entrepreneurship,” she says. “How do we make sure that we find the really powerful ideas, and when those ideas are being implemented in pilot projects, test if they are good ideas? And how do we track the impact data to understand what ideas to bring forward and to scale up?”

While in Silicon Valley, Bathel met with the Stanford Peace Innovation Lab. They collaborated to open a Peace Innovation Lab in Berlin in 2012, bringing together people from for-profit companies, nonprofit organizations, politics, and academia to discuss local issues.

One topic of discussion: the refugee crisis that started developing in Germany and other parts of Europe in 2015. There was an influx of refugees arriving from Syria at the time, and Bathel began visiting refugee camps to try to understand their needs.

“There I met Mohammed, who was from Iraq, and he had a bachelor's degree from the university in Baghdad. Since he had a degree in computer science, he wanted to work in the tech sector in Germany,” she says. But he didn't have

a laptop to keep up his programming skills. He'd go to the library but could only use the computer for a set amount of time.

They continued their conversation, bringing two more friends to join the next time they met. Those friends brought more friends. Quickly, the idea for the ReDI School gained traction.

The school stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic because it could reach students when many traditional schools couldn't, she says. Afghan students, especially women, enrolled with the school when the Taliban came back to power, and there was another push when Russia invaded Ukraine and refugees fled to Germany. “In a sense, when the world is in crisis, we grow because the need is there,” Bathel says.

Today, 71 percent of former ReDI tech students are working in full-time jobs or have entered universities to further their careers, she adds. To name just two: Her early collaborator, Mohammed, is now a senior developer at Accenture, and another student, an engineer from Syria, is a cybersecurity expert for Cisco.

“It's super nice to see these changed lives — but also changed companies that have more diversity and therefore, hopefully, can build better products,” she says. “Our part is small, but we can see the impact when refugees are well integrated into society.”

Over the years, ReDI has taken on a variety of initiatives. It worked to increase the number of women in its classes and provided child care to those who needed it while attending school. ReDI then started offering tech classes to the kids in child care, with funding help from a Rotary Foundation global grant. Its most recent push focuses on skills related to artificial intelligence, with the goal of educating 1 million students on AI over the next five years, she says.

Bathel's biggest wish is for peace in her former students' homelands and for them to return with fresh skills. “Because that's a wish of all refugees,” she says. “They don't leave because they don't love their home country. They leave because they cannot survive.”

Another, more big-picture wish: that people all over the world regularly make small but powerful steps toward peace. The best way to start? Ask yourself what can be done in the next five minutes, five hours, five days, five months, she says.

“You can go and say something nice to your spouse. Or together with your kids, you can go out and you can pick up garbage. Or you can give money to a homeless person or have a conversation with a homeless person, asking what they really need,” Bathel says.

“I really believe in these small actions that create momentum, that will become a wave and a movement that can change society for the better.” — AMY HOAK



Anne Kjær Bathel

- **Rotary Youth Exchange student,** 1999-2000
- **Rotary Peace Fellow,** International Christian University, Tokyo, 2010-12
- **Co-founder and managing director,** ReDI School of Digital Integration, 2015-present
- **People of Action: Champion of Peace,** 2025

From left: Anne Kjær Bathel (left) with ReDI School learners from Ukraine; the school has served more than 30,000 people.

DISPATCHES FROM
OUR SISTER MAGAZINES
ROTARY AFRICA

A journey about more than food



↑ Good agricultural and handling practices, including stringent food safety standards, are taught, implemented, and documented.

Last year, the Rotary E-Club of Eagle Canyon, South Africa, and the Rotary Club of Jacksonville, Florida, were awarded a global grant of about \$70,000 by The Rotary Foundation to train 90 people in aquaponics agriculture. This ambitious initiative, in partnership with the nonprofit group FreshMinistries and the Desmond Tutu Program to End Global Hunger, aims to bring sustainable aquaponics greenhouses to underserved communities to help resolve food insecurity, promote job training, and increase educational opportunities.

The training has been taking place at the Aquaponics Center located at Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) in Ferndale, Johannesburg. This center, officially unveiled by Past RI

President Gordon McNally in March 2024, has already been making a difference. Since May 2024, it has been harvesting produce weekly, generating an average turnover of 10,000 rand (about US\$560) per harvest. The center is training residents of Eswatini, Madagascar, Lesotho, and South Africa. A second site will be opened in Kenya, providing training to people from Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, and Tanzania.

The aquaponics farming model involves pumping water from large fish tanks to vertical gardens. The natural filtration process removes the nitrates from the water, which then feeds the plants, and the clean water is pumped back to the fish tanks. The controlled, soil-free environment reduces the likelihood of soilborne pathogens, while

clean water prevents waterborne diseases, promoting healthier produce and fish. Aquaponics systems support growing a variety of plants, including lettuce, spinach, herbs, tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, peppers, and even some root crops.

Training begins with an intensive five-day course covering aquaponics system fundamentals, agribusiness principles, and marketing basics, blending classroom instruction with hands-on learning. Participants gain practical experience in system setup, maintenance, and troubleshooting, as well as foundational skills in financial management and sales strategy.

Next, a two-week operations training dives deeper into system chemistry, food safety, pest control, and standard operating proce-

dures for planting and harvesting. For those advancing into leadership roles, a two-week manager training expands into business planning, financial analysis, and advanced marketing and negotiation techniques.

The training is more than just a project; it is a lifeline. It has already transformed lives, fought malnutrition, and promoted community economic development. The considerable benefits extend beyond addressing hunger and food insecurity. These include education, economic stability, mental health, gender equality, and more. “This truly makes an enormous impact on an incalculable number of people and communities,” says the Rev. Robert V. Lee III, founder of FreshMinistries. Based in Jacksonville, FreshMinistries partners with organizations worldwide to build aquaponics systems that transform communities.

Multifaceted approach

The project’s impact spans multiple aspects of community development, offering a variety of production models to cater to local needs:

- All food produced through the aquaponics system goes to the community, ensuring food security and nutritional support.
- Produce and fish are sold at local markets, generating financial resources for health care, education, and infrastructure.
- In this hybrid model, some produce feeds the community, while the rest is sold to support maintenance and other needs.

Right: Dr. Gillian Taylor, a fish and aquatic health veterinarian, conducts an inspection of a fish from the aquaponics system tank.

Below: The specially designed vertical towers conserve water, do not require arable soil, use solar power, and avoid chemical fertilizers and residual pesticides.

Help your club form practical strategies to build sustainable food systems. Visit esrag.org/food-systems.



The initiative focuses on creating sustainable agribusiness opportunities, offering the tools for communities to become self-sufficient. It promotes climate-smart farming techniques, using aquaponics systems that consume 95 percent less water than traditional methods and operate on renewable energy, such as solar power.

The emphasis is on providing a year-round food supply, regardless of climate disruptions, ensuring sustainability and resilience. The vertical systems used in this project produce three times as much yield for the space used and are more heat resilient and easier to harvest. They can grow a wider variety of plants compared with other hydroponics or aquaponics systems.

Economic growth and education

This project aims to create more than 800 direct jobs and 10,000 indirect jobs, spanning roles including farm associates, managers, technicians, marketers, and distributors. It also promotes entrepreneurship and economic independence, focusing particularly on women and youths to bridge economic inequalities.

The extensive training programs offered provide knowledge that is retained within the community, supporting long-term economic independence and sustainable growth.

FreshMinistries’ locally driven approach has a history of success, exemplified by the Siyafundisa HIV/AIDS Program, which reached more than 900,000 young people in its first five years. Similarly, the Desmond Tutu Program to End Global Hunger applies the same model, ensuring project success through community ownership and sustainability.

With 198 planned aquaponics facilities across eight African countries, this effort will address urgent needs in food security, economic empowerment, education, and environmental sustainability. Capable of producing up to 151,800 meals per day, the facilities will offer a transformative solution adaptable to regions with droughts, poor soil quality, and climate shocks. Over the course of 20 years, these facilities are expected to provide more than 1.1 billion meals.

“The production will meet the nutrient requirements (for the produce portion of a balanced meal) for up to 158,000 people per day,” explains Lee. “Per year, the number increases to over 55 million and over the useful life of the facilities, over 1.1 billion. With an overall investment in 198 aquaponics systems, that computes to around 10 cents per meal.” ■

Adapted from original article by Sarah van Heerden.



HANDBOOK

Have an ice day!

This fundraiser is more fun than watching ice melt

In Colorado at this time of year, days are short and temperatures are cold. But the Rotary Club of Mountain Foothills of Evergreen provides its community with a little reminder that spring will come again.

For two decades, the club has put a colorful barrel on the ice of Evergreen Lake. Community members buy tickets guessing the exact date and time — down to the second — that the alpine ice will melt and the barrel will fall through, offering some hope of winter relief while raising funds in the process.

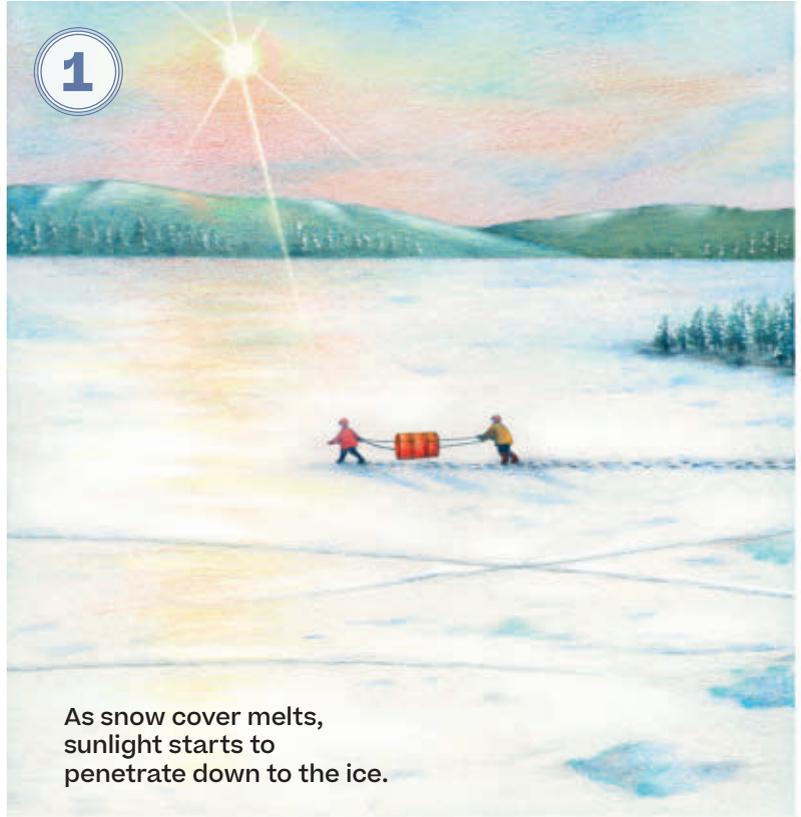
“The barrel is this promise of spring,” says Dennis Brovarone, who leads the club’s effort. “It will eventually fall through.”

Tickets go on sale early in the season as they are favorite winter holiday gifts in the community. The club partners with the local parks department to place the barrel on the ice near a main road. “You can see it very well,” Brovarone says. “People look for it all the time.”

To clock what time the ice melts, organizers take the covers off the backs of two inexpensive watches, put them inside a real estate agent lock box, and chain it to the barrel. When the barrel falls through the ice, the watches short out, stopping at the exact date and time. “You have to determine it fairly quickly,” Brovarone says. “After the watches dry out, they start back up again.” The earliest melt was 5 March, and the latest was 17 April, Brovarone says, and sometimes the winning guesses come down to the second. The local fire and rescue crew retrieves the barrel from the lake, which has an average depth of just 15 feet.

The project’s beneficiaries include the Evergreen parks department’s program for people with disabilities, an organization that connects teens with mental health counseling, a ranch retreat for first responders, and Crutches 4 Africa, a project started by a member of the club that ships mobility devices to the continent.

See more about the project and join the fun at mountainfoothillsrotary.org.

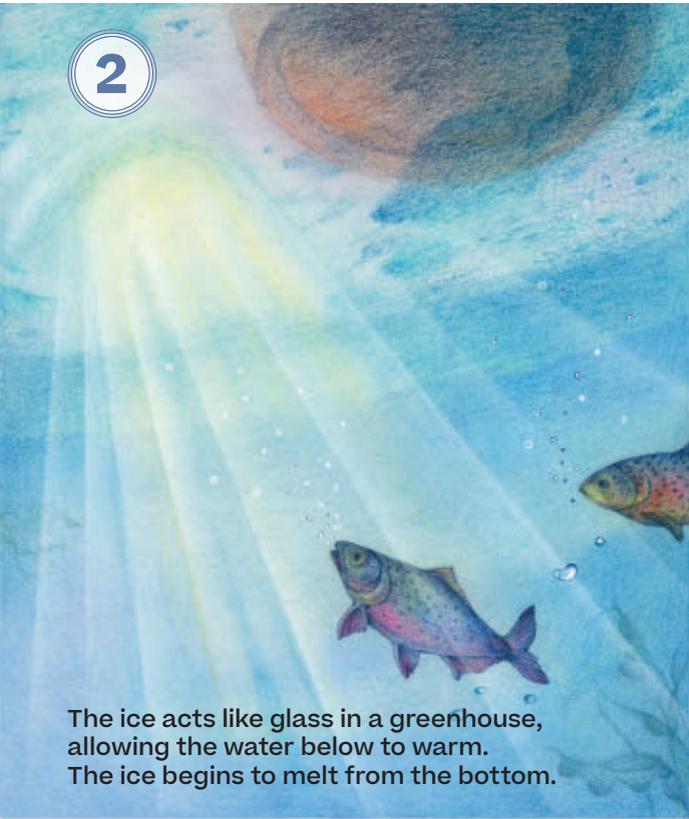


As snow cover melts, sunlight starts to penetrate down to the ice.



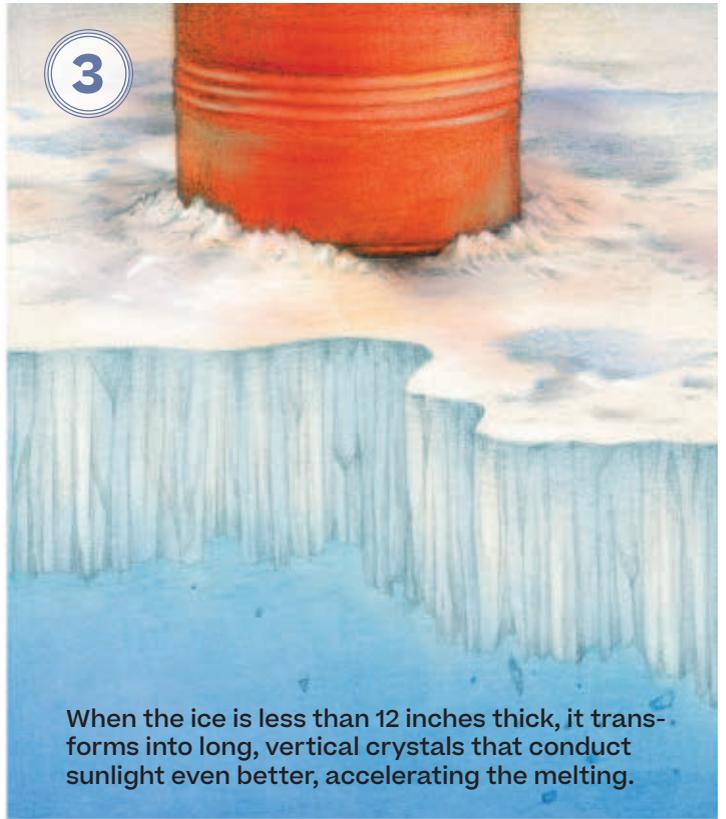
Meltwater fills in between the crystals, which begin breaking apart.

Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources



2

The ice acts like glass in a greenhouse, allowing the water below to warm. The ice begins to melt from the bottom.



3

When the ice is less than 12 inches thick, it transforms into long, vertical crystals that conduct sunlight even better, accelerating the melting.



5

Wind breaks the ice surface apart and blows the ice to the shoreline.

How lake ice melts



TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Building peace at scale

February is Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Month, a perfect time to reflect on The Rotary Foundation's mission to advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace. Whether improving health, supporting education, or alleviating poverty, peace is at the heart of everything Rotary does.

Rotary Peace Centers bring our ideals into the world by training the next generation of peacebuilders. Since 2002, more than 1,800 Rotary Peace Fellows have become catalysts for peace in over 140 countries.

I am often asked whether our peace fellows continue working for peace after their studies. The answer is a resounding yes. Many serve in United Nations agencies, governments, nongovernmental organizations, and groups they've founded themselves.

Recently, I met with the recipients of our latest Programs of Scale award, Pathways to Peace and Prosperity in Colombia. This \$3 million partnership with the World Food Programme is establishing four peace hubs that will train 1,000 people in conflict resolution and support 700 entrepreneurs in communities touched by conflict.

During the meeting, I thought I recognized one participant as Brigitta von Messling, a German peace fellow I worked closely with in Berlin 13 years ago. But so much time had passed I

wasn't sure. When I asked **Gladys Maldonado**, a leader of the Colombia initiative, she confirmed it was Brigitta:

Brigitta is based in my city, Cúcuta, and is an active member of my Rotary club. She does wonderful work with the United Nations as an observer of the 2016 peace agreement Colombia signed with rebels. She even travels to remote locations in the Catatumbo region, an area of northern Colombia that has experienced violence by armed groups.

She has my utmost admiration. I had the good fortune of meeting her three years ago. She's incredibly intelligent, with a gift for recognizing the strengths of others.

Brigitta is invaluable to my country, my city, and my Rotary club. She connected me with the World Food Programme so we could build the Programs of Scale project, which has filled my city and country with hope.

What Gladys said about Brigitta echoes so many stories we hear about Rotary Peace Fellows worldwide: They are invaluable. They remind us that peace is built one person at a time.

Your support of The Rotary Foundation opens countless opportunities for 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.

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?

Head to the Rotary Learning Center and take the Rotary Club Central Resources course!

ROTARACTORS CAN'T USE ROTARY CLUB CENTRAL.

FALSE.

Rotaractors can access it and track goals, too! All you need is a My Rotary account to start planning your future.

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

TRUE.

Club leaders use this free tool to set goals and record accomplishments, while tracking goals like membership growth, service activities, and Foundation giving.

Start setting and tracking your club's goals now:





THE ROTARY FOUNDATION

2024-25 Service Award for a Polio-Free World

The Rotary Foundation Trustees established the Service Award for a Polio-Free World to honor members who have made outstanding contributions to Rotary’s polio eradication efforts. Members can nominate individuals for regional or international service. The 62 members listed received the 2024-25 award.

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

Numbers correspond to the photos above.

- Yumi Akeyama (3)**, Japan
- Jean-Philippe Baur (8)**, France
- Bharat M. Dholakia (7)**, India
- Carla Garcia Espinosa (9)**, Philippines
- Gary Hirsch (6)**, United States
- Koji Sasaki (1)**, Japan
- Sang Seok Seo (2)**, Korea
- Jewat Ram Sunder Mukhi (5)**, Pakistan
- Kimberly Walden (4)**, United States

REGIONAL SERVICE

Regions are as defined by the World Health Organization.

AFRICA

- Henry Akinyele**, Nigeria
- Affoua Simone Kadio Morokro**, Côte d’Ivoire

AMERICAS

- Frank Adamson**, Canada
- Gerson Yoshiharu Aoki**, Brazil
- Robert Bassett**, United States

- Esmeralda Chimal Navarrete**, Mexico
- Duncan Conrad**, Canada
- Joseph Michael Dickerson**, United States
- Carol Ferguson**, United States
- Estela Fernandez**, Argentina
- Luis Oscar Garcia**, Argentina
- Maria Silvia Passos Martins Haick**, Brazil
- Doug Heizer**, United States
- Janine Cristine Koenig de Lima**, Brazil
- Ruth Lutes**, United States
- Celia Maria de Oliveira**, Brazil
- Maria José (Majo) Pacheco Osorio**, Venezuela
- Joseph Riccardo**, United States
- Thomas Julius Smith**, United States
- Bob Tello**, United States
- Luiza Helena Setti Tigrinho**, Brazil
- Michael Trewitt**, United States
- Cheryl Willett**, United States
- Richard Willett**, United States

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

- Sheikh Ishfaq Ahmed**, Pakistan
- Abdul Naeem Bukhari**, Pakistan
- Amena Khan**, Pakistan
- Sarfraz Ahmed Qureshi**, Pakistan
- Sohail Ahmed Majidano**, Pakistan
- Abdul Naeem**, Pakistan
- Najamuddin Shaikh**, Pakistan
- Naveed Zaib**, Pakistan

EUROPE

- Francoise Benoit-Cattin**, France
- Margaret Ejodamen James-Cooper**, England
- Danijel Jozic**, Croatia
- Panayiotis Katrougalos**, Greece
- Herman Stiggelbout**, Netherlands
- Catherine Van Kan Martin**, France
- Daniel (Dany) Vandevort**, Belgium

SOUTHEAST ASIA

- Suneel Aggarwal**, India
- S. Basavaraja**, India
- Subhash Gupta**, India
- Manish Gyani**, India
- Ramakotaiah Kondaveeti**, India
- Amarnath M**, India
- Chinnakonari Selvaraj**, India
- Dravidamani Sigamani**, India
- Dakshinamurthy Ra**, India

WESTERN PACIFIC

- Melissa Hebbard**, Australia
- NamHyeong Lee**, Korea
- Yasunori Kobayashi**, Japan
- Gary Newton**, Australia
- Wen-Ling Lai-Lin**, Taiwan

Nominations for the Service Award for a Polio-Free World are accepted each year between 15 July and 1 October. To learn more, visit rotary.org/awards.



Recruit Peace and Development Leaders for a Rotary Peace Fellowship



Selected fellows receive full funding for a master's degree or postgraduate certificate in disciplines related to peace and development. Our fellows lead peacebuilding efforts worldwide. Rotary members play a key role in recruiting candidates from their communities!

CALENDAR

February events

ONE BOWL AFTER ANOTHER

Event: Chili Cook-Off
Host: Rotary Club of Mathews, Virginia
What it benefits: Local nonprofits
Date: 7 February
 For the 10th year, this event invites nonprofits in the Mathews area to serve their best batch of chili the night before the Super Bowl. The organization whose chili is deemed the most delicious by a panel of judges earns \$200; the same amount is given to the winner of the People's Choice award. There are also prizes for the best decorated booth and the most tickets sold. Each chili booth will sell quarts to take home — perfect for the next day's parties.

ALL THE WAY DOWN

Event: Wimpy Mile
Host: Rotary Club of Dahlonega Sunrise, Georgia
What it benefits: Local nonprofits and scholarships
Date: 14 February
 The course for this annual mile-long race in the Blue Ridge foothills runs mostly downhill along Wimpy Mill Road, with a steady 178-foot drop in elevation between the start in downtown Dahlonega and the finish line at a riverside picnic area. Participants of all abilities are welcome. Serious runners can try for a personal record, while others can go at their own easy pace. Music, snack booths, and an awards ceremony await finishers.

ON THE BLOCK

Event: Heart of Gold Gala
Host: Rotary Club of Duncan, British Columbia
What it benefits: Local projects
Date: 14 February
 This gala event at the Cowichan Performing Arts Centre is the culmination of a nearly monthlong online auction set to launch 19 January. Bidders can expect



DOGGIE DASH

Event: Mutt Run
Host: Rotary Club of Signal Hill, California
What it benefits: Long Beach Animal Care Services and local projects
Date: 21 February

At this dog-friendly race, humans can run or walk alongside their four-legged friends on a course that follows the scenic Long Beach shoreline. All finishers receive a medal and a T-shirt. Past the finish line, Long Beach Animal Care Services, a municipal shelter that cares for about 4,000 animals each year, puts on an adorable showcase of adoptable pups.

a bounty of auction items; last year's included framed artworks, tickets to a country music festival, a year's supply of eggs from a local farm, and more. The evening celebration includes entertainment and a traditional silent auction.

BRING YOUR APPETITE

Event: Chefs of Brunswick
Host: Rotary clubs of Southport and Southport Evening, North Carolina
What it benefits: Local nonprofits and projects
Date: 19 February
 More than a dozen restaurants and other vendors in Brunswick County offer samples of their finest food and drinks at this annual social event, first held in 2023. A raffle offers attendees the chance to win up to \$500 in gift cards to some of

the participating restaurants. Organizers expect 600 people to fill the venue.

TOSS THE BEADS

Event: Mardi Gras
Host: Rotary Club of Independence, Missouri
What it benefits: Blue Valley Activity Center
Date: 28 February

The club gets into the carnival spirit with this festive New Orleans-style celebration, featuring a zydeco band and Louisiana cuisine such as jambalaya, catfish, gumbo, and king cake. A second line parade into the banquet hall gets the party started, while games and live and silent auctions add to the merriment. This year's beneficiary is a local organization that offers recreational sports programs for children.

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

PRESS



PLAY

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2026 CONVENTION

Become a first-timer

Do it! Make Taipei your first Rotary International Convention. Here are five reasons from other first-timers:

1 Take time for your passion

Give yourself a break from the daily grind to delve into topics that interest you most. Explore Rotary Fellowships and Rotary Action Groups to join. Learn about new service opportunities at member-led breakout sessions.

2 Supercharge your service

At the convention, you'll begin to grasp the reach of this global network and how it can amplify the impact of one person's idea.

3 Make Rotary what you want it to be

Gather ideas to take back to your club, deepen your contributions to your favorite Rotary area of focus, and network to grow in your profession.

4 Relax and recharge

Refill your well of positive energy

with world-class speakers and main stage entertainers. During your downtime, make a vacation of it. After all, you'll be in the heart of Taipei, a city rich in culture and one-of-a-kind experiences.

5 Nurture your network

Rotary friendships are a path to happiness and meaningful connection, and the convention is a great place to build them.

Mena Dant knows that first-hand. Working from home, she missed “hugs, smiles, and other people’s energy” and needed some fun to restore work-life balance. So she joined the Rotary Club of Tualatin, Oregon, and became a convention first-timer last year in Calgary, Canada. Dant wants you to know you’ll have a great time, too, in Taiwan 13-17 June even if you don’t know many attendees. Hit the House of Friendship and meaningful conversations will follow. “You walk in and everybody’s friends,” she says. ■

Learn more and register at convention.rotary.org.

CROSSWORD

A toast to us

By Victor Fleming
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas

ACROSS

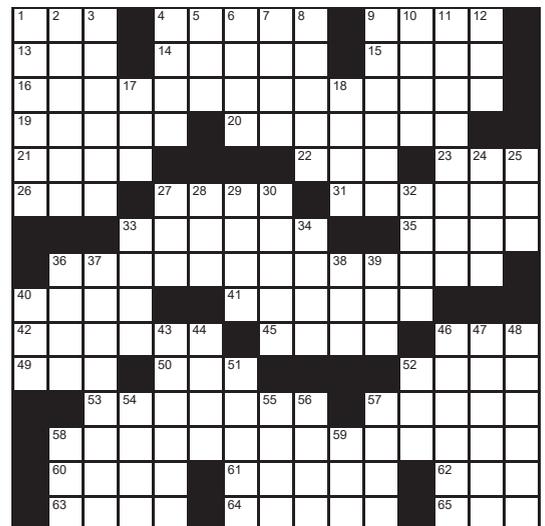
- 1 Campfire remnant
- 4 Pass, as legislation
- 9 Baby bovine
- 13 Small, in Scotland
- 14 “Cleanup on ___ 4”
- 15 Completed perfectly
- 16 Start of a birthday toast
- 19 “Few, ___, got the punch line”
- 20 Demodulating device
- 21 Airy melody
- 22 Depot (abbr.)
- 23 Author LeShan
- 26 LAX listing
- 27 Makes a decision
- 31 Classic arachnid
- 33 “___ for real?”
- 35 Holed, as a putt
- 36 Part 2 of the toast
- 40 ___ rock music
- 41 “As if I care”
- 42 Append
- 45 Like an arguable point
- 46 “All you had to do was ___”
- 49 Offense on the rd.
- 50 “Perfect!” NASA-style

- 52 Apartment building head, slangily
- 53 Camera accessory
- 57 *The Mikado* locale
- 58 End of the toast
- 60 Caramel candy brand
- 61 “Stick ‘em up!”
- 62 “Make ___ double”
- 63 English actress Nell
- 64 Church Lady’s foe
- 65 Managed

- 18 On the ___ with
- 24 Repudiate
- 25 Genesis vessel
- 27 Old California fort
- 28 Part of mph
- 29 Sailing ropes
- 30 Genesis city
- 32 Ain’t correct? Paul
- 33 “Puppy Love”
- 34 Cold War spy plane
- 36 Certain Rwandan
- 37 Up to this point
- 38 “Guess ___?”
- 39 Gobble up
- 40 Apartment, to some

DOWN

- 1 Once in ___ (every now and then)
- 2 Believe appropriate
- 3 Announce
- 4 “I’m ___” (1975 Oscar-winning song)
- 5 Picker’s lead?
- 6 Starting-date phrase
- 7 B.C. currency
- 8 Camp sights
- 9 Forty winks
- 10 Pine (for)
- 11 Maliciously stared down
- 12 Whom HST succeeded
- 17 M.D. specialty
- 43 Deep chasm
- 44 Cheat, in slang
- 46 Family helper
- 47 Ancient Athens rival
- 48 Nairobi native
- 51 1980s Chryslers
- 52 *The Revenge of the Baby-___* (Calvin and Hobbes book)
- 54 Conger-like
- 55 Vicinity
- 56 A lot of H.S. juniors take it
- 57 Deere, Doe, or Oliver
- 58 Alternative to com
- 59 Alternative to JVC



Solution on [opposite page](#)

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRISTOPHE VISEUX; AN RONG XU



Good as gold

Chinese dumplings symbolize wealth and good fortune

Known as Spring Festival in China, Tết in Vietnam, and Seollal in Korea, Lunar New Year — which falls on 17 February this year — is a time for family reunions and festive meals. For Doris Xie, the season brings back memories of her childhood in Beijing, where making and eating *jiaozi*, or dumplings, is a cherished New Year's tradition. Shaped like ancient gold or silver ingots, the dumplings symbolize wealth and good fortune, and their name echoes a Chinese phrase meaning “bidding farewell to the old and welcoming the new.”

“Our dumpling preparation started on New Year's Eve afternoon,” Xie recalls. “My father and I made the dough and rolled out the wrappers while my mother and grandmother folded the dumplings. When the clock struck midnight and firecrackers exploded outside, we'd boil the dumplings. Then the whole family gathered to eat them.”

FILL 'EM UP: In northern China, a classic filling combines minced pork with vegetables such as napa cabbage or turnips. A handful of peppercorns is soaked in hot water, and then the fragrant liquid is mixed with pork. Xie's family added fresh water chestnuts for a bit of crunch. The vegetables are finely chopped, salted, and drained, then mixed with scallions, ginger, or dried minced shrimp for extra flavor before being combined with the meat.

THEN, COOK: Most dumplings are boiled, but those with delicate vegetarian fillings, such as tofu and eggs with rice vermicelli, are steamed so they don't break apart. A torn dumpling is considered bad luck — a small but serious taboo. “Everything you say or do on New Year's Eve is supposed to bring good fortune,” Xie says. “You want everything to be perfect.” — WEN HUANG

Doris Xie
Rotary Club of
Highland Park/
Highwood, Illinois

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

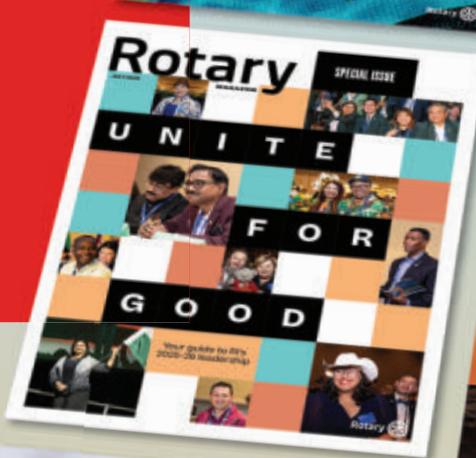
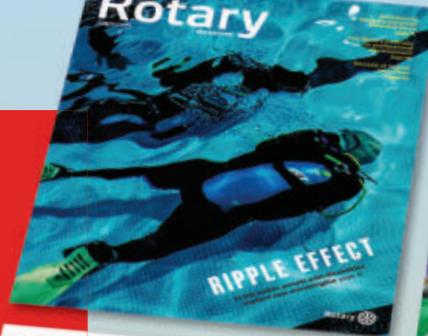
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