

Rotary

MARCH 2026

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The reach of community action

Water connects us all. From a river in a remote forest to a stream running past a city neighborhood, freshwater ecosystems sustain humanity. Yet these waters are increasingly under strain.

Pollution, overuse, and climate pressures remind us that protecting freshwater is a global challenge.

Rotary has always believed change begins within communities. Now we are working to see how far the impact of community action can travel. When local service is connected, measured, and shared, it becomes a force that extends beyond geography and borders.

A water project led by the Rotary Club of Panamá Nordeste exemplifies this idea. The project served Indigenous communities in Panamá's Darién province, a region accessible only by canoe and small boat. With no roads, limited electricity, and reliance on untreated river water, families faced serious health risks.

To reach these communities, Rotarians had to rethink how supplies and services could be delivered. Working with a partner club in the United States and a specialized water organization, they introduced solar-powered water treatment systems for an area without access to an electrical grid. Local leaders were trained to operate and maintain the system, ensuring that clean water would continue flowing long after installation crews departed.

The results were immediate. Children who once missed school due to illness returned to classrooms. No longer needing to haul water from rivers, adults gained time and strength to work and support their

families. What began as a water project became a foundation for healthier, more resilient communities.

This is how we extend our reach: combine local leadership with global partnerships, technical expertise, and long-term thinking.

That same spirit is at the heart of Rotary's partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme through the Community Action for Fresh Water initiative. Around the world, Rotary and Rotaract clubs are restoring waterways, protecting wetlands, and safeguarding vital freshwater sources. By collecting data to map and measure this work, we can better understand its impact and show how local service contributes to worldwide solutions.

Data is not an end. It is a tool that helps us learn and improve so that Rotary's service delivers real, measurable change. Each project entered and each waterway restored adds to a shared story of stewardship and responsibility. You can learn more and get involved at communityactionforfreshwater.org.

As we observe Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Month, I encourage you to reflect on the freshwater systems that sustain your community and the role Rotary can play in protecting them.

When we connect local action to a global vision, we strengthen Rotary's ability to make lasting change. Together, by extending our reach and working side by side, we truly *Unite for Good*.

FRANCESCO AREZZO
President, Rotary International



WELCOME



YOU ARE HERE: Madeira, Portugal

GREETING: Olá

EUROPE'S HAWAII: Rising from the Atlantic, 500 miles southwest of mainland Europe, the Madeira Islands are a volcanic archipelago often compared to Hawaii. Portuguese explorers discovered them in 1419 and named the main island Madeira, which means “wood,” in tribute to its thick primeval forests. Funchal, the capital, derives its name from *funcho*, for the fennel that once grew in abundance there.

RAZOR'S EDGE: At 6,106 feet, Pico Ruivo is Madeira's highest point, connected by a dramatic trail to Pico do Areeiro, the third-highest summit. Known as the “razor's edge,” the route traces narrow ridgelines fitted with handrails and weaves through tunnels, volcanic rock, and steep stone stairways. Dave Lawrence, the son of Richard Lawrence of the Rotary Club of Manchester, Connecticut, photographed this spectacular sunrise from above the clouds on Pico do Areeiro.

THE CLUB: Chartered in 1933, the Rotary Club of Funchal is the third-oldest in Portugal and has initiated projects including protecting Madeira's forests and communities from wildfires. ■

Rotary

MAGAZINE

March 2026

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STAFF CORNER

John Hannes

Supervisor of membership growth and experience

Shortly after I was born in the Philippines, I was adopted by an American couple stationed at Clark Air Force Base. A few months later, my parents adopted an infant girl five months younger than me from another family. We grew up almost like twins, and we had three loving siblings, my parents' biological children. My family moved back to the U.S. and settled in southern Illinois, near Scott Air Force Base where my father worked.



Hannes on stage at the 2023 International Assembly.

I was a shy child, but I experienced a personality shift in high school, when I decided to start fresh and become more outgoing. Theater played a role in that. I joined show choir and the speech team and landed lead roles in school musicals, where I made more friends.

In college, I stayed with theater and minored in music with a focus on vocal performance. Like many, I dreamed of performing on Broadway. After graduation, I performed professionally in Chicago and once joined the cast of the *American Girls Revue*, a musical about American Girl dolls at in-store theaters. The recession in 2008 curtailed my theater work, and I began to explore alternative careers.

While working at my day job at a bookstore in 2010 in Evanston, the Chicago suburb home to RI, I ran into a Rotary manager who encouraged me to apply for an open position. He helped me get my foot in the door working to support clubs and districts.

Theater training has served me well in my 15 years at Rotary. I'd learned to be a good listener and collaborator. At Rotary Conventions in Seoul, Toronto, and Hamburg, Germany, I hosted a daily video report called *Convention Minutes*.

I was also invited to be a co-host on the International Assembly stage.

My current role has me leading a team that works with Rotary leaders in North America to enhance member engagement and drive strategies that grow our organization and increase our impact.

I joined the Rotary Club of Lakeview in Chicago in 2012 and served twice as club president. I started a tradition in which club presidents become the membership chair the following year, allowing them to continue contributing their leadership skill and their institutional knowledge. I also helped get the Rotary Club of Evanston Nouveau chartered. Recently, I reached Major Donor Level 1 with The Rotary Foundation.

When I was 30, I found my birth mother. Going through a box of old belongings my parents had saved, I discovered my birth certificate. Out of curiosity, I began searching and eventually located her on Facebook. I reached out and told her I understood the difficult decision she had made, and we started talking regularly. In 2015, before working at the Rotary Convention in Sydney, I took a personal trip to the Philippines to meet her and other members of my biological family, thus filling in a missing piece of my life. ■

Letters to the editor

ODES TO JOY

The December issue may be the best since I joined the Rotary Club of Mobile in 1988. So positive, so upbeat, so much fun — way to go.

Lynn B. Robinson, Mobile, Alabama

I hope I'm far from the only one to respond to [the December] issue about being happy and joyful. Yes, we need to lead our service projects with joy, not obligation or guilt.

With Rotary's bedrock of service, let us energize the self by providing humor along with grace. And may the humor include the return of Stripped Gears.

OK, so maybe dad jokes aren't as appealing as in the past, although I still unhesitatingly enjoy them. Accepting that things evolve, I challenge you to energize our Rotary community by providing a monthly dose of humor — and maybe a few links to George Carlin, Steven Wright, Nate Bargatze, Jim Gaffigan, Dave Chapelle, and my favorite, Robin Williams.

Smile for no reason.

Hal Schlenger, Marietta, Georgia

TALKING POINTS

I write to endorse what Dr. Stephanie Steckel wrote in her letter to the editor, "Speak for yourself" [December]. I attended the Toastmasters club that was started at the company where I worked in Silicon Valley for 11 years. The speeches in the Toastmasters program are each designed to develop a specific facet of speaking well in public. The first speech is the "Ice Breaker," a five-minute speech introducing oneself to the audience (a topic one ought to know rather well).

Toastmasters also wants its club members to embrace a key facet of Rotary — to have fun. Hence, I titled one of my speeches "Relax With a Joint." Naturally, the audience members were intrigued by what they might be hearing. I proceeded to teach them a couple of woodworking skills: how to make a dovetail joint and a mortise and tenon joint. They relaxed!

Our club's best speaker became a friend of mine. He was from Indonesia, and English was his second language. He



carefully designed attractive speeches and delivered them well.

Toastmasters imbued me with considerable confidence. Would you believe I'm even brave enough to subject our club members to my voice, when I occasionally lead the song at our meetings?

Robin Maybury, Sebastopol, California

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

I am 87 and have been a member of the Rotary Club of Hughes, Arkansas, since the 1970s. We are a small rural club that meets once a month.

I really enjoy *Rotary*. Y'all are doing good work and are printing a first-class magazine. I have a suggestion: On the last page or close to it, I believe some wit or jokes or points of interest would make a good ending for the magazine.

Thomas Beene, Marion, Arkansas

I'd like to offer a suggestion to enhance an already excellent magazine: Include the four priorities of Rotary International's Action Plan [increase our impact, expand our reach, enhance participant engagement, and increase our ability to adapt] somewhere in the magazine. These priorities are intended to give

OVERHEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In November, celebrity chef Rick Bayless wrote about a recent trip to Taipei in which he tasted his way through the city with the help of Rotary members ahead of the 13-17 June Rotary International Convention. Watch a video of his adventure at [youtube.com/rotaryinternational](https://www.youtube.com/rotaryinternational).

Glad you had the opportunity to see how wonderful Taiwan's food culture is. Amazing flavors and such dedication by the street vendors ...

Lulu Yang
► [via Facebook](#)

Loved Taiwan. Super friendly, food from lots of Asian cultures represented. Easy to get around. ... Can't wait to go back!

Jennifer Eckstein
► [via Facebook](#)

Amazing trip and great video! He is the best host!

jojo 1998
► [via YouTube](#)

CONNECT

direction to Rotary club resources and activities via a strategic plan.

I think it's a good idea to allow readers of the magazine to understand that Rotary has four well-defined priorities. This organizational focus is an excellent way to demonstrate Rotary's commitment to its 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."

Perhaps you could find some more space in the column dedicated to Service Above Self (page 58 in the December issue), which includes the Object of Rotary, The Four-Way Test, and the Member Code of Conduct. Clarifying that service is focused on four priorities would be great and would fulfill The Four-Way Test!

David J. Duncan, Chesapeake, Virginia

AIR DROP

I'm always looking for ways to promote Rotary to the general public. My latest involves *Rotary* magazine. Now, on every flight, I leave a copy of the magazine in the seat pocket for the next passenger to enjoy. Maybe it will spark an interest or even help recruit a new member.

Mel Weith, Davenport, Florida

A TROUBLING TRADITION

Rotary prides itself on being apolitical, which I respect and generally agree with.

Despite this, many clubs, including mine, recite the Pledge of Allegiance [to the U.S. flag] during meetings. Members recite the words "with liberty and justice for all" as if they are reality, when arguably they are not. This nation's history, and recent events in particular, make it abundantly clear that those words always have been, and at best remain, an aspirational statement.

Reciting the pledge is also difficult to reconcile with the fact that Rotary officially defines the organization as secular. The words "under God" were added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, during an earlier time of great social and political division in our nation.

Perhaps the time has come for Rotary clubs to consider if it is appropriate to be reciting something that is neither secular nor apolitical, and if doing so honors The Four-Way Test.

If truth, fairness, goodwill, and better friendships are more than hollow words, then we need to respect Rotary's founding principles and honor the diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and personal convictions of every member.

Steve Kaverman, Centennial, Colorado

OUTSIZED IMPACT

I write to share an inspiring example of what small Rotary clubs can accomplish through sustained commitment to a single well-executed service project. For 35 years, the Rotary Club of Addison, Texas — with just 39 members — has hosted an annual golf tournament benefiting the Ronald McDonald House of Dallas. This modest undertaking has generated extraordinary results: more than \$5 million raised to provide comfort and support to families with critically ill children.

Our success comes not from our size but from our consistency, community partnerships, and unwavering dedication to a cause that resonates deeply with our members and sponsors alike. Year after year we've refined our approach, strengthened relationships, and demonstrated that showing up matters.

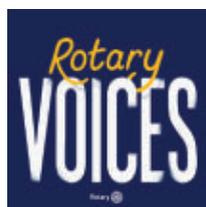
The families served by the Ronald McDonald House remind us why we do this work, and I hope our story encourages other clubs to dream big, regardless of their membership numbers.

Janet Meyer, Dallas

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ON THE PODCAST

The Rotary Youth Exchange program has been promoting international understanding for 50 years. On a recent *Rotary Voices* episode, longtime exchange host Sabrina Barreto and a student her family hosted, Simon Foote, share their perspectives on the program. Later, Rotary Foundation Trustee Chair Holger Knaack discusses his own experience hosting over 40 students. Listen at rotary.org/podcast.



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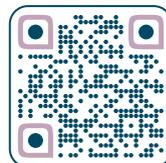


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THE SPECIALIST

Prescription strength

A pharmacist turned CEO considers the future of health care

I often say, “Once a pharmacist, always a pharmacist.” After many years, I am still a pharmacist at heart. I started out as a community pharmacist in my hometown of Chiavari, first managing a pharmacy and then acquiring one of my own. In the early 1980s, I moved into pharmaceutical distribution because I strongly felt this was a segment of the health care supply chain where there were gaps and, therefore, opportunities to be grasped.

When I think of all the meetings or business dinners in which I have been the only woman in the room — well, I am pleased to see that some progress has undeniably been made. The number of women in top roles is still too limited, but it is quite significant that the idea that gender-diverse leadership drives better innovation and financial performance is now widespread. I’m pleased to say that The Boots Group is a company in which the vast majority of its 66,000 employees — 76 percent — are women.

Pharmacies are going to play an increasingly frontline role within health systems as the primary care point of reference for patients, because they are essential in relieving pressure on general practitioners and emergency departments. Today in several countries, pharmacies offer expanded clinical services: vaccinations, minor illness management, and monitoring of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma. They will continue to expand in this direction to become tech-enabled community health hubs focused on clinical services, personalization, prevention, and digital integration.

Ornella Barra
Rotary Club
of Chiavari-
Tigullio, Italy
CEO, The
Boots Group



The unprecedented technological transformation the world is experiencing is the main disrupter in health care too. Pharmacies are already becoming more tech-enabled so they can manage e-prescriptions and automated repeat dispensing, remote patient monitoring, AI-supported medication reviews, telepharmacy consultations, and more. And there are of course immense opportunities that artificial intelligence will bring. Just think of the application of robotics in surgery or the new possibilities in terms of diagnostics.

I’ve been familiar with Rotary since I was young and have always admired the dedication of this organization in promoting the ideal of service and ethical standards in business. A childhood friend invited me to his Rotary club to tell my story, and that was my first Rotary moment. ■

PRESS



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SUPPORTING EDUCATION

A smart start

As early childhood education expands, challenges and opportunities abound

Pheliswa Matutu never thought she'd be a business owner. As a single mother, she had her hands full raising three children while teaching at a community learning center in the town of Knysna, South Africa. But in 2022, she learned about a new initiative that helps people with child care experience like her to open schools for some of the youngest children, 3- to 5-year-olds. Funded by the nonprofit Knysna Education Trust and the Rotary Club of Knysna, the program provided Matutu with training, guidance, and financial support to transform her garage into an educational facility.

"I started with only six children. In 2024 there were 12. Now I have 30 children," says Matutu, 38, who employs three other teachers and a cook to provide for her charges. "I'm glad I opened my school. It gives me some money coming in, I'm able to give job opportunities to other people, and I love the children."

As early childhood education has gained traction around the globe, advocates are grappling with the practical problems of trying to educate the youngest of the world's 2.4 billion children: expanding access, securing funding, and meeting more of kids' needs. Matutu's school and others like it are part of the solution — and the benefits stretch beyond improved outcomes for children.

"People are starting to think more holistically about early childhood education," says Lindsay Weixler, a professor at Tulane University's Early Childhood Policy Research Lab in New Orleans. "What

should we expect in terms of child outcomes, and where else should we be looking in terms of the impacts beyond just on the individual child?"

In South Africa, for instance, a nonprofit called SmartStart has found an innovative way to address the shortage of facilities while also offering people like Matutu the promise of entrepreneurship. Salaries for teaching toddlers and preschoolers may be modest, but owning your own school is a different matter. And since most of the aspiring business owners in this arena are women, the initiative has the added benefit of expanding access to economic opportunity.

"It's starting off some of these women with little business enterprises," says Judy-Marié van Noordwyk, the managing director of the Knysna Education Trust. "SmartStart gives them a stipend for the first two years, to get settled and start to get fees from parents. The vision is that they will eventually become the human resources who will run a national system for early childhood development."

Impressed by the creativity of SmartStart's approach, van Noordwyk helped write a successful Rotary Foundation global grant application to bring the initiative to Knysna. With the grant, the Knysna Education Trust guided 50 local women to open schools like Matutu's and ultimately reached nearly 4,000 children.

Creative approaches are needed to fund existing programs too. "Early childhood education has a history of philanthropic, community-based, or even home-based provision," says Emma Pearson, a professor and



To learn more
and get involved,
visit [rotary.org/
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In South Africa, a Rotary Foundation global grant supported the expansion of the SmartStart early childhood education program, helping 50 women open schools and reaching nearly 4,000 children.

director of research at Maynooth University outside of Dublin. “We’ve moved into the formal sector fairly recently, and there’s a tendency for governments to semiprivatize” the program funding.

In some cases, the efforts of one energetic individual can make a difference, as happened in Rapides Parish, Louisiana, in 2023. Patrick Moore, a member of the Rotary Club of Alexandria, Louisiana, learned the Rapides Foundation was offering to match community donations for early childhood education in the area. The state, in turn, had committed to match the total contribution. The only problem was getting local businesses to donate.

The business leaders Moore approached said they couldn’t possibly contribute to another regional

initiative. So Moore stopped talking about kids’ brains and started talking about the bottom line. “I put together a kind of investment plan,” he says. “When you ask these businesses, ‘What do you need?’ they say, ‘We need workers.’ Well, by paying for early childhood education, we’re basically planting seeds. This money will help our community have a stronger workforce in the future.”

With this pitch, Moore and other members of his club were able to raise around \$500,000. Matching contributions from the Rapides Foundation and the state government brought the total to more than \$2 million in scholarships.

The business case for early childhood education is even more comprehensive, Weixler says. “You get

a two-pronged benefit from a business perspective,” she says. “You immediately open up a potential employee in the parent who no longer has to stay home to care for the child, and you help set kids on the right path to be in a better place 20 years from now.”

Thanks to one of the scholarships Moore and his club helped fund, parent Angel Sands was able to send her 3-year-old daughter, Ryatt, to an early learning center. “They have a great curriculum for the kids,” she says. “My kid comes home telling me the days of the month, and I’m like, ‘OK, wait, you’re 3!’ She’s going to do big things. I can feel it.”

With her child cared for during the day, Sands is doing big things too. She has been able to obtain her



From left: Louisiana Rotarian Patrick Moore worked with his club, businesses, and other partners to raise more than \$2 million in early childhood scholarships; beneficiaries included children at the Loving Hands Children's Enrichment Center.

BY THE NUMBERS

1 million

Neural connections formed per second in early life

36%

Share of the world's 3- to 4-year-olds in early education

\$4.19

Return on every dollar invested in early education in U.S. (in higher earnings)

general high school equivalency diploma and start training to become a medical assistant. “This scholarship has helped so much,” she says. “Without that, I wouldn’t be here.”

Stories like Sands’ mean different things to different experts. For Weixler, parents like Sands illustrate the wide-ranging economic impact early childhood programs can have: Ryatt’s learning center doesn’t just prepare her for a demanding job market one day, it frees her mother to enter it. Other researchers say one of the main values of such programs isn’t necessarily educational. It’s the safe, reliable environment they provide.

Some experts, however, have found that the benefits of early childhood programs are less attainable if a child is experiencing instability and deprivation at home.

In more than 30 years of owning a Montessori school, Rotarian Suzi Howe came to see there was a limit to what she could do for her students. Nurturing, attentive parenting was key.

“I decided part of my role was to work with parents,” says Howe, a member of the Rotary Club of Space Center (Houston), Texas. “It was good if they could replicate some of the skills the teacher has: getting down to kids’ eye level, making eye contact, not overwhelming or overstimulating children with too many things and too much going on. Parenting classes are very important.”

Howe’s club recently funded a Colombian program that combines early curriculum reform with parenting workshops. The initiative also helps children and their families get health care. It’s the kind of broad-

based intervention that’s increasingly seen as essential to the success of early childhood programs.

For some children, simply having regular meals can make a huge difference. Many of Matutu’s students come from impoverished families, and she spends a lot of time and money feeding them. The Knysna Education Trust requires her to serve meals throughout the day, providing grocery vouchers and supplies of premade nutritional porridge.

“Sometimes the children come to school without having had anything to eat,” Matutu says. “I hope the government will give us a subsidy, because we need to be holistic. There are things we need for them so they can also build their physical strength. It’s not only academic.”

— ETELKA LEHOCZKY

Short takes

New Rotary Fellowships focused on agriculture and farming, hypnosis and healing, and sub-Saharan culture were recognized this past fall.



Nominations for the Rotary Award for Excellence in Service to Humanity, which honors nonmembers, will be accepted this month. Learn more at rotary.org/awards.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (MOORE) MONIKA LOZINSKA; (LOVING HANDS) COURTESY OF PATRICK MOORE



PROFILE

Next generation

A Rotaractor in Singapore found his passion in helping others realize their purpose

Diva Kalaivanan
Rotaract Club
of Raffles City,
Singapore

Diva Kalaivanan was a troublemaker, an energetic kid who loved to play and wasn't one for studying. That changed when he decided to go to the Institute of Technical Education in Singapore, where he found Interact and his passion to serve others. "I wanted to change myself for the better, try to grow out of that phase," says Kalaivanan. "I knew my strengths lay in being hands on."

When he continued to Singapore Polytechnic, he joined its Rotaract club and grew into district and then regional roles. In 2024, he was the organizing chair for the Asia Pacific Regional Rotaract Conference in Singapore; the conference is hosted in a different country each year to connect Rotaractors in the region. Today, Kalaivanan serves as the vice chair of the Asia Pacific Rotaract multi-district information organization.

Rotaract has played a role in Kalaivanan's work as a community development manager for the People's Association in Singapore, which works with community organizations to promote engaged citizenry. "I try to engage our Rotaractors to be passionate about what they're doing," he says. "Rotaract played a big part in my career as I help community volunteers understand the root of what they do as well."

No matter the role, Kalaivanan wants to bring people together and prepare Rotaractors for futures with impact. "A lot of young people are trying to find purpose," he says. "We want to ensure the things we do create a sustainable, long-term change. When it comes to doing what's right versus doing what's easy, I think doing what's right is more important."

— JP SWENSON

Mike McGovern, longtime chair of the RI PolioPlus Committee, became chair of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative's Polio Oversight Board in January.

The Cyclone Ditwah Response Fund supports Sri Lankans affected by the November disaster. Donate until 31 March at my.rotary.org/disaster-response-fund.



At a November event in the United Arab Emirates, Rotary joined other organizations and governments in pledging a collective \$1.9 billion for polio eradication.

People of action around the globe

By Brad Webber

Canada

The Rotary Club of Chilliwack Mt. Cheam in British Columbia aced its volleyball tournament in November, attracting 28 teams to a fundraiser that the club has hosted since 1995. "Many local businesses participate by registering a team, and they have their staff come out and play," says Kim Ashley, the club's president. "Each player brings a new toy to donate to Chilliwack Community Services as part of the Christmas Sharing Program." The project supports the club's foundation, which focuses on the needs of children, including dental work, medical assessments, and counseling. In all, the matches have raised more than \$300,000 and collected 15,000 toys over the past 30 years.



1900

Volleyball introduced in Canada



United States

Everett Singleton was an educator who helped integrate schools in Collinsville, Illinois, in the 1950s. When Interactors from Collinsville High School learned that Singleton's gravesite lacked a marker, they organized a Dine-to-Donate event to raise the \$1,700 needed for a proper headstone. Honoring Singleton, who died in 1970, was second nature to the civic-minded students, says Brad Skertich, the club adviser. Singleton, who grew up in the town's Black neighborhood during segregation, served as a teacher at various schools and as a principal. "Our students have been eager to get involved, give back to their community, and help others," says Skertich, a member of the Rotary Club of Collinsville, Maryville, Caseyville.



\$1K to \$3K

Average headstone cost in U.S.

England

An event to celebrate Indian culture featured local luminaries with Bollywood connections and raised about \$2,200 for the Rotary Club of Maidenhead Bridge's service work. Attendees included Chittal Shah, choreographer to celebrities, and vocalist Atul Pushkarna, both of whom now reside in the United Kingdom. Ten of the club's 55 members are from India or have Indian heritage. "The laughter, dancing, and genuine sense of connection in the room showed just how powerful cultural celebration can be in bringing people together for a good cause," says Lisa Hunter, charter president of the club. The November event helped fund a Parkinson's disease support group and a trip by the club's vocational training team to Uganda for a maternal and child health initiative.



1.9 million

People of Indian ethnicity who live in England and Wales



Rotary Club of Maidenhead Bridge



Malta

The Rotary Club of Gozo has discovered a formula for civic and social media engagement: Tell community members just how much they're appreciated. After rolling out the glitzy Pride of Gozo Awards in 2022, the club saw a burst of interest in the work of Rotarians on Gozo, one of Malta's three populated islands. "The event is our showcase of the year," says Tom Welch, a past president of the club who proposed the ceremony, which is supported by the *Times of Malta* newspaper and a government ministry. "While not a fundraiser, it raises our profile: a touch under 40,000 views on Facebook, 600 new followers, and over 2,000 engagements. It also provides us with a collection of wonderful speakers and drives membership growth."

41,000

Population of the island of Gozo



Rotary Club of Gozo



Japan

The Rotary Club of Tokyo Hiroo embarked on a melodic mission in October, collaborating with the Rotary Club of Beverly Hills in California to bring the music therapy program Music Mends Minds to people with Alzheimer's. Over several visits, club members brought drums, cowbells, and other percussive instruments to care facilities and encouraged participants to clap along as the Rotarians struck up tunes. "Music Mends Minds helps older adults with memory loss reengage," says Miyuki Ochi, president of the club. "Watching older adults' faces light up through music is one of the greatest joys of our service."



Rotary Club of Tokyo Hiroo

4.4 million

Japanese people with dementia in 2022

GOODWILL

Member magnets

Four things your club can do to make members want to stick around

By Brianne Haxton and Nick Taylor

We're living in a world with rapidly changing global economies, and Rotary's membership follows those trends. The United States, Europe, and Australia, which have traditionally been places where Rotary's membership has been strongest, have been declining in members, while parts of Africa and Asia have tremendous membership growth.

For many years Rotary thrived by connecting people locally for friendship and professional development. The internet changed the way we interact and made it easy to connect with a few clicks. We're starting to see the pendulum swinging back as people look for in-person connection because they are tired of interacting primarily online. They see Rotary as a way to make genuine connections. That's a huge opportunity for Rotary to grow.

Unfortunately, right now, half of all Rotary members leave their clubs within three years of joining. Rotary research tells us that they're leaving because they're not satisfied with the club experience. A 2022 survey found that the most important thing to members is the week-to-week happenings within their club. We want to create inclusive and welcoming environments for members so that they want to come back. We need to make sure that we provide value, making their time as members truly worthwhile. Here are four small but significant steps clubs can take to create a positive club culture.



The Rotaract Club of Melbourne City in Australia leads an effort to keep trash out of the Yarra River.

1. Know your club's identity and provide a product that reflects it.

There are more than 45,000 Rotary and Rotaract clubs in the world. Unlike a global corporation like Starbucks that offers a standardized experience in all of its stores, each Rotary and Rotaract club provides a unique experience for members and guests. It's important to be aware of your club culture and be sure that your club reflects it in your meetings and events, the work you do, and the image you portray in social media.

2. Set unifying goals.

We know from research that the top reason people join a Rotary club is to make a difference in their community. Many members end up staying because of the relationships they build doing something meaningful.

If you look at an American football team roster, you see 50 to 60 players from different walks of life. But the teams that end up winning at the end of the season tend to be those with a close-knit locker room. They get along, they like each other, and they enjoy spending time together. That's oftentimes because they're working toward that common goal of winning. And so, when we look at a Rotary club with conflict and tension, our first question is: "Do you have big, audacious goals that can unify your members?"

3. Listen to your members and adapt.

Rotary's membership team provides helpful survey tools on rotary.org/membership. Members' needs and interests change over time, so checking in regularly helps you assess, adapt, and evolve. One club told us it surveys members twice each year. Based on those results, the club stopped doing projects it's been doing for years and started projects that align more closely with members' interests. Members feel more engaged and it's a growing club.

4. Communicate consistently.

At Rotary, doing good in the world is what we do best, but oftentimes telling people about who we are and what we do is a challenge. Clubs can tell their Rotary story in newsletters, on websites, and on social media, but the key is to do it consistently. A Rotary club in Ohio grew by over 100 members in the last couple of years. Leaders attribute their success to a newsletter that highlighted service projects and club activities with locations, meeting times, and what to expect for new members.

Change can seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be hard. Start by asking your members what they want. Be honest about the changes your club needs to make and prioritize them. And remember, change doesn't have to be big. Small changes can make a big impact. ■

Adapted from the *Rotary Voices* podcast. Hear RI staff members Brianne Haxton and Nick Taylor talk more about Rotary membership trends and tips at rotary.org/podcast.



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!

ESSAY

The survival guide

I escaped years of domestic abuse. Now I help others find their way to safety and healing.

By Valencia Jones



It was in the parking lot of a grocery store. That's where I felt my life diverge, my life before and my life after, trapped and free.

A simple trip to the store — something most people do without really thinking about it — had been for me a thing of terror. I'd nervously watch the clock. How long had I been gone? Long enough for him to question where I'd been? Would I get a beating or just a fusillade of hurtful words?

I gripped the shopping cart and felt the familiar stab of fear, looking at the clock and the long checkout line. C'mon, move. Move! Out in the parking lot, I threw everything into the car and got in. Then it suddenly dawned on me. There's nobody at home, no one waiting. That life was over. In a car full of groceries, I sat and cried, just because I could take as long as I wanted, and because of everything that meant.

I met the man who would become my husband in 2006. He started talking to me at a gas station in Shreveport, Louisiana, about an hour and a half by car from my home in Monroe. He seemed nice. We exchanged numbers and would talk on the phone. Every couple of weeks, we would meet up while I was in Shreveport to see a specialist for a back injury I suffered working as a nursing assistant.

After a few months, he asked me to move in. I was a single mother of three in my late 20s, unable to work because of my injury. I wouldn't have to worry about getting back to work or about money, he said. Within two years we married.

Looking back, I know now that's when it started. The manipulation begins when they first approach you. They're relentless at being everything you need, filling the gaps in whatever is missing in your life. You're in financial trouble, you're a single mom, you're lonely. They try to be the answer to those things. They overwhelm you with nice gestures, dinners, flowers. But I didn't know that then. He just seemed like everything I could have hoped for.

It's small things at first. Ugly little comments, controlling behavior, once they feel comfortable and certain that they've got you. It's hard to explain to friends and family. They wonder how anyone could stay and put up with such abuse. But like I said, it's gradual and

always followed by a barrage of apologies. I'm sorry I cussed at you. I'm sorry I threw something. I just got so angry because I care so much, I'm so passionate. And it's fine again until the next time. And there is always a next time. Over my 15-year marriage, I would experience many types of abuse. I know now that the categories of abuse people experience can include verbal and physical violence directed at you or harm or threats of harm to your children, pets, or property as a way to hurt and control you.

Experiences like mine are more common than you might think. One out of 3 women and 1 in 4 men will experience domestic violence. You might have experienced it or know someone who has. Maybe you saw the signs on someone else but didn't know what you were looking at. You may have heard them say, "Oh, this bruise? I fell, I'm so clumsy." Or perhaps they dodged invitations to a movie or dinner. "Sorry I can't, I need to get home."

Today, I work as a licensed professional counselor specializing in the treatment of people who experienced domestic violence or human trafficking as well as adults who were sexually abused as children. One case I'll never forget. I was counseling a woman whose partner had beaten her into a coma and was continuing to stalk her. She managed to safely escape to another state. Later, another woman came for help. Her abuser, I would learn, was the same man. Here I was helping these women and all the while there was this perpetrator out there creating another victim. That's how I, a domestic violence survivor, also began counseling abusers, ordered by courts to undergo treatment.

Rotary lifted my self-esteem. It gave me a community of support and the courage to become a public speaker and advocate. It gave me my new start on life.

It might sound strange, but I feel a certain empathy for these men. Many of them were victims of horrific abuse as children. That was my ex-husband's story. When he was 5 or 6, his dad would come home drunk and violent. Sometimes he'd hide out in the woods. He was hurt so he grew up hurting people.

I HEAR THAT OVER AND OVER.

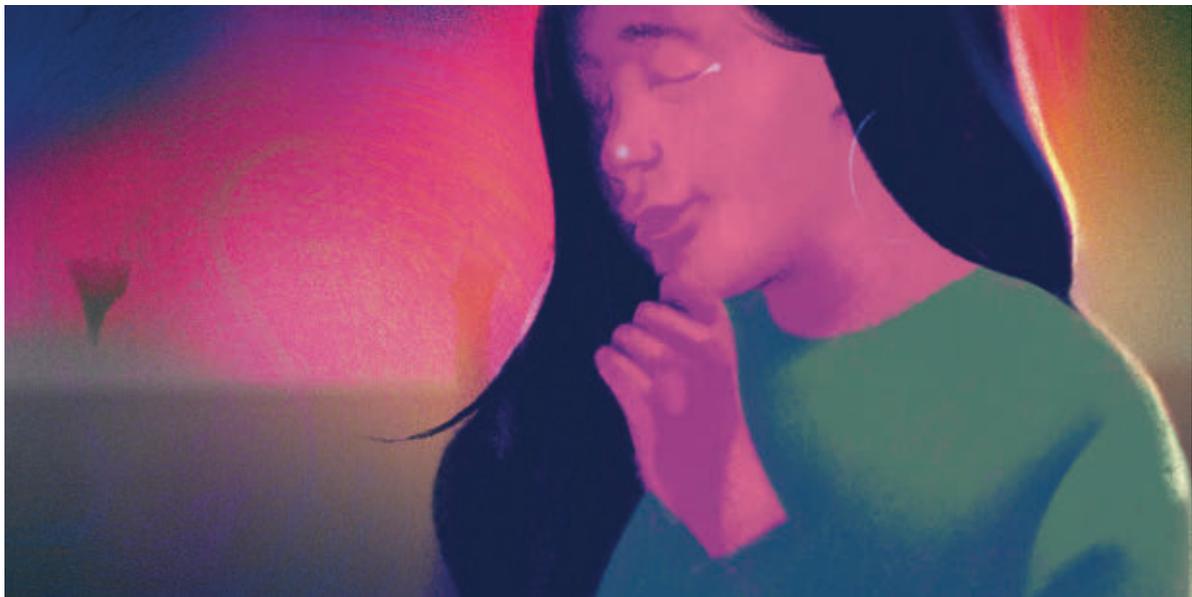
While counseling a group of men, I asked one of them, "Why do you think you're so angry that you want to hurt your wife?" "Well, I don't know," he said. "My dad was a monster, I guess. I guess that's where I get it from."

He shared that one time his father had beaten his mother so severely he thought she was dead. I looked at him, this man, now 36 years old, fresh out of prison, covered in tattoos, full of muscles. He was weeping and rocking back and forth like he did as a child hiding in a closet. I cried too. All I could see was the scared 6-year-old boy. The other men leaned in, giving their full attention. I said, "I'm so sorry somebody hurt you. You just said your dad was a monster. So why then did you become the monster of your house?" There were gasps in the room. Later that man returned to tell me he'd turned his life around, enlisted in the Navy, and was treating his family better.

It's not easy for me. After all, these are representations of the man who abused me. When I first enter the room, they often react angrily to the sight of a woman as their counselor. But once they open up and become vulnerable, their healing can begin. Sometimes I share my story with them. After one such session, a few of the men offered me words of support, asking how anyone could want to hurt me. And I said, "You know what, that's exactly how your wife feels." My perspective as a survivor has a real impact on them.

Of course my experience helps with counseling survivors too. Some even come to me specifically because I'm a survivor. I share in their pain, tears, and regrets, all of it. Then I remind them that they had the courage to get out. I always take time to celebrate their strength in taking this path to freedom.

Lots of therapists avoid this area of counseling because it's so intense and improvements take time, sometimes years. It's a long haul because, to start



with, you have to unbrainwash patients. I know the choreography of that manipulation and control. I know the isolation, how your friends start to drift away after you've canceled on them so many times for fear of your abuser's reaction to you being gone.

Over time, you no longer recognize yourself. You give up doing your hair or makeup or dressing nice. That would arouse suspicion. You flatten your personality, lest he suspect you of flirting with other people. Your conversations with others become bland and generic. Don't get excited, don't make eye contact. In my case, I started to feel like an NPC, one of the nonplayable characters that float by unnoticed in the background of the video games I like to play. I felt erased.

But here's the thing: There is hope. There is help and healing. I know that too. It starts with careful planning. Simply leaving without a plan can put you in more danger. Around 75 percent of homicides related to domestic vio-

Get help: To reach the National Domestic Violence Hotline in the U.S., call 1-800-799-SAFE (7233); chat at [thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org); or text "START" to 88788.

lence occur after separation. I studied advice from online videos. My plan started with building financial independence. I persuaded my husband to accept me getting a part-time job and had my pay deposited electronically to a secret bank account. My husband, a truck driver, was away for months, allowing me to work more. Eventually, I had saved enough to go back to school and completed a bachelor's degree in psychology, then a master's degree, allowing me to work as a counselor and earn more. Meantime, my three oldest children were safely independent. I just had to care for the two younger children I had with my husband.

Each person's safety plan differs, and some are able to break away sooner than others. For me, that day came after years of planning; I packed up the house while my husband was away. When he learned I was gone and I told him I wanted a divorce, he laughed, calling it a phase. Threats followed. I moved again. But in the end our divorce was finalized. And there was that moment in the grocery store parking lot. I'll never forget it.

Healing is a long journey. Through therapy, I learned to find myself again, to find my personality, decide how I want to dress or wear my hair. But one of the other first big things I did with my

freedom was to join a Rotary club. Rotary was my first act of rebellion. A member of that club was on the board of a counseling center where I ran a free group for women who had experienced violence. He said he could tell I had a love for my community and asked me to join. He was the first person who really saw me. After some time, I shared my story with the club. Rotary lifted my self-esteem. It gave me a community of support and the courage to become a public speaker and advocate. It gave me my new start on life.

Now, every October, for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, I invite a few dozen of my clients or women from shelters to attend an event our club organizes to celebrate them with entertainment, dinner, cocktails, and door prizes. Sponsors donate money that we use to support women with counseling, transportation to safety, temporary shelter, personal items, moving trucks, living expenses, and more. The event, called Illuminate, ends with the women lighting paper lanterns. In the glow, we reflect in silence on how far we've all come. ■

Valencia Jones, the immediate past president of the Rotary Club of Riverbend-Shreveport, is the director of the Social Therapy Project. Learn more and get involved at socialtherapyproject.org.

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.

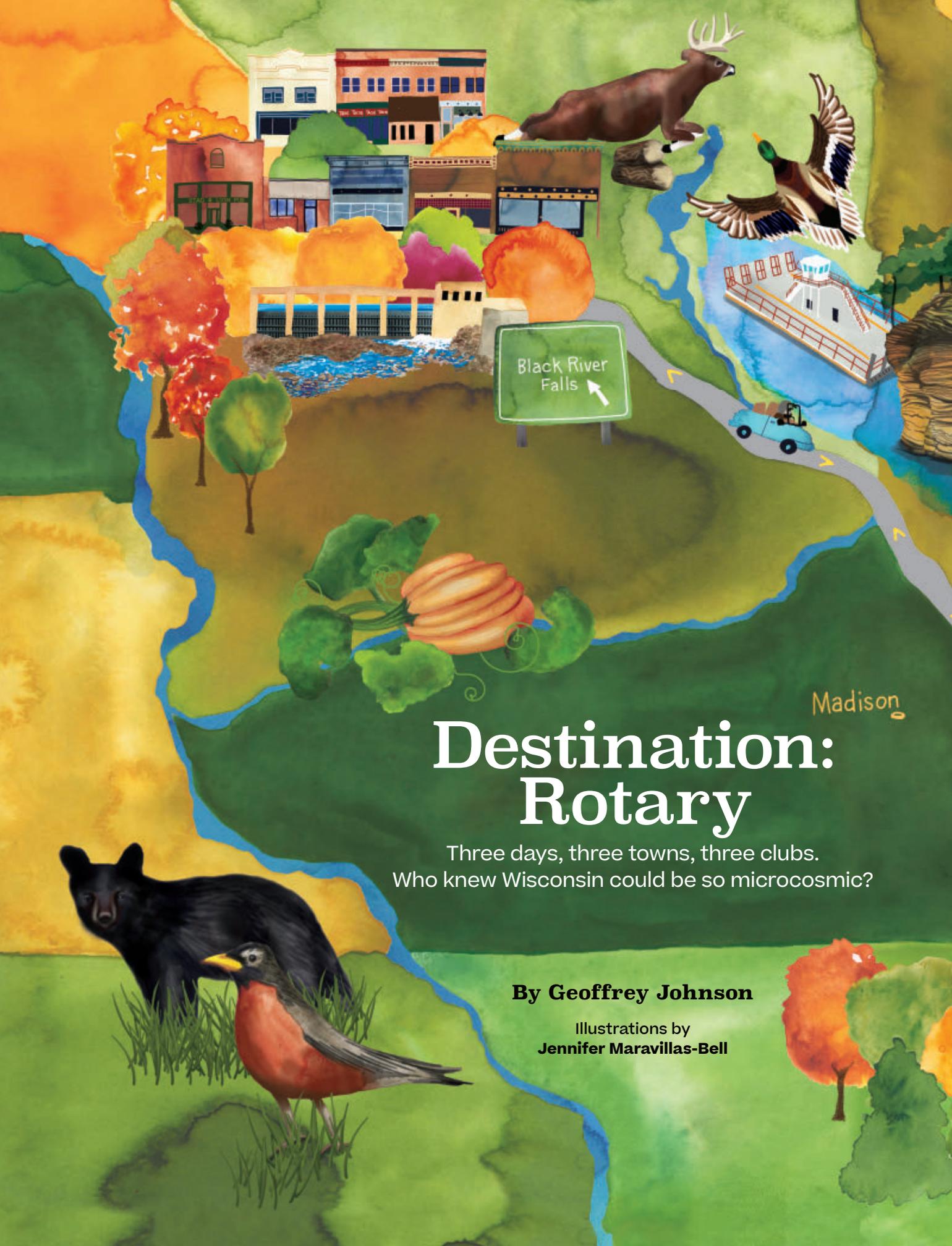
MORE THAN HALF OF ROTARY CLUBS USE ROTARY CLUB CENTRAL TO TRACK THEIR GOALS.

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:





Black River Falls

Madison

Destination: Rotary

Three days, three towns, three clubs.
Who knew Wisconsin could be so microcosmic?

By Geoffrey Johnson

Illustrations by
Jennifer Maravillas-Bell



Lake Mills



Saukville
Port Washington
10 MILES

Milwaukee

WISCONSIN

WELCOMES
YOU

Chicago

They said there would be pyramids. I appear to have been misled.

A few days ago I was in Chicago, where Lake Michigan extended beyond the horizon and a steady stream of traffic coursed along all eight lanes of DuSable Lake Shore Drive.

But now, early on this October morning, I am the only traveler on another Lake Shore Drive — and I'm on foot. I'm in Lake Mills, Wisconsin, strolling along what might generously be called a two-lane byway. Big old houses line the road on my right, and to my left is legendary Rock Lake. I can see clear to the other side, and trust me, there are no pyramids.

Not that I was really expecting to see ponderous polyhedrons, more Aztec than Egyptian, emerging from beneath the waves. But in the not-too-distant past, stories had circulated about three or four ancient structures moored at the bottom of Rock Lake. Turns out those stories had more myth than mass. Yet when I arrived in Lake Mills this morning, the first place I headed was Rock Lake to see — or, as it turned out, not see — for myself.

Lake Mills is the second stop on my current assignment for *Rotary* magazine. My mission is threefold. I am to visit three different Rotary clubs and see how they operate. I'm also meant to observe the places where they're based and assess how small-town America is faring a quarter of the way into the 21st century and whether Rotary remains a fixture of civic life there. That includes evaluating how club membership is faring today compared to 30 years ago — and learning about strategies to ensure a club's vitality in the future. Finally, I'm meant to see the sights, for at its core, this is essentially meant to be a rapid-fire road trip.

Granted, I am spending only a day in each of those three Wisconsin towns: Black River Falls, Lake Mills, and Port Washington. Therefore, my impressions are just that: perceptive glimpses rather than prolonged examinations. My delight, however, is entirely unfeigned.

Though I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little disappointed about the pyramids.





Black River Falls

“The United States Geological Survey has formally recognized this feature as Ni-ho-kha-wa-ne-ey-ja, ‘where the black water goes over the rocks.’”

— WORLD WATERFALL DATABASE



Monday morning in Black River Falls, and downtown is bustling. “The town itself reminds me of a quintessential Hallmark picture book,” says Lynn Martalock-Wensel, the president of the Rotary Club of Black River Falls, but her description, though not far off the mark, fails to capture every aspect of the place. Stolidly charming Main Street is lined with two-story rough-hewn masonry buildings housing the typical businesses you’d expect to find in a rural downtown: a hardware store, a bank, a law office,

and so on. But there are also a good variety of restaurants, an art gallery, a photo gallery, and two tattoo parlors.

One thing is missing. When I ascend the high-arched bridge that spans Black River, I can see that the water level is low and that the town’s distinguishing hydrographic feature, called Ni-ho-kha-wa-ne-ey-ja by the Indigenous Ho-Chunk people, is nowhere to be seen. “We do have falls,” Martalock-Wensel assures me, “but only when the dam is open.”

That proximity to the river was both a boon — Jacob Spaulding settled here in

1839, and the town and a thriving logging industry grew up around his waterfront sawmill — and a threat. In 1911, a flood wiped out much of the town’s business district, which means that many of these old edifices lining Main Street are of relatively recent vintage. It’s unlikely Uncle Jake Spaulding, who died in 1876, would recognize many of them.

There are exceptions. Stag & Lion Pub isn’t open yet, but I knock on the window and a minute later I am greeted and welcomed in by Rod McGillivray. I’d already heard about the publican from

Martalock-Wensel, who told me about “one of our Rotary members” who had taken a bar with a dubious reputation and “restored it back to its glory days.”

McGillivray shows me around the pub, explaining that the building is one of the few survivors of the flood and that the floors and ceilings date to the 1860s. “I wanted to blend elements of a traditional Scottish pub with traditional Wisconsin,” he says. “I was going for something that’s never been around here before and that you can’t get anywhere else.”

I’m reluctant to leave, but I have a lunch date elsewhere. The Rotary Club of Black River Falls meets Mondays at noon at Skyline Golf Course on the outskirts of town. When I arrive, people have already begun filling their plates at the buffet or are eating and conversing at round tables. “You get a pretty good pulse of the community in this club,” says Martalock-Wensel, who moved to town and joined Rotary four years ago. “It’s been a great way to meet a lot of people. There’s a good mixture of both the public and private.”

That’s evidenced by the people seated around the tables. Here, for instance, is Duane Waldera, the sheriff of Jackson County and the club’s designated 2027-28 president, and nearby is Brad Chown, the city administrator, clerk, and treasurer.

But as in many communities across the United States, there are fewer people gathered around the club’s tables these days. With a little more than 30 members — a 40 percent decline from 1995 — the club is looking at ways to attract younger people. “They do want to serve,” says Martalock-Wensel. “It’s just that Monday at noon doesn’t always work and going to lunch every week is not really in their budget.” So members are exploring the formation of a satellite club, an offshoot that can offer flexibility on meeting times, the chance to focus on specific interests, and other features that have successfully broadened Rotary’s appeal and reach in other places.

Much of the business portion of the meeting is devoted to a review of the club’s major fundraiser, a barbecue cook-off nine days earlier at Lunda Community Park. Michelle Clark-Forsting, who chaired the event, leads the discussion, which touches on future improvements. There’s a lively exchange as people throw out suggestions, a decidedly nonpar-

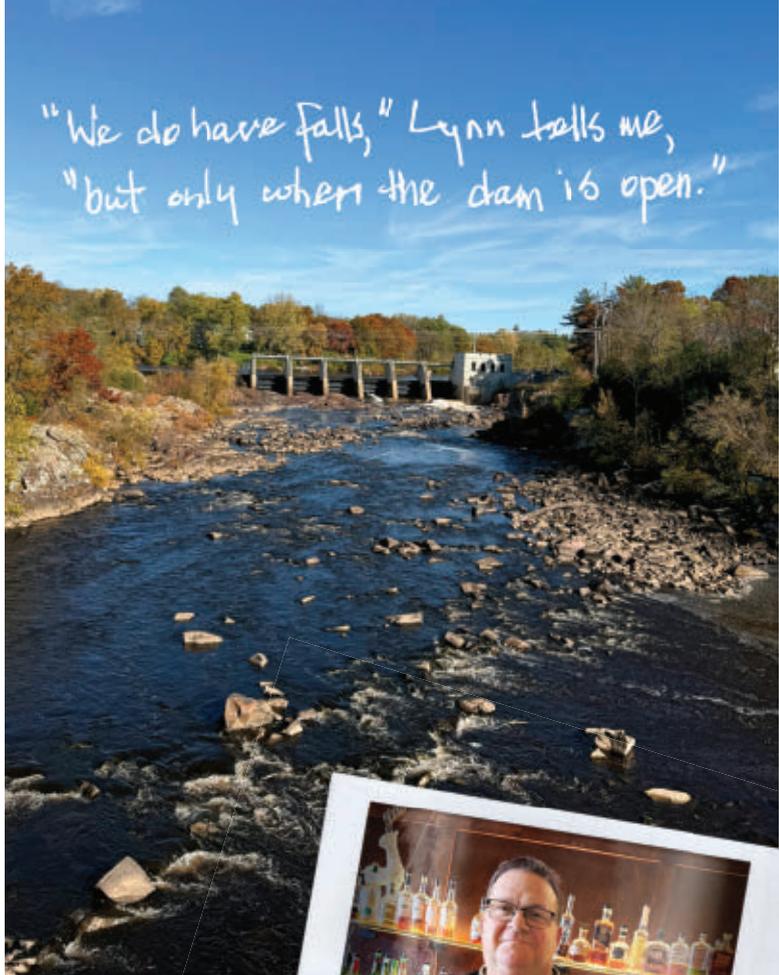
liamentary process that proves very effective. Mark your calendars: This year’s barbecue is Saturday, 10 October.

The meeting ends at 1 p.m., but I linger to talk with David Hoffman, who has been a member of this 97-year-old club for 48 years. He regales me with tales of the golf course, his family — the four generations of Hoffman Construction are commemorated in a downtown mural — and the club. “In the 1950s,” he says, “Rotary members used to drive high school football players out to practice here at the golf

course. It was just another service we provided to the community.”

I make one final circuit of the town, visiting the club-sponsored skate park and shelter in Lunda Community Park and hiking the Born Learning Trail, a joint effort between the club and the Great Rivers United Way that promotes family fun and early childhood learning. The trail was easy to find. “It’s just behind the Chamber of Commerce,” said Martalock-Wensel. “Be sure to stop in and say hello. They’re part of our membership.”

Of course they are.



Club member Rod McGillivray behind the bar at his Stag & Lion Pub; Club President Lynn Martalock-Wensel is exploring options to ensure the club’s vitality.

Lake Mills

“Lake Mills, on the irregular shore of Rock Lake, is a city of broad lawns and shade trees. In the center of the city is a park with many trees fronting the business section.”

— WISCONSIN: A GUIDE TO THE BADGER STATE



In the 85 years since that guidebook description appeared, it seems not much has changed in Lake Mills. Joseph Keyes, who settled here in 1837 and built the grist- and sawmill that gave the town its name, wouldn't recognize the place. But whoever wrote that description of this Jefferson County town for the renowned Depression-era American Guide Series would have little trouble finding their way around Lake Mills today.

Case in point: I'm seated in the Daydream Believer bookshop, which is

housed in a 96-year-old building that fronts that same tree-shaded Commons Park referenced in the 1941 guide. And this building is a relative newcomer. The F.B. Fargo Dairy Supply Building one block over dates to 1892.

The three Rotarians who have invited me to join them for a cup of coffee at the bookshop disabuse me of any notion that the town is stuck in the past. "We're an in-demand community," insists Anita Martin, president of the Rotary Club of Lake Mills. "There's not enough housing for all the people who want to live here."

The reason, she explains, is the town's location on the interstate between Milwaukee and Madison, the state capital. "Sixty-five percent of [employed] people living in Jefferson County commute outside of the county for their job," says Martin, but they prefer to make their home in a family-friendly town like Lake Mills. "We're a small enough town, and most people know about Rotary," adds Lake Mills native and 19-year Rotarian Amy Litscher. "And," says Gerard Saylor, "they know what we do."

The list of what the 71-year-old club does is extensive: blood drives, a food pantry (run by the affiliated Interact club), a park replete with ballfields, a playground, a shelter, and seasonal concession stands. Saylor is proud of the scholarships presented to local high school grads bound for college. “We award eight or nine each year for between \$1,000 and \$2,000,” he says. “It’s a big deal, a nice honor — and people know that the students are getting support from Rotary.”

Once again, civic leaders are well represented in the club. City Manager Drake Daily is a member, as is Tonya Olson, who runs the Lake Mills school district, and Martin served two two-year terms on the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors. Saylor, who arrived in Lake Mills and joined Rotary more than 20 years ago, is the director of the L.D. Fargo Public Library, where he’s orchestrating a \$5 million expansion. Housed in an architecturally stunning 123-year-old stone building, the library, says Saylor, “is a gathering place that’s welcoming to everybody. It’s a place to learn, to study, or to just come in, sit down, and do your thing.”

Saylor has received an assist from the club in promoting and raising funds for the expansion. Club members Beth Naughton and Barb Cramer hold leading roles on the Friends of the Library board of directors, and at the Tuesday afternoon club meeting I attend, after Saylor reports that he needs a letter of

support from a local civic organization to secure a particular grant, the club votes unanimously to provide that letter, which Martin volunteers to write.

Held in a former EMS building, the meeting has a different, yet no less effective, dynamic than the Black River Falls club meeting. Members eat lunch at three long communal tables, along which lots of friendly conversations unfold, yet the meeting has a more formal structure. There’s a speaker, Steve Zambo from Salty Earth Pictures — “the largest movie studio in Jefferson County,” jokes Zambo, and gets the laugh he hoped for — and a series of announcements about the latest blood drive and an upcoming vaccine clinic, among other things.

The club sponsors a flourishing Interact club, and with its own 50-plus members, ranging in age from 25 to 92, membership remains virtually right where it was 30 years ago. (In fact, it has managed to grow slightly.) That doesn’t mean the club isn’t actively seeking new members. One of its growth strategies is to connect Rotary with the next generation.

In partnership with the town’s two high schools, the club sponsors a program that invites high school students to attend meetings and talk to and with members. (The Black River Falls club sponsors a similar program.) It’s a way for club members to learn what’s going on in the high schools — and it helps introduce potential future members to the club. The

four students at the meeting I attend are an impressive group of young women: a former junior reporter (at age 8) for the Chicago Bears, an equally precocious water-skier, a member of the National Honor Society, and a violinist with the Wisconsin Youth Symphony. They receive a warm welcome from the Lake Mills club and would be a welcome addition to any Rotaract or Rotary club in the future.

And for good measure, when she’s finished reading *Rotary* magazine each month, Anita Martin leaves her copy in a public location with a note inside letting people know how they can learn more about the Rotary Club of Lake Mills.

On my way out of Legendary Lake Mills (as the town fancies itself), I swing by Mulberry Street to see the mansions erected by the Fargo brothers — the same family that gave the town the dairy supply building and the library — as they strove to outdo one another in domestic opulence. The most magnificent, the Enoch J. Fargo house (today a bed-and-breakfast), has an ursine story to go with its turrets and gables. For years, Enoch had a bear pit, and one Halloween, some pranksters lowered a ladder into the pit. The bears climbed out, roamed the town, and, when finally apprehended, were shipped off to Milwaukee, where they became the first bears at that city’s zoo.

Even without those pyramids, “legendary” may be an apt moniker for Lake Mills after all.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GEOFFREY JOHNSON; COURTESY OF GERARD SAYLOR



FROM LEFT: As the director of the L.D. Fargo library, Rotary member Gerard Saylor is overseeing the library’s \$5 million expansion; Amy Litscher and Anita Martin enjoy coffee at the Daydream Believer bookshop.



Port Washington

“We will not continue to be silenced and ignored while our beautiful and pristine city is taken away from us.”

— PORT WASHINGTON RESIDENT VOICING OPPOSITION TO A PLANNED \$15 BILLION DATA CENTER



To my great regret, there will be no club meeting at my third and final stop. The Rotary Club of Port Washington—Saukville holds its meetings on the first, second, and third Wednesdays of the month, and I have arrived on October’s fourth Wednesday.

As consolation I get to spend the day with one club member, and to my great delight, this particular Rotarian contains multitudes. A Milwaukee native, Gene Boyer graduated from the Jesuit-run Marquette University High School and

went on to earn a degree in finance and business administration from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He spent two years as a manufacturer’s rep before having his Damascene moment. “This,” he realized, “doesn’t excite me.”

That’s when Boyer returned to the Jesuits with the intention of becoming a priest. He earned two master’s degrees — in philosophy and theology — and a PhD in educational development and spent two years working with refugees and students in Sudan and Kenya. Then, six months before his ordination, he had

another revelation. “I thought,” he says, “that marriage looked pretty good.”

I meet Boyer at the home that he and his wife, Mary Schmitt Boyer, built eight years ago about a mile west of Port Washington’s lakefront. I say a quick hello to Mary — the first woman to serve as president of the Professional Basketball Writers Association, she’s off to meet with friends and former colleagues before the home opener of the Milwaukee Bucks — and then Boyer and I hop into his truck to tour Port, as locals refer to the town.

“My wife was from Milwaukee,” says Boyer, “and so when we decided on retirement” — he as associate superintendent for high schools for the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, she as a sports reporter for Cleveland’s *Plain Dealer* — “we decided we’re going home to Wisconsin.”

We stop first at the Lake Michigan shoreline, where I get a history lesson and a close look at the local Rotary club’s impact on Port. I hear about the Luxembourgers who refused to fight in the Civil War because they had specifically fled their home country and settled in Wisconsin to avoid conscription. Ever the teacher, Boyer jumps forward more than a century to explain the evolution of the 180-year-old town’s lakefront, where the old fishing buildings are today giving way to high-rise condo developments.

Without leaving the lakefront, the tour then takes a decidedly Rotary turn. “If you asked any person on the street if they knew of Port Washington Rotary,

they would say, Well, sure we do,” says Boyer. “Just in terms of what we do in the community, we’re well known. We’re not a secret in the community at all.”

Boyer, the Port club’s treasurer, secretary, and Rotary Foundation chair, has already provided me with a list detailing the 30-plus local institutions to which the club contributed a total of \$25,000 in the 2024-25 Rotary year. Now he leads me through a waterside park that the club helped build, with a gazebo, commercial fishermen’s memorial, and a view of the 90-year-old breakwater lighthouse. Back in the truck, the Rotary tour continues as we drive along the bluff north of town to visit the beer garden and Possibility Playground, with activities for kids of all abilities in Upper Lake Park — welcoming public venues created through the collaborative effort of Port’s Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis clubs.

From there we head inland. As we travel through open fields, Boyer points

out the four large dairy farms, owned by his late uncle, where he spent parts of his boyhood summers. If things go as expected, the property will soon have electric power lines strung across it, a key component of the \$15 billion data center slated to be built on 672 acres north of Port Washington.

“It’s pretty much a done deal,” says Boyer, but that hasn’t stopped vociferous opposition from Port Washington residents concerned about the potential impact on the environment and the town’s quality of life from the center, one of many cropping up around the world to power artificial intelligence and cloud computing. “There’s a rallying cry you’ll hear from some people: Keep Port Port. They’ve lived here all their lives, and they insist that we don’t need development. But development’s coming — and the city needs development. The alternative is a kind of living death.”

Though Boyer doesn’t say it explicitly,



“The sense of community excites me and other people,” says Gene Boyer.

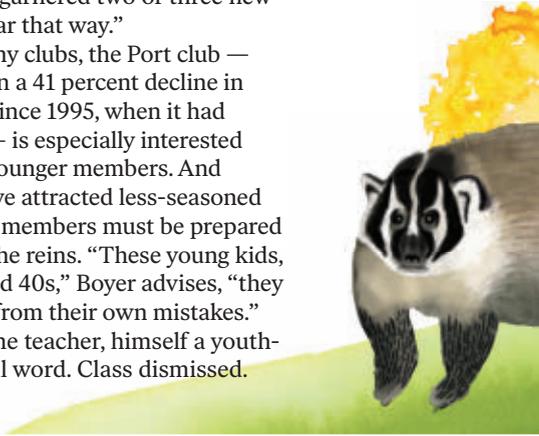
Near his town’s Lake Michigan harbor (where the salmon were running), Gene Boyer points toward the entrance to the waterfront park that the Port Washington club created; elsewhere, club members and their friends work on a few of the projects that have made the club an essential part of the town’s fabric.



he clearly thinks that, to survive and thrive, the Rotary Club of Port Washington–Saukville must also develop, adapt, and grow. That’s why it proactively seeks new members. “We consistently tell our [40-plus] members, if you know somebody interested in joining, please get in contact with one of our board members,” Boyer says. “We will personally reach out to that person and talk about Rotary. We’ve garnered two or three new members a year that way.”

Like so many clubs, the Port club — which has seen a 41 percent decline in membership since 1995, when it had 75 members — is especially interested in attracting younger members. And once clubs have attracted less-seasoned recruits, older members must be prepared to hand over the reins. “These young kids, in their 30s and 40s,” Boyer advises, “they need to learn from their own mistakes.”

Let’s give the teacher, himself a youthful 72, the final word. Class dismissed.



“Above the large shield appears a badger, the state animal, and above the badger appears the state motto, ‘Forward.’”

— DESCRIPTION OF THE COAT OF ARMS IN THE 2025-2026 WISCONSIN BLUE BOOK

And with that, I bid Wisconsin goodbye, driving south along Lake Michigan’s western shoreline toward Chicago and home. By the time I reach Milwaukee, about 25 miles south of Port Washington, I’ve already started to evaluate what I encountered and wonder if what I’ve learned had any larger applications to other towns and other clubs.

Later I’d learn that, if you are going to visit one U.S. state that’s in many ways representative of the other 49, you couldn’t go wrong by choosing Wisconsin. The state ranks 20th in terms of population, 23rd in area, and 26th in median household income. In other words, smack in the middle of the pack.

Recalling my earlier caveat about perceptive glimpses rather than prolonged examinations, I’m happy to report that I came away feeling optimistic about the future of those towns I visited, hopeful for the prospects of the people who live there, and impressed by Rotary’s vitality. What’s more, my initial skepticism about organizing a road trip around visiting Rotary clubs was obliterated, and I encourage you to plan your own trip. You will see unexpected things in out-of-the-way spots, and you will meet hospitable people happy to tell you about themselves, their homes, and the things they are doing to improve their communities.

If you are going to follow my lead, remember, as you travel from town to town — be it in Manitoba or Maine, Mexico or Malaysia — be sure to attend a few Rotary meetings along the way. It’s the best way to meet people, and you will be diverted by and learn from the different club dynamics you encounter. Something to bring back to your own club, in addition to whatever other souvenirs catch your eye.

And so, for would-be travelers, community leaders, and Rotary clubs envisioning a vibrant future, one last Wisconsin-specific word of advice:

Forward. ■



By KEA KRAUSE

A rising tide



A fishing cooperative on the Puerto Rican island of Culebra is redefining conservation and ‘making good things happen’





At the end of a short road

that spreads out into a paved spit of working waterfront on the tiny island of Culebra sits a small building with hurricane-proof windows, a sunflower yellow trim, and two rows of solar panels on its roof.

A calm canal borders the wharf, with boats docking or passing through from a protected lagoon out into the Atlantic.

Until recently, the structure was boarded up, a relic of the Puerto Rican island's once thriving fishing community. But in 2024, people passing by to fill up their car tanks at the island's only gas station next door began noticing renewed signs of life — workers putting up new siding and adding coats of paint, and the occasional group of fishers sitting outside shucking oysters.

What they would soon learn was that the modest white building was, in fact, being put back together, one brush stroke at a time, returning it to its former status as the beating heart of the community.

“We took on the task of reclaiming the building for the fishing community,” explains Nicolás “Nico” Gómez-Andújar, a fisherman who grew up on the island. Gómez-Andújar, whose father was also a fisherman, recalls the building was once a thriving communal space for the island's fishers, a piece of public infrastructure set up by the local government called a *villa pesquera*, or fishery house.

At its peak in the 1970s, the villa was quite literally a village, including a market and a meeting space, ramps, docks, and gear storage. It was also the headquarters of the Asociación de Pescadores de Culebra (Fishermen's Association of Culebra), a cooperative of people making a living fishing in the island's coastal waters.

Small-scale commercial fishing operations prospered back then. Fishers benefited from access to infrastructure while also receiving the social support of the Asociación, a member-led advocacy group. For generations, this kind of small-operation fishing sustained much of the island's population.

But by 2002, because of unsustainable tourism development, gentrification, and other factors, the archipelago-wide Department of Natural and Environmental Resources' fishery census counted just 12 fishers on the island. This attrition led to a shuttering of the villa and the cessation of Asociación activity for the next 20 years. As a result, the residents of Culebra, more than a fifth of whom live below the poverty line, lost access to fresh, affordable fish.

A series of acute crises followed, including Hurricane Maria in 2017 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The small island's 1,100 residents could hardly afford to purchase fresh seafood, let alone fish for it. This put the residents' lot into stark relief for Gómez-Andújar and his colleague Tomás Ayala, another veteran fisher on the island.

For the two men, the dearth of fresh seafood was linked to many factors. The waterfront displacement of fishers by tourism rentals, lackadaisical environmental regulations, and out-migration of residents all imperiled not only the socioeconomic reality of residents but the islanders' culture. What was needed was infrastructure and community, this much was clear to them both.

The effort to get fresh fish to the aging and rural population of the island arose organically. “It started with Tomás and others just doing this spontaneously during the pandemic,” Gómez-Andújar says.

But momentum to organize built quickly. Soon the two men were holding community meetings that culminated in the revival of the Asociación, with Gómez-Andújar as acting secretary and Ayala as its president. “We just said, ‘Hey, this is something we need to do, and we're going to fix it no matter what,’” says Gómez-Andújar. Culebra residents didn't need much convincing to pitch in, perhaps because of the Asociación's history as an influential political group.

IN 1901, the Flamenco Peninsula, along with other parts of the island, became property of the U.S. Navy, which began using its pristine coastline as a gunnery, running military drills and offshore operations. By 1940, all of Flamenco's residents and commerce, including the island's grain milling facility and fishing settlement, had been displaced.

Years of war games followed, polluting the waters and degrading the once life-sustaining fisheries. Meanwhile, residents were organizing; 1965 saw the founding of the original Asociación Pesquera de Culebra with 80 participating fishers as members, a group created to represent the rights of fishers on the island but which evolved into something much bigger.

The next five years saw protests, civil disobedience, and legal action, often led by the Asociación. The efforts culminated in the ousting of the U.S. Navy in 1975. Following the military's departure, the Asociación created the Reserva Natural del Canal Luis Peña, Puerto Rico's first no-take protected marine area, to give the fisheries — and residents' livelihoods — a chance to recover.



A rusting tank left behind by the U.S. military

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF NICOLÁS GÓMEZ-ANDÚJAR, GETTY IMAGES

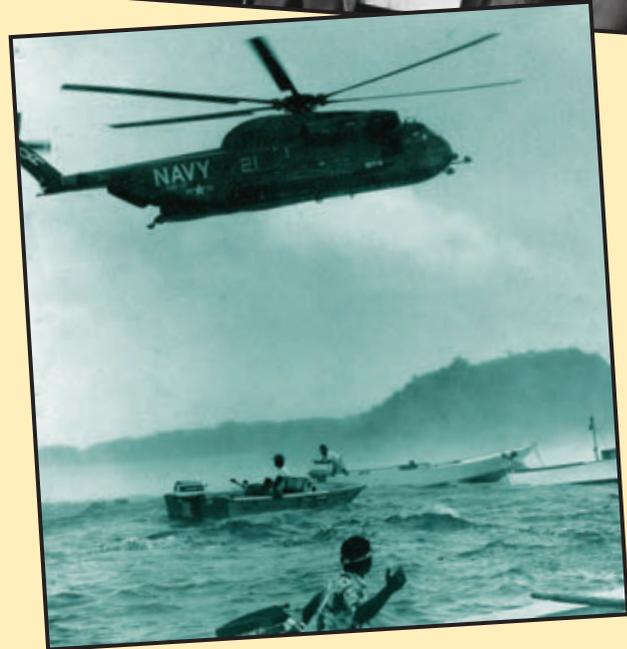
Emmanuel Maldonado-Gonzalez, a sociologist on the island, has identified several factors contributing to food insecurity for residents. Almost 100 percent of food is imported, making its way to the island via a two-hour ferry ride aboard an aging and unreliable public maritime transportation system.

This is compounded by a century of displacement on the island due to the privatization of land, first by the U.S. military and now by the tourism industry. Coastal short-term rentals and the building of private docks have blocked access to the ocean — in other words, the food.

Under Gómez-Andújar and Ayala's leadership, the Asociación set out to create a system in which islanders generally, and poor and older residents specifically, could get seafood more reliably and at cheaper prices by incentivizing fishers to sell their catch to the Asociación rather than to restaurants for tourists. Simultaneously, they sought to rehabilitate the fishing industry by providing free education to fishers and a forum in which updates to fishery rules and regulations are communicated and explained.

One of the more novel elements of the Asociación's work has been self-governing, fisher-led conservation, which upends the often-cited fishermen versus stewardship trope. The Asociación has found that fishers make great conservationists as they are the ones most frequently on the water, gathering the best data. Sometimes, this means expanding what the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration already has in place.

For example, in February 2025, fishers in Culebra were catching an abundance of



Fishery first aid

In 1901, the Flamenco Peninsula and other parts of Culebra became property of the U.S. Navy, which began using the pristine coastline for training exercises, displacing the island's fishing settlement and degrading its fisheries. The original Asociación Pesquera de Culebra formed in 1965 and helped lead the campaign to oust the Navy and create a protected marine reserve to allow fisheries to recover.

Good for the environment, good for business

A look at recent Rotary projects supported by Rotary Foundation global grants that combined care for the environment with community and economic development.



Colombia

- *Rotary Club of Medellín-Nutibara, Colombia*
- *Rotary Club of Redondo Beach, California*

► This project trained people in a rural village to grow organic produce and improved the village's water management system. Through the project, 60 species of fruits and vegetables were planted in 20 orchards using environmentally friendly methods, and repairs were made to an aqueduct to increase its flow and pressure. In addition to generating food for the villagers themselves, the project provided them with economic opportunities by training them how to process and market the surplus produce.

Pakistan

- *Rotary Club of Karachi, Pakistan*
- *Rotary Club of Arni Fort, India*

► The clubs supported the restoration of a mangrove forest ecosystem along Pakistan's coast. Mangrove saplings were planted at a site identified as suitable for their growth, and community members were trained to maintain the habitat. By increasing the mangrove cover, the project aimed to protect the coastal community from flooding and to create sources of income through expanded opportunities for fishing and ecotourism.

Puerto Rico

- *Rotary Club of San Juan, Puerto Rico*
- *Rotary Club of St. Simons Island, Georgia*

► Supported by a pair of global grants, this project helped small farmers in Puerto Rico recover from damage caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 and improved the economic stability and food security of the farm communities. Working with a local nonprofit dedicated to conservation, the project trained hundreds of farmers in regenerative agriculture techniques; provided farmers with fruit trees, organic fertilizer, and financial support; and coordinated with other groups to strengthen the entire food system. Further training led to the establishment of groups of farmers who shared their labor and knowledge to ensure the project's long-term sustainability.

Taiwan

- *Rotary Club of Taipei Yuanshan, Taiwan*
- *Rotary Club of Garden City, Singapore*

► The two clubs partnered on a project that boosted the stagnating economy in Taiwan's Pingling County. The project helped tea farmers implement organic and pesticide-free farming, thereby reducing pollution in a nearby reservoir. It then helped them market the high-quality tea they produced by launching an e-commerce platform and by initiating ecological tours that had the additional benefit of creating jobs for local guides.



From left: The cooperative helps fishers obtain licenses to dive, a popular fishing method in Culebra; Tomás Ayala (right) helped revitalize the local fishing association.

female sharks (the shark fishery is legal in Puerto Rico), which was unusual. The fishers came to the Asociación with their findings and asked whether it was OK to continue taking sharks.

“What they were doing was legal,” says Maldonado-Gonzalez, “but internally we decided we have to do something, because they were bringing a lot of pregnant females.” After looking at the data, they implemented their own community rules, which outlined best practices — where to fish for the species and how to continue data collection to ensure the shark fishery’s stability. “We’re going beyond what the regulations say,” says Gómez-Andújar. “We’re recommending what we know.”

FISHING COMMUNITIES ACROSS Puerto Rico are watching what’s happening in Culebra closely. Vanessa Rodriguez, a fisherwoman and organizer from Cabo Rojo, on the big island’s west coast, is in frequent communication with Gómez-Andújar and Ayala. She similarly encountered fishers running disparate operations when she entered the industry in 2011. “Everyone was on their own,” she recalls.

Rodriguez determined three elements were lacking: a dearth of education on regulations; insufficient communication between fish market owners, which made it hard to maintain the loyalty of local fishers and make sales; and no emergency response system for local fishing groups in the event of a missing or capsized boat.

She set out to open a dialogue between fishers and market owners about safety and

the idea that fishers could step into the role of first responders should an emergency unfold on the ocean. “I started talking with the fishermen of all the markets, asking them, ‘What do you think if we get together and make an emergency plan?’”

Soon she had organized so many fishers in Cabo Rojo that she needed to hire school buses to take them to public hearings.

AS THE SUCCESS of Culebra’s Asociación took off once more, there was one thing missing: a headquarters. Three years ago, Gómez-Andújar and Ayala began the labor-intensive transformation of the abandoned villa. Their plans were ambitious — divide the building in half, restore its infrastructure, open a fish market on one side, and transform the other into a research center.

At first, it was just the two of them. But soon, a curious thing happened: People passing by took notice of the building’s progress and began stopping in to help. So much had to be done. “There was carpentry, electricity, plumbing, painting, solar system, rainwater-catching system, saltwater system for the lobsters, new walls, new tiles, new floors — everything, basically everything,” Gómez-Andújar says. In the end, over 60 volunteers provided hundreds of hours of labor that amounted to nearly \$150,000 worth of time and work, he says.

In October, the fish market opened and now island residents can drop in to buy fresh snapper, conch, and lobster, among other local species. Today, the Asociación has 45 active members but also an entire village

of people contributing expertise outside of their day jobs. “We have biologists, we have Emmanuel the sociologist, and environmental planners,” says Gómez-Andújar. “We have cooks, marine mechanics, and so many people that bring different knowledge to the association. We all live here, and we all contribute. That has been the key ingredient.”

Shortly after the villa reopened, the Asociación threw a party with food and music, and even a reenactment of the Culebran people expelling the Navy from the island, performed by kids. An estimated 400 people showed up, more than a third of the island’s population.

When Gómez-Andújar and Ayala were seeking vendors for the party, they told people they could charge for the food they were selling but everyone refused, insisting it should be free. The spirit of reciprocity among the islanders stood out to Ayala. “It’s not only the activities,” he says, while discussing the vendors’ donations to the party. “It’s also how the people are interacting in the activity.”

Now, whenever the Asociación hosts an event, organizers can expect crowds in the hundreds. “On an island where everybody loves to eat fish, and it’s very important economically and culturally, there wasn’t a fish shop, and fishermen’s livelihoods were very threatened,” says Gómez-Andújar. “So we took on the task to organize our community, and with lots of cooperation, we’re making good things happen.” ■

This story was produced by Reasons to be Cheerful and the Local Catch Network with funding from the University of Maine.

The ambassador

Sibongile Mlambo's path to working with Rotary was years in the making

Watching the supernatural thriller TV series *Siren*, one thing instantly becomes clear: This is not your typical mermaid story. It's darker, much darker. In the fictional coastal town of Bristol Cove in Washington state, mermaid folklore over generations suddenly becomes all too real with the appearance of the mysterious and powerful Ryn (imagine a predatory version of Disney's Ariel). ¶ As I binged the three-season series from Freeform, I was captivated by the performance of Sibongile Mlambo as Ryn's sister, Donna, who, in this fanciful tale, is captured and subjected to experiments by the military. ¶ Zimbabwean-born Mlambo is an actor, producer, model, dancer, and philanthropist known for roles in Netflix's *Lost in Space*, MTV's *Teen Wolf*, and other popular series. She also has Rotary connections, and in 2022 she visited the Nakivale refugee settlement in Uganda to learn about Rotary's work fostering community and connection there. ¶ You can imagine my excitement, then, when I learned that Mlambo had also become a Rotary celebrity ambassador and would attend the 2025 Rotary International Convention in Calgary, Alberta. I scrambled to set up an interview with her there. Between many other appearances, she obligingly breezed into *Rotary* magazine's makeshift podcast studio with a warm smile to discuss her life, career, and work with Rotary.

Interview by
JP SWENSON

Illustration by
REBECCA CLARKE



Tell me a little about your upbringing in Zimbabwe.

I was born in 1990, a decade into Zimbabwe's independence, and so I was born free. That was a really special time. The different races were finally mixing and interacting, and there was a lot of hope in the country.

Unfortunately, once I got to high school in the 2000s, the economy was crashing. There was even a 100 trillion-dollar banknote that everyone called the zillion-dollar note. That's how much the economy crashed. Things really changed at that point. You would go to the grocery store and there'd be no food on the shelves, long periods of time with no electricity, no running water. And so that led to the resilience that I have, which I feel you need as an actor because it's not a linear career. It ebbs and flows. The culture in Zimbabwe is that you make a plan. Anything bad that happens, you figure it out. Life goes on. I've carried that with me through my whole life.

After I finished my secondary school exams, I took a gap year doing volunteer work, and that influenced what has led to my work with Rotary. My oldest sister did a Rotary Youth Exchange program in Belgium. Our high school had Interact, and both of my sisters were part of Interact. That was my introduction to Rotary.

What else about Zimbabwe? I mean, it's home. I don't live in Zimbabwe anymore, but it is home.

I read that you couldn't always see yourself becoming an actor when you were younger. Why did you feel that way and what changed?

I did my first acting job when I was 10 years old in Zimbabwe, and after that I went back to regular life because I didn't know what the next steps were. I would watch TV, I would see people in Hollywood, and I was trying to figure out, "How am I going to get from here to there?" I didn't know how it could be possible and how it would happen coming from a small country like Zimbabwe.

There was also this thing of, if you don't see yourself represented on screen, it's hard to imagine that for yourself. When I think about the pivotal points in my life, when I saw Lupita Nyong'o win an Oscar and I saw someone who looked

like me who had a similar background to mine, that's when it was like, "Oh my goodness, I'm ready. Hollywood is ready for us now." That influenced my next steps getting myself to Los Angeles.

You lived in Dallas to pursue your education at one point, and you also lived in Spain. How has living in these different places shaped your perspective on the world?

Being exposed to different kinds of people has been such a gift. At one point I was working in a restaurant in Dallas and everyone in the kitchen spoke Spanish. I realized that, if I live in Texas, I should speak Spanish. And so I studied French and Spanish in university.

Studying Spanish led to me living in Spain. I studied abroad for about 4½ months. Languages are one of my passions because they are such a great way to connect with other people from different cultures. Even if you can say only one word in someone's language, it breaks the ice. People get really excited when you can speak their language.

People use differences to separate each other, but those differences are actually a great way to get closer. At university I was the president of the international club and that was a great space to be in because there were people from countries that I had never heard of. We would explore Dallas together, and I'm still friends with some of the people from that group today. Me and someone from Mongolia had much more in common than the surface things that made us different. Our common thread was that we were all international students in America.

How has your Rotary ambassador experience been so far?

Rotary got in touch with me a few years ago to highlight the work that they were doing with polio eradication in Africa. That felt like it was aligned with my wants and desires. I'm very passionate about where I come from and things that happen on the African continent, especially if it's for the good of our people and moving things forward.

A few years later we got together for an interview with a woman in Kenya who was part of a Rotary club there. She had an initiative where she was pro-



↑ Mlambo as Donna in *Siren*.

→ Mlambo visits the World Refugee Film Academy at the Nakivale refugee settlement in Uganda to lead a workshop.



viding sanitary pads to girls in remote areas, and I'm also very passionate about women and girls. There's a saying attributed to the poet Rumi: "What you seek is seeking you." And so Rotary and I just found each other in a really natural way.

Is there anyone that you've worked with who inspired the shape of your career?

Charlize Theron. She's South African, and I used to live in South Africa, working as a model, an actress, and a dancer. When I was working as a model, I looked at Charlize's career and saw that she was a model turned actress, and so that was kind of my pathway. I actually did a movie with her when I was still living in South Africa called *The Last Face* directed by Sean Penn. It was a full circle moment for me.

When you're not in front of the camera, you also voice act. How did that come about?

I've done some podcast series, and those were all very intimidating to begin with. I didn't feel like I had the tools. Of course, now with more experience, I'm much better at it. But when you're acting on screen, so much is said without even say-



ing anything at all. You have your body language and facial expressions. You're communicating the whole time visually.

Once you take that away, you only have the voice, so you have to engage in a completely different way and really stretch it out. Especially for my character in the video game *Rainbow Six Siege*, where I had to do death falls and screams. Like now you've fallen off a building, and how does that scream sound? It was fun, but then you don't have a voice left afterward.

From filmmaking to voice acting to modeling and dance, you are an especially driven person, especially now working with Rotary. So how do you recharge?

I try to connect with my family and friends, the people who are really important to me when things are not going well. That emotional support is so important especially when it comes to my family, because when I'm with them, I'm just the little sister. It's such a grounding thing.

Nature is also very important to me. My astrological sign is Cancer the crab, so I find that the water is somewhere

that really recharges me. I live in California, so obviously going to the beach, and when I'm in South Africa, I'm in Cape Town. Also going for hikes, being in forests surrounded by green things. Nature is so healing.

You've helped center African narratives in other parts of the world. Why is this a personal mission of yours and how has the reception of African narratives changed since your career began?

I think Hollywood has been more open. At one time, it used to be, "OK, they're looking for an African accent." Now it will be more specific. "Looking for an East African accent" or "looking for a Kenyan accent." At the same time, there's still so much further to go.

And why it is important for me goes back to representation. It makes such a difference when you see yourself represented on screen. One time when I was shooting *Siren* in Canada, one of the crew members came to me and asked, "Are you from Zimbabwe?" She was from Zimbabwe, looked at my name and could tell I was too. It was such a special moment.

There's something about inspiring people who come from a place that is going through a tough time. When I see something that I can relate to, it gives me hope. That is the power of storytelling too — transporting people. A form of escapism. Getting to experience something other than your own reality.

What projects should we be on the lookout for from you?

I recently did a podcast series for Audible called *Sacrilege: Curse of the Mbirwi* about an African American family that goes to Zimbabwe, so that's a story that is obviously very personal to me, though it's for a universal audience.

Something else that I'm very excited about is I've been working on a video game that will be coming out in a few more years. I'm also working on a short film that's about an immigrant in California, which is one of three short films that will be put together to make a full feature film.

And of course I'll continue to be out there enthusiastically amplifying Rotary's message of hope and resilience. ■



Vital

PROGRESS REPORT: Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria



The success of a program to reduce maternal deaths in Nigeria is measured in more than statistics

Photos by **LIGHT ORIYE** | By **OLUBUNMI AFOLABI**

The statistics may appear faceless on paper: 512 deaths for every 100,000 pregnant women in Nigeria, one of the highest maternal mortality rates globally. But they're not faceless to me. I see the mothers. I see the babies. I have stood in the rooms where those numbers become either tragedies or triumphs.

I work with Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria, a Rotary Foundation Programs of Scale grant-funded initiative. Having just completed its third year, the initiative aims to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality in select areas of Nigeria by 25 percent. To do this, we're conducting community dialogues and home visits to increase the number of families choosing to get health care in clinical settings rather than at home. We're also making those services higher quality by providing additional training for health workers.

During a recent emergency obstetric and neonatal care training, a woman in labor came into a nearby health center in Aaye in Ekiti state. The woman had been pregnant five times before and was carrying twins at just over 36 weeks.

The situation was tense. The facility was short-staffed and the officer in charge, a nurse midwife, was absent. A community health extension worker had stepped in to manage the delivery. She was not a midwife by training, but she had been part of our program, equipped with lifesaving skills through the emergency care training.

The first twin came quickly, headfirst. The cries of the newborn filled the room, and for a moment, relief washed over us. But the second twin was not as cooperative. He was in breech position, and despite the community health worker's best efforts, the delivery would not progress. Time seemed to slow. The room grew heavy with anxiety.

A referral was made immediately, and thanks to the training and coordination in place, the medical officer of health and a nurse who were also attending the workshop acted without hesitation. Together, they transferred the woman to the General Hospital in the town of Iyin Ekiti.

Hours later, I stood at her bedside as the second twin was delivered safely. But the ordeal was not over. The patient began to bleed. She was experiencing a postpartum hemorrhage, a leading cause of maternal death in Nigeria. Swiftly, she was given several drugs and her bleeding came under control. The mother's life had been saved, and both babies, though small, were breathing steadily.

That night, as I lay down, I thought of her face, pale but smiling, and the tiny forms of her children bundled at her side. I thought of the community health worker whose training gave her the courage to try, of the referral system that worked when things turned complicated, and of the hospital team that did not give up until mother and babies were safe.

For me, this was more than another day on the job. It was a calling reaffirmed. The experience reminded me that behind every statistic is a story: a mother, a child, a family, a future.

Olubunmi Afolabi is communications officer for Together for Healthy Families in Nigeria and a member of the Rotary E-Club of Nigeria New Dawn.



908

Health workers trained
in emergency obstetric
and neonatal care

Statistics are as of 30 June 2025.



Above: A community health worker mimics a pregnant person as she gives a talk about maternal health at a community dialogue in November.

Left: At the event at a primary school in the Gwarinpa community in Abuja, students receive menstrual supplies as part of the broader discussion around reproductive health.

Previous pages: A health fair serves session attendees.

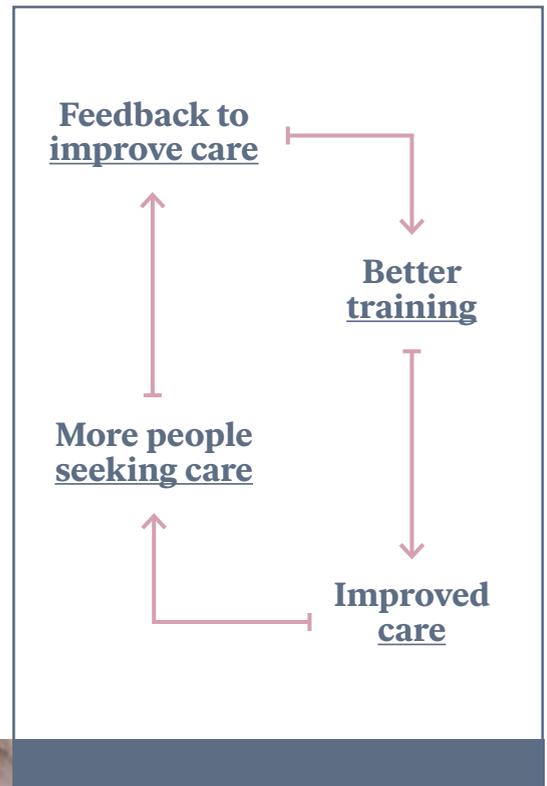
542

Health workers trained in respectful maternity care

133

Health facilities supplied with contraceptives, medicine, and supplies





The event includes a handwashing demonstration for students (above) and blood sugar and malaria testing (right). The screenings encourage the attendance of men in the community.



Left: Rotary Foundation Trustee Ijeoma Pearl Okoro (second from left) and Rotary Foundation Trustee Chair Holger Knaack (far right) receive appreciation awards, with (from left) Kingsley Okoro, Lanre Adedoyin, and Joy Nky Okoro.

Below: A mother in attendance receives anti-malarial medicine.

■
38,783

Home visits to encourage people to use available maternal and child health care

■
408

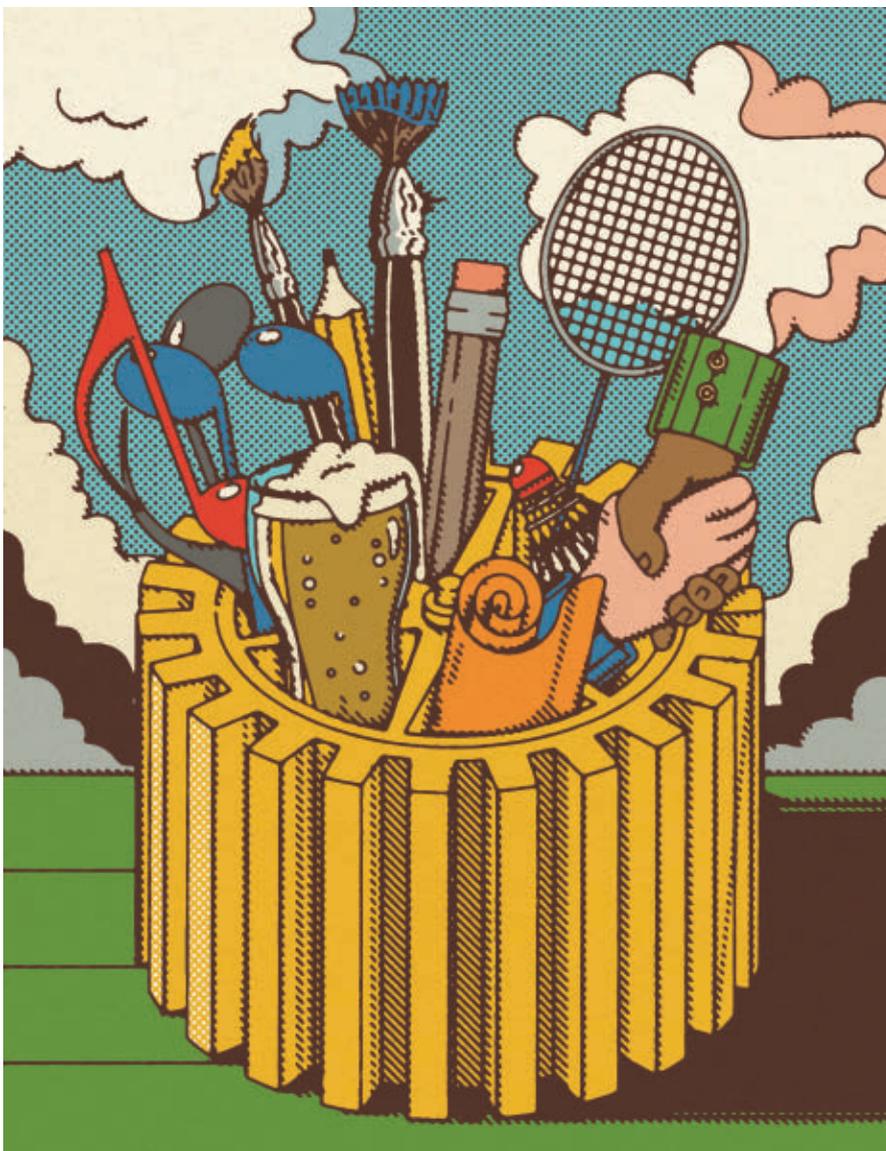
Community dialogues to educate residents about maternal and child health

■
51,350

People reached at community dialogues across four target states



OUR CLUBS



FROM THE BLOG

Out of many, one

Rotary Club of Vijayawada
Midtown, India

By Subbarao Ravuri

When our Rotary club chartered in 1985, it started modestly: just 33 members with big dreams.

Over the years, the club grew, and in 2018, we reached an incredible milestone, becoming the largest Rotary club with 650 members. Today, with more than 750 members, we continue to hold that title with pride.

People often ask me what keeps so many members motivated, encouraged, and united for so long. The answer is simple, yet powerful: our club within a club concept.

What “club within a club” means

The idea is both simple and transformative. Within our large club, members who share common interests — sports, music, business, or health — come together to form smaller circles that function like mini clubs within the main one. These clubs within the club create

focused spaces for friendship, fun, and shared purpose. They give every member a chance to connect in a way that feels personal and meaningful.

The club within a club model helps all Rotarians find their own space to connect, serve, and grow.

What makes it work

This model has transformed engagement and retention. Here's how:

- Families got involved, turning Rotary into a shared joy.
- Friendships deepened, lasting far beyond meetings.
- Members stayed active, finding belonging in smaller circles.
- Contributions to The Rotary Foundation grew, powered by enthusiasm and purpose.
- What began as an experiment became a proven model for sustainable growth and vibrant friendship.

Simple structure, strong results

Each club within a club is self-managed, led by a small team and headed by a chairperson. Activities are planned in coordination with the main club board to complement, not compete with, Rotary's calendar. A modest membership fee supports operations. For example, the Midtown Cricket Club collects 3,000 rupees (about US\$34) annually to cover rent, equipment, and refreshments. This structure keeps things light, efficient, and focused on fun and friendship.

Our club within a club idea has caught the attention of many clubs in Rotary District 3020 and beyond. By creating multiple ways for members to connect and serve, Vijayawada Midtown has shown that when Rotarians bond beyond meetings, Rotary itself becomes stronger, livelier, and more impactful.

At Midtown, every passion finds a place, every member finds meaning, and every connection strengthens Rotary's purpose.

If your club is also looking to better engage its members, consider adopting your own club within a club model. It might just be the spark that transforms your Rotary family.

Subbarao Ravuri is a past governor of Rotary District 3020, Zone 7 membership plan lead, and current district Rotary Peace Fellowship subcommittee chair.

FINDING FRIENDSHIP IN SHARED PASSIONS

Here's a glimpse of how our Midtown club members stay connected and engaged through their interests:



The Beer Boys Club holds a dance party to raise money for polio eradication.

■ Midtown Cricket Club:

Cricket lovers play weekly friendly matches and host the 20+ teams in the Midtown Premier League, which raises significant funds for The Rotary Foundation.

■ Midtown Badminton Club:

Where fitness meets friendship. The Midtown Badminton League blends sport and service, supporting Rotary's End Polio Now campaign.

■ Midtown Music Club:

Brings members and families together twice a year for joyful evenings of rhythm, harmony, and friendship.

■ Rotary Means Business:

A dynamic networking platform where members present their businesses before more than 200 Rotarians. It has strengthened trust, created collaborations, and even launched new ventures, proving that enterprise and friendship can thrive together.

■ Midtown Yoga Club:

Promotes daily wellness and mindfulness, because healthy Rotarians build healthier communities.

■ Beer Boys Club:

A lighthearted fellowship group whose annual Drink-Dine-Dance (D3) event raises funds for Rotary's polio eradication efforts.



ABOUT THE BLOG

Have a story to share? Rotary 360 is your place to read about other people of action and submit your own inspiring posts. Visit blog.rotary.org.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

AI for a better world

Rotary Peace Fellow employs technology to prevent conflict



Branka Panic founded AI for Peace to help stop conflicts before they start.

During her Rotary Peace Fellowship, Branka Panic worked as a short-term consultant at the World Bank, joining a team that was building a model to predict the probability of famine.

The benefits of such a tool were obvious: “If a certain area will be in need of food in six months, in 12 months, we can prepare humanitarian aid more efficiently,” Panic says.

But unintended consequences of making that information available also became clear. “Our intention was to make humanitarian agencies ready,” Panic says. “But what if, by providing this signal as an open source, we were actually informing the government or any warring party out there to intentionally attack this population because they see there is a vulnerability?”

The exercise illustrated both the power and the danger of using such technologies. It surfaced ethical questions to be mindful of and the sensitivities of parsing data and sharing it widely.

It also motivated Panic, 42, to found AI for Peace, a think tank dedicated to issues like these, as well as how artificial intelligence has the potential to benefit peace, security, and sustainable development. She co-authored a book of the same name.

The organization’s focus areas include humanitarian action (using AI to save lives by anticipating and targeting response efforts); human rights and democracy (using AI to identify human rights abuses and protect defenders of human rights); and human security (using AI to protect people, as well as researching potential security threats). Positive use of AI technology can strengthen societies and prevent conflict in the first place, Panic says.

AI is already being used in peace negotiations. Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders have used AI to facilitate large-scale dialogues aimed at ending the conflict in Gaza, she says. In some conflict areas, AI is breaking down language and dialect barriers. “We are using AI to say, ‘Wait a minute, we actually have quite an easy way to

let people's voices be heard in this peace process.”

AI for Peace works with peacebuilders to build their knowledge and familiarity with artificial intelligence to become an active voice in designing, developing, and implementing new applications, she says. “We also work with data scientists, who quite often never thought about peacebuilding before, and we want them to become a little bit of peacebuilders themselves,” she adds.

In fact, Panic says everyone has agency to shape the future of AI and how it's used — not only the experts and data scientists. While it can feel intimidating to participate for those who aren't technology-minded, it's important that individuals with varying perspectives have a say, Panic adds. “Everybody needs to be part of this conversation,” she says. “Rotarians as well.”

Born in Belgrade, Serbia, Panic lived through conflicts in the Balkans, an experience that shaped her worldview and motivated her to become a peacebuilder. She recalls the NATO bombing of her country, when school stopped and people had to live in basements and shelters. “These things tend to leave a mark,” she says. For her, it set her on a mission: to do all she could to

prevent people from having to live through similar conflicts.

Panic became an activist while in high school, joining the Otpor (“Resistance”) movement against the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milošević, former president of Serbia and Yugoslavia. The group organized daily peaceful walks in resistance of Milošević, who eventually resigned and was charged with war crimes committed during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

Protesting in 1999 and 2000, however, was done without much technology, she points out. In contrast, subsequent grassroots movements, such as the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, were able to benefit from social media tools to coordinate. “At the very beginning of my interest in technology, we started seeing how social media has been used to actually strengthen that type of activism,” she adds. “This was super empowering.”

With her Rotary Peace Fellowship, she was able to delve deeper into technology and AI to enrich her peacebuilding background. Rotary District 2483 in Serbia and Montenegro supported her fellowship, and the connection changed her life, she says.

Panic is now a Rotarian herself and is a charter member of the

Rotary Club of Global Partners in Peace, an e-club for peace fellows and peace activists. The club hosts speakers who talk about their peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development work, and members live all around the world, from Mexico (where she lives, in San Miguel de Allende) to Chile, Nepal, and the Philippines.

With her husband, Panic opened a “peace house,” which she describes as “a place where artists, thinkers, neighbors, diplomats, technologists, travelers, and unexpected guests can meet around one table.” Gatherings spark conversations among people of different backgrounds, an effort to turn “everyday encounters into small acts of peace,” she says.

The house is part of Panic's ethos of stopping conflicts before they start. AI for Peace intentionally focuses on prevention of conflict and building resilience; it doesn't focus on the ethics of AI in weapons of war but rather how to address root causes of human suffering and vulnerability.

“This is the niche that we decided to cover,” Panic says. “There are a lot of things to do in building peace or sustaining peace or making sure that wars don't happen at all.”

— AMY HOAK

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF BRANKA PANIC



Branka Panic

- **Rotary Peace Fellowship**, Duke University/University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2017-19
- **Founding director**, AI for Peace, 2019-present
- **Charter member**, Rotary Club of Global Partners in Peace, 2022-present

From left: During her Rotary Peace Fellowship, Branka Panic joined her host club from North Carolina in helping introduce electricity to schools in Nicaragua and volunteered with Habitat for Humanity for the International Day of Peace.

DISPATCHES FROM
OUR SISTER MAGAZINES
ROTARY NORDEN

A sea of opportunities



↑ Among the biggest practical challenges for the new crews are all the ropes. With a total of 9 kilometers (5.5 miles) of rope and 220 tampers (rope ends), there is a lot to learn and to keep track of.

In Norway, the Rotary Club of Fredriksten has set a clear goal: to help young people overcome barriers to success in its town of Halden. The club works toward this aim through its support of the Windjammer Project, in which young people participate in sailing and personal development aboard the tall ship Christian Radich, a windjammer widely known thanks to a 1958 documentary film. In the past year, the club has supported 20 young people through this transformational program.

Over a month, the sea voyage program combines sailing training with responsibility, reflection, and

networking. The program helps young people clear obstacles to returning to school and jobs through intensive sail training, teamwork, and self-discovery at sea. The program teaches valuable life skills, instills responsibility, and fosters meaningful change for young people who lack a stable direction, perhaps having dropped out of school or work.

“What helped me most of all were the fixed routines and all the rules. I have transferred much of the discipline from the boat to my home life,” says 21-year-old Sigve Aleksandersen after about four

weeks of sailing from Le Havre in the Normandy region of France to Oslo, Norway. Back home in Halden, Aleksandersen had dropped out of school and was without a job when he heard about the Windjammer Project for young people between the ages of 16 and 30. “There I quickly realized that this was something that worked very well for me. It has to be strict. But it was discipline with care,” Aleksandersen explains.

When asked what it was like to live without internet access and social media for four weeks, Aleksandersen insisted it was just fine.

He even managed to read three crime novels during his breaks.

Another sailing trainee, Alexander Alexandersen, 19, was in the first cohort supported by Stein Erik Sund, then president of the Fredriksten club and head of the Windjammer Project. Sailing to Madeira, Portugal, Alexandersen experienced eight days without seeing land. “This was unfamiliar and a first-time experience, but I avoided getting seasick. And it was nice to ‘let people go’ and wonderful to see the starry sky every night,” he says.

“The day is divided into four shifts, which everyone must take in turn. There was a lot of sail-setting, and everything was done manually,” Alexandersen says. He, too, emphasizes discipline as useful and necessary on the ship.

Both young men stress that the work and regimented routine on the ship created unity and note that no one leaves the vessel without having made at least one friend. “We became like a family at sea,” they both agree.

At the conclusion of the program, Alexandersen was inspired to pursue a maritime career, perhaps as a chef, and applied to continue on with Windjammer’s light sailor education program. He expressed interest in teaching others and being a role model as well.

The Fredriksten Rotary club partners on this project with the Delta Group, an organization that offers job preparation and is owned by four Norwegian municipalities: Indre Østfold, Marker, Skiptvet, and Rakkestad.

Knut Kloster Bjørge, Delta Group supervisor, says, “Windjammer is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that can give the participants a new foothold and a new course in life. Many people talk about having found out who they are, what they want and suddenly see new opportunities for the future.”

Bjørge describes the collaboration with the Fredriksten Rotary club and Windjammer as invaluable and an example of what the volunteering sector and the business community can achieve together.



Sund, who has accumulated a lot of knowledge during his 38 years in the Royal Norwegian Navy — most of them as a submarine officer — follows the participants closely. Also experienced in varied leadership positions in the business community, he is the initiator and driving force in the club project and says it started with the goal of doing something for young people who need resources and support to succeed. The club contacted the municipality and then had an informational meeting with a Windjammer representative.

Foundations, shipping companies, and other businesses are be-

hind the Windjammer Guild, which finances its operations. The Halden participants’ fees are supported by the Rotary club. Local banks have covered the fees for 10 young people. And SpareBank 1 Stiftelsen, a Norwegian foundation, and the municipality of Halden have expressed pride in announcing an increase in their support for upcoming cruises.

Sund, along with District Governor Sean Armana, is turning his attention to Rotary clubs elsewhere in Østfold County and is being met with great interest in the program.

— OTTAR JULSRUD

Every year, 240 young people take part in the Windjammer program. In an evaluation report from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, almost all the participants said it was “very meaningful,” and 3 out of 4 had become “more optimistic” about their future.

HANDBOOK

Our favorite Taipei mementos

Tuck these souvenirs in your suitcase



PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES, MONICA ENG, RAWPIXEL

When you visit Taipei

for the Rotary International Convention in June, you'll be able to explore the city's vibrant "old streets," admire thousands of years' worth of Chinese art and artifacts, and eat your way through night markets — but these experiences can be hard to tote home in your suitcase. Luckily the island also produces an array of mementos that will help you remember your stay. If you haven't registered yet, you can still get a preregistration discount through 31 March. Then check out our shopping guide to plan your Taiwan souvenir strategy.

— MONICA ENG

1

Tea

Taipei brims with hundreds of teahouses, tea shops, and market vendors proffering locally grown oolong varieties including light, creamy high mountain, or honey-toned oriental beauty. Proprietors are often happy to let prospective buyers try the teas before purchasing as part of a delightful tea ceremony.

2

Pineapple cakes

These ubiquitous pastries are filled with sweet and tangy pineapple jelly and wrapped in a shortbread-like dough. They're individually portioned, making them an ideal souvenir to share with folks back home. Like a lot of Asian gifts, the cakes represent success and fortune; in the Hokkien dialect, the word for pineapple (ong lai) sounds like "prosperity arrives."

3

Kuai Kuai snacks

These crispy coconut-flavored puffs offer a mild flavor but bold promises to protect your technology — or at least that's the superstition behind Kuai Kuai, which sounds like the words "be good" or "behave." "I don't know if it really works, but when I was at IBM in Taipei our tech department kept a bag next to the mainframe," says Michael Tung-Mao Tseng, a member of the Rotary Club of Taipei Prosperity. Find them at most 7-Elevens and FamilyMarts.

4

Latest tech

While you probably aren't going to take home one of Taiwan's famous processing chips, you can check out some of the latest and trendiest tech products including accessories for phones, audio, and video making. One place to look: the Guanghua Digital Plaza, which has six stories of electronics.

5

Jade

You'll find art and jewelry made from this precious mineral all over Taiwan, including at the National Palace Museum. There, among the museum's nearly 700,000 pieces, visitors flock to view a Chinese cabbage carved from green and white jadeite, a stone some believe to have healing and protective properties. Look for your own treasures at the weekend Jianguo Holiday Jade Market in the Da'an District.

6

Dried herbs, fruits, and candy

Taipei is full of shops selling herbal remedy blends as well as dried fruits and nuts, some of which you can take home. Wander along Dihua Street, one of Taipei's old streets, in the Dadaocheng neighborhood for an abundance of dried goods sellers.

7

Gaji market totes

These popular mesh shopping bags — classically in red, blue, and green — make an affordable gift and come in an array of sizes, even one for water bottles. They're available at gift shops around the city including on Dihua Street.

8

Dumpling-themed gifts

Xiao long bao (soup dumplings) originated in China, and it was the Taiwanese chain Din Tai Fung that brought them international renown. You can remember this delicious dish when you're back home as the dumpling motif shows up in housewares, toys, jewelry, clothes, and art, both at Din Tai Fung restaurant gift shops and all over the island.

9

Anime toys

Figurines and toys based on manga or anime characters are sold from gachapon (toy vending machines), shops, and in malls across Taipei. Some come obscured in boxes that keep the toy a mystery until opening. You'll find the greatest selection at the Taipei City Mall, which stretches for a half-mile underground and makes for great rainy day and comparison shopping with dozens of anime shops in one place.



Register by 31 March for a discounted rate. Scan the QR code or visit convention.rotary.org.



TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

It starts with water

Since 2013, The Rotary Foundation has invested more than \$230 million to support thousands of water, sanitation, and hygiene initiatives. Behind these numbers is Rotary's unique approach. Rather than offering one-time fixes, we train communities to manage systems for generations, moving beyond charity to lasting change. **Erica Gwynn**, manager of Rotary's water, sanitation, and hygiene area of focus, shares her perspective:

I have worked with hundreds of members, providing technical support to improve the sustainability and impact of their projects. During site visits, I am struck not only by their dedication but by how far-reaching their impact truly is — oftentimes in ways no one anticipated.

In northern Uganda for RI work, I met a Rotary member who had been a child soldier in the rebel Lord's Resistance Army and escaped. During the conflict, he said, schools and health care facilities became places of refuge. Years later, after joining Rotary, he wanted to give back. He volunteered to improve water and sanitation in those same schools and facilities, which were once again centers of refuge — this time for the health, safety, and vitality of the entire community.

In Maharashtra, India, I witnessed how our Programs of Scale grant initiative, Partners for Water Access and Better

Harvests in India, is bringing irrigation to a traditional farming region that gave women a voice. Though the women couldn't own land, the water project enabled them to engage in silviculture, or care for forests, and other income-generating activities. They became knowledgeable about farming techniques, increasing their economic agency and dignity.

It's no coincidence that water challenges are most acute in areas affected by conflict. In Haiti, I have seen how these projects are central to rebuilding resilience in communities recovering from instability and violence. I see the same theme playing out everywhere: These projects deliver so much more than clean water. They boost Rotary's other areas of focus and are a source of safety, pride, and hope.

Indeed, water projects improve health, foster economic opportunity, and amplify education through increased school attendance, especially for girls who no longer spend hours fetching water. And they fight poverty.

By giving to our Foundation and volunteering in water projects, you are part of this success. Everything we do opens an opportunity for someone, somewhere.

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?

MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT

All members (Rotarians and Rotaractors) are expected to:

1. Act with integrity and high ethical standards in their personal and professional lives
2. Treat others fairly by using respectful language, being supportive, fostering a welcoming environment, and honoring all individual member characteristics
3. Use their professional skills through Rotary to improve people's quality of life in their own communities and elsewhere in the world
4. Avoid behavior that reflects adversely on Rotary or other Rotary members
5. Follow all codes of conduct for any Rotary-related event.

CALENDAR

March events

INSIDE TRACK

Event: Mini Golf Classic
Host: Rotary Club of North Pocono, Pennsylvania
What it benefits: North Pocono Public Library
Date: 1 March

In its fifth year, this indoor golf event at the library features an 18-hole putting course that Interactors set up amid the stacks. On the last hole, golfers have the chance to win a \$500 grand prize by hitting a hole-in-one, with mulligans allowed. At the end of the course, all participants are treated with popcorn, ice cream, and a free book.

VIVE L'IRLANDE!

Event: La Saint-Patrick du Saguenay
Host: Rotary clubs of Chicoutimi and Rive Nord Du Saguenay, Quebec
What it benefits: Local projects
Date: 13 March
 More than 400 people are expected to attend this St. Patrick's Day celebration in Saguenay's Chicoutimi district that has become an annual tradition for the two clubs. The festivities take place in the old harbor building along the Saguenay River. A poutine bar showcases the celebrated Quebecois dish of french fries topped with cheese curds and gravy, while some half-dozen regional breweries pour craft beers.

LISTEN TO THE MUSIC

Event: Black Tie Bingo
Host: Rotary Club of Riverside Sunrise, California
What it benefits: Local projects
Date: 14 March
 For more than two decades, the club has organized an annual formal-dress



BETTER TOGETHER

Event: Naples Craft Beer Fest
Host: Rotary Club of Naples North, Florida
What it benefits: Local projects and nonprofits
Date: 7 March

At this annual festival, about 15 restaurants and 30 breweries team up to offer paired samples of food and beer. Pairings are judged by culinary experts to determine the Grand Champion, while attendees vote for their favorites in a People's Choice contest. Last year's winning combos included mango-habanero chicken wings with a hazy IPA, a smashburger with a light lager, and short rib ragu with an amber ale. Festivalgoers enjoy live music while they chow down.

bingo event to raise funds in support of the community. This year, guests are invited to wear a "sparkle of green" in honor of St. Patrick's Day and play "jukebox bingo," in which bingo numbers are replaced by popular songs. The evening includes dinner, live music, and a silent auction.

BRING IT HOME

Event: Home & Recreation Expo
Host: Rotary Club of St. Albans, Vermont
What it benefits: Local projects and nonprofits
Dates: 21-22 March
 More than 5,000 people each year flock to this two-day expo in which local companies exhibit their goods and services. Visitors can peruse the booths of landscapers, builders, real estate agents,

and other vendors and try samples of food from businesses including Franklin County maple producers. First held in 1992, the event has raised more than \$1 million over the years.

'CUE TIP

Event: The BBQ Thing
Host: Rotary Club of Round Rock, Texas
What it benefits: Local nonprofits
Date: 28 March
 The historic grounds of the Old Settlers Association of Williamson County are the site of the club's third annual finger-licking feast. The ticket price covers a barbecue dinner, dessert, and two drinks; there will also be a cash bar. Live music and games make for a Saturday evening of good old-fashioned fun and camaraderie.

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.

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF ROTARY CLUB OF NAPLES NORTH



Chinese cuisine and opera are among special offerings for attendees.



2026 CONVENTION

Only in Taipei

There are so many ways to find connection and fun at the Rotary International Convention.

Beyond the inspiring convention program itself, you'll have your pick of special experiences when you go to Taiwan 13-17 June. Highlights include the opera, a gathering for Rotary Youth Exchange alumni and supporters, and even an around-island bike trip.

Your friends in Taipei have organized Rotary nights at the national theater for opera and at the National Symphony Orchestra. You're invited to a host hospitality night banquet for exquisite Chinese cuisine and exciting performances. Or raise money to end polio: Choose from a week-long bike trip ahead of the convention that circles the island or a 3K or 12.5K run on 13 June.

Seeing the sights is simple with planned tours in Chinese or English, ranging from a half-day Taipei itinerary to five days exploring

Taiwan's diverse landscapes. One of the many shorter Taipei tours is sure to match your interests: national landmarks, nature spaces, "old streets" for shopping, and traditional arts, to name a few.

Rotary Youth Exchange gets the spotlight at two ticketed events. At a banquet on 12 June, Youth Exchange leaders and alumni can mingle and hear speakers share their stories of how the program promotes global understanding. The next day, the Rotary Youth Exchange Preconvention is the spot to network with leaders, participants, and people interested in getting involved.

Rotary President Francesco Arezzo says something special happens when members come together at the convention. "It is this feeling that anything is possible," he says. That feeling comes alive in Taipei, and Arezzo has a request: Come experience it together. ■

CROSSWORD

Safe and clean

By Victor Fleming
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas

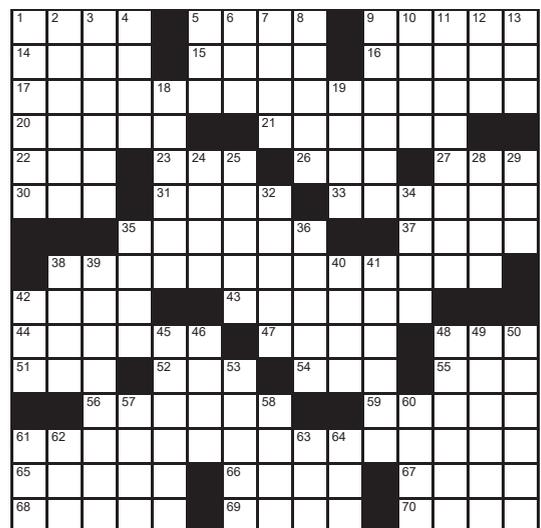
ACROSS

- 1 Reminder of surgery
- 5 Goes (for)
- 9 "Pointed" remarks
- 14 Vogue competitor
- 15 ___ in (get control of)
- 16 Diciembre follower
- 17 With 61-Across, 38-Across
- 20 Chaotic situation
- 21 Intervene
- 22 Text-scanning initialism
- 23 Cable cinema sta.
- 26 Land's end
- 27 Beatnik's "Get it?"
- 30 Albany is its capital (abbr.)
- 31 Dainty dessert
- 33 Arm holder
- 35 Wearable tech line bought by Google in 2021
- 37 Rod and ___
- 38 Clue for 17-/61-Across
- 42 Place for a pet bird
- 43 Work hard on
- 44 Williams with 23 Grand Slam singles titles
- 47 Breadth
- 48 School subj.
- 51 Waste not

DOWN

- 1 Attaches, as a patch
- 2 Novelist Tom
- 3 Church platforms
- 4 Atoll, for one
- 5 Hosp. areas
- 6 Vegetable that rolls
- 7 Quaint food containers
- 8 Angry moods
- 9 "C'mon, help me out"
- 10 Hardly pro
- 11 Blitz or Dasher
- 12 Sis's counterpart
- 13 Arlo to Woody
- 18 Countrified
- 19 Golf ball bearers

- 24 Doth possess
- 25 Celestial ellipse
- 28 Governor Kay of Alabama
- 29 Salon selection
- 32 Baseball's Martinez et al.
- 34 Middle of QED
- 35 At liberty
- 36 Balderdash
- 38 Fannie and Ginnie
- 39 Accepted
- 40 The Good Earth character
- 41 Bicycle for two
- 42 Fort Collins sch.
- 45 "Later!"
- 46 "Shake ___!" ("Hurry!")
- 48 Key of Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine"
- 49 Was defeated by
- 50 Become commercially successful
- 53 Certain believer in God
- 57 Bumbling sort
- 58 Short note
- 60 Football great Ronnie
- 61 Capone and Pacino
- 62 Bible bk.
- 63 Wordless assent
- 64 Bruised thing, maybe



Learn more and register at convention.rotary.org.

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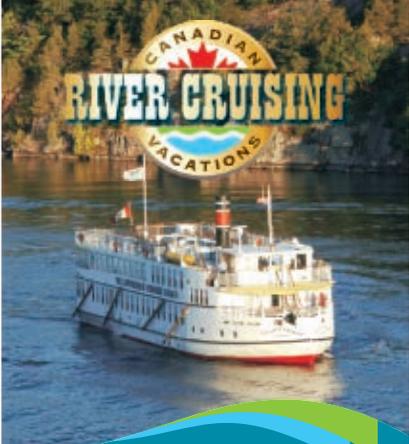
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S	B	A	R	B	S	O	P	T	S	O	C



Born at the ballpark

A vendor's creation, vigorón was an instant success

In 1914, **María Luisa Cisneros Lacayo**, a vendor of some renown, was on the hunt for a new dish to sell at a baseball field in the colonial city of Granada in Nicaragua. “She wanted to sell something that is practical so people wouldn’t need any utensils,” explains **María Violeta Rizo**. “They could easily grab it with their hands and eat it.” She landed on a dish of boiled yuca, crispy chicharrón (fried pork skin), and curtido (cabbage slaw), all layered on top of a banana leaf wrapper. In a stroke of marketing prowess, she called it vigorón after a cure-all tonic that she saw advertised on a poster. It was a home run, and Nicaragua’s iconic dish was born. While vigorón remains popular at sporting events, Rizo says most people make it at home.

HOW-TO: The banana leaf is heated much like a tortilla, so it’s pliable enough to roll. Then come small pieces of boiled yuca. To save time, Rizo says people often use ready-made chicharrón rather than fry the pig skin themselves. The curtido traditionally contains tomato, onions, cabbage, and a sour fruit called mimbro, topped with black vinegar (some people use lime or white vinegar instead).

SNACK FOOD: Vigorón might be served at a meeting or an informal party, or, Rizo adds, when you just don’t feel like cooking a big meal. “We tend to prepare vigorón instead of serving sandwiches,” she explains. And what better to wash it down with but a beer or a glass of chicha, a popular corn-based beverage? ■

María Violeta Rizo
Rotary Club
of Matagalpa,
Nicaragua

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

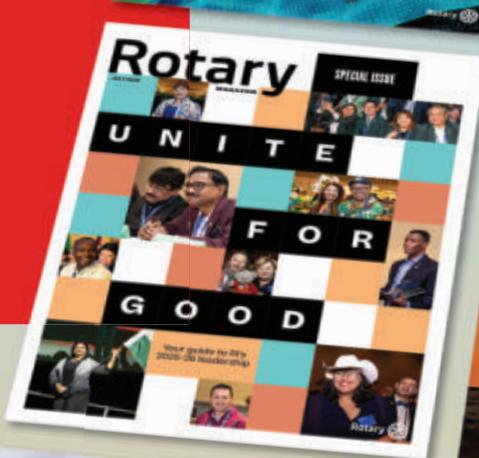
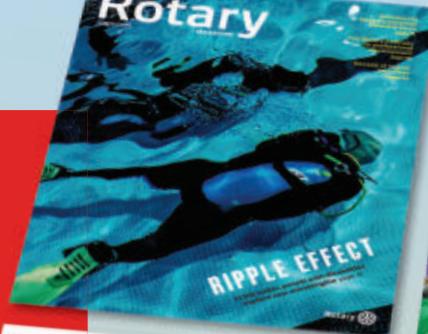
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