

Rotary

JUNE 2026

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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1. Rotary President Francesco Arezzo and his wife, Anna Maria Arezzo-Criscione, are welcomed by Rotarians in Nigeria during a tour of Africa. 2. Wrapping up a visit to Ethiopia, Arezzo attends a Kick Out Polio event featuring young soccer players. 3. Will the real Francesco please stand up? The president meets his doppelgangers in Chennai, India. 4. At a Rotary event in Chennai, Arezzo and his wife enjoy a lighthearted moment with aide John de Giorgio and his partner, Monique Chambers. 5. Planting a tree in Nigeria.



Let's carry the momentum

As my year as president of Rotary International comes to a close, I offer my heartfelt thanks to each member of our global Rotary family. Your kindness, warmth, and dedication have changed my life.

During this year, I had the privilege of traveling across our world, from San Francisco, birthplace of the United Nations, to the innovative Rotary clubs of Nigeria. In every place, I saw Rotary members and our partners working side by side to create lasting, positive change, reminding me that our strength lies in shared purpose.

That spirit leads naturally to a simple truth: Rotary is not something we attend, but something we do. We are not spectators. We act, and through that action, we transform our communities and ourselves.

As we continue this work, we must keep our focus on building conditions for peace. Rotary is, at its core, a peace machine. But maintaining that machine requires intention, commitment, and steady effort.

That same resolve is needed now as we push toward polio eradication. The final mile is often the hardest, but we cannot falter in our promise to the children of the world.

You have shown that when we *Unite for Good*, there is no challenge we cannot meet if we stand together. Let us carry this momentum forward with courage, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to the safety and prosperity of all.

FRANCESCO AREZZO

President, Rotary International





YOU ARE HERE: Taipei, Taiwan

GREETING: Nihao (Mandarin) or lí-hó (Taiwanese Hokkien)

GATHERING OF THE GODS: Built in the 18th century in Taipei's historic Wanhua District, Longshan Temple is a masterpiece of traditional Taiwanese architecture. Designed in a classic three-hall layout, the temple features a Grand Hall anchored by two ornate pillars, each wrapped with coiling dragons, and a towering statue of Guanyin, the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion. The temple, often referred to as the "meeting place of the gods," houses figures of more than 100 deities from Buddhist, Taoist, and folk traditions. The structure has endured despite earthquakes, typhoons, and even a World War II Allied bombing raid launched over suspicions of hidden Japanese weapons.

During Lunar New Year and major festivals, the temple fills with worshippers bearing flowers and food offerings.

CONVENTION: Taiwan is home to more than 39,000 Rotary members. This month, Taipei will welcome thousands of members from around the world as it hosts the Rotary International Convention.

Rotary

MAGAZINE

June 2026

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David Alexander

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Wen Huang

MANAGING EDITOR

Jason Keyser

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SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Diana Schoberg

DIGITAL EDITOR

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Rose Shilling

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JP Swenson

ART DIRECTOR

Jacqueline Cantu

DESIGNER

Madison Wisse

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Marc Dukes

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR

Vera Robinson

CIRCULATION MANAGER

Katie McCoy

CONTRIBUTING ROTARY STAFF

Art Director: Leann Arthur

Photo Editor: Diego Campos

Photographer: Monika Lozinska

Send ad inquiries to:

GLM Communications, 212-929-1300, jtobin@glminc.com

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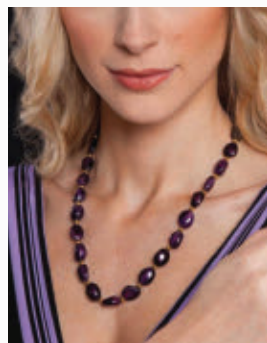
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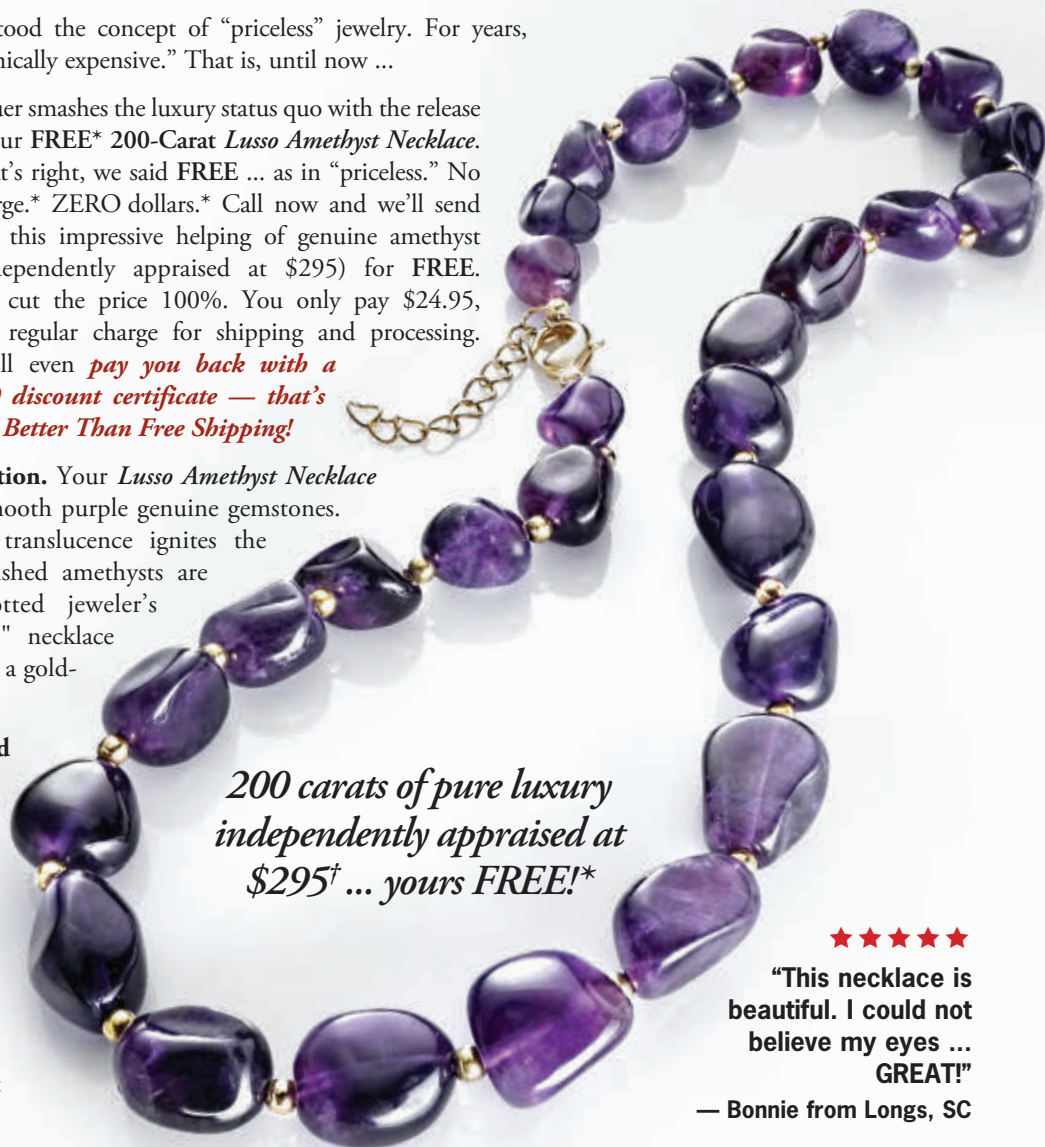
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Rotary Club of Fergus Falls Sunrise, Minnesota

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2026 Photo Awards

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Her experience as a Rotary Scholar provided Betty Chen with the skills and expertise that fueled her career as an interpreter, news anchor, and emcee.

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

STAFF CORNER

Petina Dixon-Jenkins

Manager of Corporate Communication

As a child, I was fascinated by TV news.

With a cassette player, I recorded mock newscasts for my family. That early curiosity soon turned into real experience. At 14, I began an internship at WNUR, the listener-supported radio station at Northwestern University, where I hosted a morning jazz show. By my senior year of high school, I was also interning at Evanston Community Television.

I attended Northwestern's Medill

School of Journalism, focusing on broadcast. I resumed hosting a weekend show at WNUR and spent a semester in Lexington, Kentucky, as an intern reporter for the local ABC affiliate. There, I observed live coverage of the Kentucky Derby and a distillery fire. I also hosted a local cable program and weekly radio show featuring Caribbean music, a reflection of my Jamaican heritage. Growing up, I'd often visit Jamaica with my family, attending music festivals and interviewing artists.

In 2001, I joined Rotary as an intern in media relations.

Over the years, I have worked in external relations and in Polio-Plus communications. Today, I manage the Corporate Communications team, supporting senior leaders, members, and staff, while also overseeing promotions for Rotary's polio eradication efforts.

A photography course I took opened up a new way of storytelling. I enjoy capturing candid moments of people going about their lives. One photo of my nephew won a local photo contest and hung in Evanston City Hall for years.

Photography took on deeper meaning after a personal loss. In 2012, I lost twins due to premature birth. The experience led me to advocate for maternal and child health. I began using photography to raise funds for March of Dimes, an organization with historic ties to polio eradication that now focuses on pre-



Dixon-Jenkins with daughter Avery

venting birth defects, premature birth, and infant mortality. Through portrait sessions and public speaking, including testimony at the Illinois State Capitol, I have worked to raise awareness about maternal health disparities, particularly among women of color. Each year, I participate in a 5K fundraiser, and in 2021, I ran the Chicago Marathon as part of the March of Dimes team.

In 2014 my daughter Avery was born, and in 2016 my son Sullivan. When Avery turned 6, I saw a social media post from a white foster parent asking for advice on how to care for her Black foster child's hair. I sent her a set of Avery's hair care products. Avery wanted to help more children, so we launched a GoFundMe campaign and raised about \$4,000. With that, we purchased hair care products and donated them to residential treatment centers serving children in foster care who also have emotional and behavioral challenges. That effort evolved into Avery's Helpful Hair Kits, a nonprofit we established in 2023 after I completed coursework in nonprofit management. Avery, now in fifth grade, has helped distribute more than 1,000 hair care kits.

I'm also a speedskater and trained alongside Shani Davis, who later became the first Black athlete to win an individual gold medal at the Winter Olympics. ■

Letters to the editor

ON WISCONSIN

Thank you for the colorful and thoughtful piece in March about three Wisconsin Rotary clubs ["Destination: Rotary"]. It was fun to see Port Washington-Saukville as one of the featured clubs since it is in the same county as our Thiensville-Mequon club. Many good deeds have been generated by the Rotarians in the four clubs here in Ozaukee County.

Karl Hertz, Thiensville, Wisconsin

I was interested to see the [March cover story] as a couple of my Group Study Exchange teammates and I made a similar trip to Wisconsin in June 1980 after our six-week exchange tour to District 508 (as it was then known).

We had traveled from Spokane, Washington, to Chicago to attend the Rotary International Convention that marked Rotary's 75th anniversary. Following that, we took a Greyhound bus to Wisconsin to spend a few days, arriving first in Fond du Lac where we were hosted by a local family. We also went to a baseball game between the Milwaukee Brewers and the Detroit Tigers. We had a marvelous time.

John Boag, Tamworth, Australia

MADEIRA MEMORIES

A huge thank you to Dave Lawrence for sharing his gorgeous photo of sunrise on the island of Madeira [March, Welcome]. I visited the island in December and was impressed by the stunning natural beauty, the people, and the food.

Having been warned that there is virtually no flat land on the island, we spent a lot of time climbing up and down steep streets and paths. Exploring the local dishes was a treat, especially the espada (scabbard fish) and the bolo do caco (round garlic bread served with every meal). Dave's photo gave me an instant flashback to a beautiful location with a rich history.

Lesley S. Zajac, Tampa, Florida

A PLACE FOR THE PLEDGE

In the March issue, Steve Kaverman suggests that clubs consider stopping



the practice of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance due to political and religious concerns [Letters, "A troubling tradition"]. One of the good things about Rotary is that clubs have the freedom and flexibility to adjust their practices as they see fit. Just like I would have the freedom to leave a club that instituted such a change. Our club will continue to recite the pledge, say "Rotary Grace" before a meal, and occasionally sing a patriotic song.

Tracy Copeland, Fort Fairfield, Maine

The Pledge of Allegiance is why I joined my club. My generation, ages 35 and under, has a sense of confusion when it comes to our nation. Some don't know what it means to be an American. Some are searching for values that resonate with them. We need to anchor in our values as Americans, so that we can be one nation. This allows us to be part of something bigger like Rotary International.

Every Thursday when my Rotary club meets, I look forward to the tradition of saying the pledge. I hope it may inspire others who listen.

Caleb Warren, Bangor, Maine

Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is not a political act. It is an expression of respect and gratitude for the nation that has made Rotary — and the freedom to debate questions like this one — possible. To conflate patriotism with partisanship is a false and troubling equivalence.

OVERHEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In February, we wrote about how Rotary members in India are tapping into the country's passion for chess to open pathways to educational advancement and connection.

—
Glad to see that Rotary is taking part in spreading this great game that challenges mental strength.
Chuck Vitale
► via Facebook

Fantastic initiative by Rotary! It's great to see chess being promoted in our community. Thanks for sharing! 🍀
Amol Bodhe
► via YouTube

CONNECT

Kaverman suggests that saying the words “with liberty and justice for all” is somehow dishonest because our nation is imperfect. But no thoughtful person recites the pledge as a declaration that America has achieved perfection. They recite it as a reaffirmation of the ideals we strive toward — the same ideals that have driven every reform, every civil rights advance, and every generation of Americans who worked to make this country better. We can acknowledge our failings and still stand with pride when we say the pledge, because those words describe not just where we have been but where we are determined to go.

Christopher Kimball, Lakewood, Washington

PERSPECTIVES ON PEACE

As a proud Rotary member and supporter of peacebuilding, I read with great interest Moh Eid’s moving essay “Heart and soul” in the February issue. The story of his brother Ibrahim’s selfless humanitarian service and the deep family bond they shared is a powerful testament to the Rotary ideal of Service Above Self. Stories like this remind us why Rotary’s work matters so much in a troubled world.

Rotary has always taught us that lasting peace requires understanding, empathy, and dialogue across divides. Our Rotary Peace Centers program exists precisely to equip leaders to listen to multiple narratives and build bridges. Publishing powerful Palestinian stories is valuable; pairing them with equally powerful Israeli stories would be even more valuable. It would demonstrate to our global membership — Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and others — that Rotary truly stands for balanced, inclusive peacebuilding rather than spotlighting only one side of a painful conflict.

I respectfully suggest that a future issue include an Israeli perspective — perhaps from an Israeli Rotary member who lost family on 7 October 2023, an

Israeli humanitarian worker, or an Israeli Rotary Peace Fellow — so that our magazine can model the very dialogue and mutual understanding that we ask of the world.

Randall Brody, Las Vegas

MISSED ANNIVERSARY

As a 35-year Rotarian, I have read every copy of the magazine cover to cover. Through the years, I have enjoyed most articles, always learning something new and continuing to be in awe of this amazing organization.

However, after rereading the entire February issue, I found no mention of Paul Harris’ founding of Rotary on 23 February 1905, the most important date in Rotary’s history. Nor was there anything of note about the worldwide impact Rotary has made in its 121 years. A very disappointing issue in my opinion.

Ronnie K. Mand, Danville, Virginia

SUGGESTION BOX

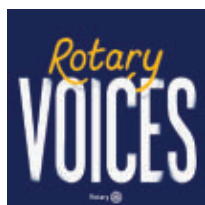
My club, as with many others, has suffered a significant drop in membership. This is a serious problem, especially as the majority of our active members are older and may not be members in the near future.

I expect that Rotary is aware of this problem. However, I don’t remember any articles in the magazine suggesting how to interact with young people or other groups in an effort to obtain new members. Can you dedicate a regular page or section in the magazine to discuss things clubs are doing to address this problem and any other ideas you can think of?

Bill Fishman, Rye, New York

I often wish I could scan a QR code at the end of an article and forward it to people who would find value in it. It would be a nice way to bridge print material with digital formats.

Gary Hillman, El Prado, New Mexico



ON THE PODCAST

On a recent episode of *Rotary Voices*, broadcast journalist Jerome McDonnell talks to Marc Schulz, a psychology professor and co-author of the bestseller *The Good Life: Lessons from the World’s Longest Scientific Study of Happiness*. Listen at rotary.org/podcast.

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THE SPECIALIST

A family tradition, freshly roasted

A coffee roaster reflects on a third-generation business, community, and Rotary

My grandfather came to the United States from Serbia when he was a teenager. He worked in silver mines in Nevada, but the mine owner, seeing he was too young for that kind of labor, pulled him out and had him help in the kitchen instead. It turned out he was a great cook, as was my father, and as it happens, I went to culinary school too. Food and coffee run deep in our family.

Eventually, my grandfather moved to Oakland, California, and that's where he met my grandmother and started what became Peerless Coffee & Tea in 1924. He chose not to open a restaurant, though many people urged him to, but instead bought used roasting equipment. He started selling the product to restaurants and opened a storefront where people could buy

George Vukasin
Rotary Club
of Oakland,
California
Coffee roaster

coffee by the pound. That entrepreneurial spirit set the tone for the future.

My dad studied criminology and wanted to join the FBI, but my grandfather tapped him on the shoulder and said, "You're going into coffee." My dad followed that path but also made a name for himself in public service, serving on the Oakland City Council and as port commissioner.

Today my sister and I run Peerless as the third generation. We're proud to still be roasting in Oakland and to be celebrating over 100 years of business in the city that supported our family all along. Like generations before us, we've been part of Rotary. My grandfather was a member of the first Rotary club in Oakland, followed by my dad, and then my sister and me.

Before I joined the business full time, I worked with an exporter in Chiapas and Oaxaca, Mexico, to understand the coffee supply chain. I remember visiting a farm we had featured by name, something that wasn't common at the time, and the farmer cried when I showed him the label. That gave me a deep appreciation for the people who make this work possible.

Why do I care about my work? Because coffee matters. It's a ritual, a comfort, a connection. It's a livelihood for farmers, for our team, and for my family. It still brings me joy to be part of it.

— AS TOLD TO BRIANNA COOK

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Hearing health matters more than you think

DISASTER RESPONSE

For the long haul

A year after the LA fires, Rotary members focus on rebuilding community and optimism

A few weeks after last year's Los Angeles wildfires, Claire Robinson got to work, not rebuilding her home but cleaning up scorched landscaping around the sheriff's station in the hard-hit community of Altadena. Straight-forward labor was Robinson's way of coping and looking to the future. "I wanted to start making us feel better as a community as soon as possible, by cleaning up this civic area," she recalls. "Volunteering was the only thing I felt like doing."

More than a year later, the frames of hundreds of new homes are going up over the ashes, but that physical rebuilding is frustratingly slow and likely to take years. In the meantime, volunteers like Robinson are focused on an emotional rebuilding and holding on to a sense of community, tradition, and optimism.

She's found plenty of like-minded neighbors, including Rotary members. For several years, the Rotary Club of Altadena has supported the nonprofit that Robinson manages, an urban conservation group called Amigos de los Rios. As the community began to recover last spring, club members presented her with a check for \$2,000 to help the group continue its work, including adding green spaces to schools and watering mature trees that survived the fire.

The club's executive secretary, Mark Mariscal, who had also lost his home, told her, "Let's get this in your hands right now. This is your community; this is our community," Robinson recalls. "That meant a

lot." Now, Robinson is seeking corporate membership in the Altadena club for her employees.

Greening the burn-scarred hills is part of the real and symbolic healing here. Robinson is in the early stages of rebuilding her home, which was once filled with books and art. But the ash and debris that had covered her property have been replaced by patches of bright orange poppies and other native flowers, part of a massive seed-planting effort aimed at bringing hope and beauty to survivors. That effort, too, was led by a Rotarian who has turned personal loss into tireless service.

The Santa Ana winds tore through opposite ends of Los Angeles on 7 January 2025, reaching up to 100 mph and fueling two of the worst fires in California history. The toll is staggering: 31 dead, more than 16,000 homes and businesses destroyed, evacuation orders for at least 180,000 people, and billions of dollars in economic losses.

The worst-hit places were the Pacific Palisades and Altadena, outlying areas of LA on the edges of mountainous wilderness prone to fire. About a dozen Altadena Rotary members lost their homes, as did nearly all 13 members of the Palisades club.

Yet, members say they carry a cautious, at times joyful, optimism as they enter the next chapter of recovery. Priorities have shifted from finding shelter and distributing emergency goods to supporting small businesses and schools and organizing events to reunite dispersed residents.

The community is noticing. The

Learn more and get involved at rotary.org/disaster-response.



Above: Rotarian René Amy has sown 250 million poppy seeds to bring color to this somber landscape and boost spirits. **Right:** Through events like this breakfast, Rotary is seeking to reunite dispersed residents.

Altadena club had 17 members join in the last year, bringing its total to 53, while Palisades membership has increased from 13 to 23. Not surprisingly, members cite connection and friendship as key forces. “That is one of the most beautiful things birthed out of this tragedy,” notes Jeff Lemen, a Palisades Rotary member who lost his childhood home to the fires.

In the Palisades, the Rotary club has prioritized support for rebuilding commercial infrastructure and schools, says Lemen. The club has committed funds to install an outdoor classroom at an elementary school and replace lunch tables and benches at a high school that had to hold classes in a former Sears building for almost a year.

In Altadena, there is a focus on returning to normalcy, says Club President Brad Roeber. When the historic outdoor amphitheater that hosted a popular series of Rotary club-led concerts burned, members made sure the shows went on last summer in another park. Rotarians



from clubs all over Los Angeles showed up to help, and turnout was high and ebullient. “We made sure that the community didn’t miss out on any of this,” Roeber says.

It was that sense of community and trust that led Deb Halberstadt to join Rotary in Altadena after the fires. When she and her husband, Jon Hainer, lost their home, family and friends stepped up with generous donations, and they found themselves with more than they

felt appropriate to accept given their insurance benefits. Halberstadt realized Rotary knew how to work with other groups to identify needs and get supplies like air purifiers, blankets, and mobile hot-spot devices into the right hands fast. She also found an outlet in the weekly meetings, with their exchanges of happy news and information on insurance and other relevant topics. “The group is far more powerful than any individual



BY THE NUMBERS

\$2.7 million

Relief funds raised in districts 5280 and 5300

250 million

Poppy wildflower seeds scattered across Altadena

3,000

Attendees of anniversary vigil hosted by members

trying to help in a disaster situation like this,” she says. “That was a huge factor for me.”

Though the majority of Altadena and Palisades residents remained displaced, many returned for vigils on the anniversary of the fires. The Altadena event took place in the parking lot of a grocery store owned by Rotarian husband and wife Jose and Sandra Valenzuela. The store’s lot had become a distribution hub for relief supplies after the fires. Under a banner reading “Altadena Strong — We Will Rebuild,” thousands gathered to hug, sing, and share a moment of silence. “We were expecting 600. In the end, just shy of 3,000 people showed up,” Sandra Valenzuela recalls. “It was a sight to see. Nothing mattered at that moment. We were all one. We’re here for each other.”

And then came the poppies. Seeking to lift spirits and beautify

the scarred landscape, Altadena club member René Amy launched an ambitious poppy-planting project last fall. A century ago, the orange state flower covered the hills of Altadena every spring. The bloom was so vast, according to Veronica Jones, a Rotarian and president of the Altadena Historical Society, that the area was known as “the Altar Cloth of San Pasqual,” the Spanish friar known for kneeling in prayer in fields of wildflowers.

Amy got the word out, and 750 individuals and businesses signed up to have their lots “poppified.” He spent a couple of months scattering 250 million seeds across Altadena in his faded red pickup truck, one of his few treasures to survive the fires. Scouts and conservation groups pitched in, while the Altadena Rotary club, businesses, and Amy himself provided funds and supplies.

On a drive through his neighborhood in early spring, Amy was thrilled to see clusters of poppies emerging in yards and on sidewalk dividers and scattered across hill-sides. “As someone who lost property, I understand what all this means,” he says. “Even the slightest act of kindness makes a difference.”

A few blocks away, Halberstadt and Hainer have begun settling into their new home. Instead of undertaking a complete rebuild on their property, they opted to sell it and buy a standing home nearby. It hasn’t been easy, but they’re drawing comfort from small things like hanging art in their new home.

Gazing from the backyard at sweeping views amid sounds of hammering and construction, Hainer amends a suggestion that there is cautious optimism. “I feel outrageously optimistic,” he says.

— LAURA RANDALL

Altadena resident and Rotarian René Amy inspects the California poppies growing on the site of his former home in March, more than a year after it was destroyed in the Eaton Fire.

Short takes

The RI Board approved a new zone structure. To see the current list of RI zones, go to on.rotary.org/zones.

The Interact Club of Kathmandu, Nepal, won best video in the 2025 Interact Awards, earning a plaque and \$1,000 toward a future service project.





PROFILE

The power of a personalized gift

They planned to give in their wills, then thought, Why wait?

Michael Bostelmann
Rotary Club
of Hamburg-
International,
Germany

It only took a couple of years for Michael Bostelmann to become hooked on The Rotary Foundation. After joining the Rotary Club of Guatemala del Este in 2003, he attended a project fair in the Guatemalan city of Antigua, met a project partner from the United States, and secured his first grant, to help children with spina bifida, in 2005. “That was the start,” he says. “I never looked back.”

As he began to participate in more grants (22 between 2005 and 2017), Bostelmann would pitch in some of his own funds too. The donations began to add up, and soon, he was the first Major Donor in his club. He and his wife, Guni, decided to join the Foundation’s Bequest Society and wrote Rotary into their wills. “Then one day we said, ‘This doesn’t really make sense. Why should Rotary have to wait until we drop dead?’” he recalls.

The result was a \$230,000 gift in 2017, which, on top of the amount they had donated previously, made the Bostelmans members of the Arch Klumph Society. They opted for a directed gift (known at the time as a term gift) and steered the money to District 4250, especially Guatemala, where the couple moved decades earlier from Germany.

The money has supported 25 global grants, including three for projects that expanded hearing screenings for newborns. “It’s really great to see the money improving the lives of thousands of people,” Bostelmann says.

He and his wife returned to Germany in 2024 to be nearer to their children. His new Rotary club has never done a global grant. But with Bostelmann involved, that is about to change. ■

Rotary rolled out a new system to help connect prospective members with clubs. Club and district leaders can access it at pmm.rotary.org/admin.

The deadline for club officers to nominate their club for a Club Excellence Award is 30 June. Learn more at rotary.org/awards.

The 2027 Rotary International Convention will now take place in Barcelona. Visit on.rotary.org/barcelona to learn more about the decision to change the location.



People of action around the globe

By Brad Webber



Mexico

In February, the Rotary Club of Chapala Sunrise in the state of Jalisco hosted a five-day Friendship Conference with members of international partner clubs from Richmond, British Columbia; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Lincoln, California, as well as clubs from the Mexican cities of Guadalajara, Zapopan, and Chapala. Attendees toured projects they had supported, including a wastewater treatment facility, a plant that uses gravity to move water to wetland flower beds, and a health clinic planned to serve an Indigenous community in Jalisco. Delegation members also delivered presentations on projects of their home clubs. "Rotary connections we're making together are going to continue for years," says Nicci Beninger, club president and organizer of the gathering.

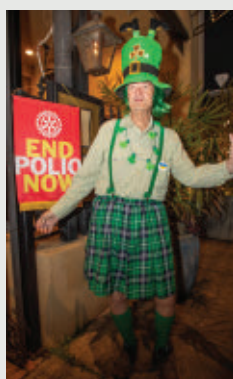
Rotary
Club of Chapala Sunrise

47%
Jalisco workforce that is in the informal economy

United States

The party starts early in Healdsburg, California. The Bay Area city's St. Patrick's Day festivities begin with a raucous, early morning procession that originated in the 1990s as a prank to rattle tourists out of bed. Since 2010, the Rotary Club of Healdsburg has gone green — with hair dye and wigs — to use the parade as a PolioPlus fundraiser. In March, two dozen Rotarians joined the crowd of about 2,000 partygoers at 7 a.m. to frolic around the town plaza, raising an expected \$50,000, says club member Tim Mann. "The parade is more than just a spectacle; it's an annual platform for our ongoing fight against polio," Mann says. March 17, adds club member Devin Lee Drew, is "the one day of the year where we get up at dawn for our club meeting."

Rotary
Club of Healdsburg



1601
First known St. Patrick's Day parade, in Spanish Florida



England

Rotary Club of Elthorne-Hillingdon member Sarah Gardner founded Serving Our Superheroes in 2020 during the pandemic to support caregivers, including staff of the National Health Service. The name “was inspired by the everyday heroes we serve,” Gardner writes in the Rotary regional magazine serving Great Britain and Ireland. “What began with sewing laundry bags for NHS staff quickly grew into a registered charity” that distributes donated wash kits, toiletries, clothing, products for newborns, and other items. Rotarians and other volunteers deliver the items to hospitals, nursing homes, and care centers. More recently Gardner formed Helping West London, a network of charities and organizations that share surplus supplies. “I like to say that I join the dots,” she says. “Rotary reflects that same spirit of connection.”



\$6 million

Value of goods collected by Serving Our Superheroes

Rotary
Club of Elthorne-Hillingdon



7 million

Teachers in India's secondary schools

India

Nearly two dozen members of the Rotaract Club of Coimbatore Gaalaxy spent Valentine's Day transforming a school. Guided by school staff, Rotaractors from the Tamil Nadu-based club “engaged in painting, restoring, and designing murals that brought color and life to the campus,” says Club President Srivarshan R.R. “The school caters to a diverse and often vulnerable group of students,” including orphaned youth, the children of prisoners, and families in poverty, Srivarshan says. The club also assists the institution by paying school fees for select children, providing handwashing stations, and offering career guidance for graduating students.

Rotaract
Club of Coimbatore Gaalaxy

Hungary

Since 2007, the Rotary Club of Miskolc has organized an annual food distribution project during the Advent season. In 2025, the event attracted about 250 people to the town square, where Rotarians passed out bean goulash and jam-filled buns. The signature effort of the club “supports people in need by offering warm, freshly prepared meals at a time of the year when assistance is most appreciated,” says club member Márk Dobai. “Over 18 years, the program has provided roughly 5,000 meals, becoming a meaningful local tradition that brings comfort, dignity, and human connection.”

8

Varieties of Hungarian paprika

Rotary
Club of Miskolc



GOODWILL

Let them know you care

Three ways to show new members they matter

Jeff Stefek, president of the Rotary Club of Pflugerville, Texas, has seen his club grow 50 percent since he joined in 2010. He says that's because the club's leaders strive not just to attract new members but to make them want to stay.

"It's something that's top of mind. We bring it up on a weekly or biweekly basis," Stefek says. "Our longer-standing members are always looking for opportunities to make sure everyone feels included and engaged."

If your club is trying to grow, you probably talk a lot about bringing in new members. But what about helping those new arrivals feel welcome, involved, and truly part of the family? Rotary's research suggests many clubs are falling short in this crucial mission. Only 72 percent of new members surveyed recently said they had a mentor to help them get acclimated, with even lower rates reported by women and members older than 70. And only 50 percent said their club experience met their expectations.

To turn new members into forever members, focus on friendship. "We're not just here to serve; we're here to connect," says club membership chair Barbara Najera. "When members become your friends, when you choose to spend time with those people in or outside of your club, retention kind of takes care of itself."

Here are a few more of the club's tips for welcoming new members.

1. Get together more, and make get-togethers more fun.

The Pflugerville club offers lots of opportunities for members to hang out. "We're part of a community of people that share the same passion, and you don't learn that if you're just sitting in a chair every Wednesday, listening to different speakers," Najera says. "You often learn it outside of meetings, whether you're getting your hands dirty or doing socials or fundraisers."

Stefek and the club's social chair make sure to schedule a service activity every month and a purely fun event at least every other month — activities like a pool party, a tapas cooking class, and an escape room. At such events, "you're able to engage one-on-one, find out what's going on in members' lives, and really develop those relationships," Stefek says. Plus, these gatherings give members ways to connect even if they miss a meeting.

2. Standardize your methods, but take a personal approach.

The Pflugerville club has created a set of best practices for orienting new members, and Stefek makes sure everyone knows what to do. "If you walk through the door as a new member and we've never met you, you will immediately be bombarded with attention to make sure you feel included in that room," he says. "It's a job for every member of our club."

The club's leaders have created a series of follow-up emails to

send visitors after each meeting they attend. And before members are inducted, Najera makes sure they know all the ways to get involved. "I tell them what all our club's committees do, what the responsibilities are, and the last question I ask is, 'Which of these do you feel most connected to, do you want to be a part of?' And I will not go to bed at the end of that day without connecting them to those committees' chairs."

3. Make onboarding a game.

Many clubs give new members a list of orientation activities, such as going out to lunch with another member, serving as the greeter at a meeting, or registering for an account on the My Rotary website, which is full of resources. The Pflugerville club puts a fun spin on it with a new member bingo card. It has 40 squares with different tasks. "They only have to complete 10, but they can win prizes with different bingos," Najera says. "That's how we keep them engaged. By the end of it, they've hopefully connected with past presidents and Paul Harris Society members, visited other clubs in our district, and gone to district events."

Ultimately, Najera says, you have to make new members feel like they matter. "Never let somebody sit by themselves. Never let somebody walk into a room and not have somebody talking to them," she says. "Because we all want to belong, right? We all want to be a part of something."

— ETELKA LEHOCZKY



Only 50 percent of new members say their club experience meets their expectations.

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ESSAY

A silent malady

Why hearing health matters more than you think

By Markus Hilbert



When I was 14, my family's business introduced me to the world of hearing care. Almost immediately, I was captivated. It wasn't just the science that captured my imagination; it was the transformative power of sound itself. I loved music, the nuanced melodies of birdsong, the rhythmic crash of ocean waves, and the subtle inflections in human voices that convey emotion and connection. Sound, I realized, was the invisible thread weaving us into the fabric of life.

Throughout my university studies in audiology and my 25 years in clinical practice — including humanitarian work in southern Africa, India, and Latin America — I have dedicated myself to the life-changing work of preventing and treating hearing loss and diseases of the ear. Along the way I've learned how universal and fundamental this truth is: Hearing is about far more than perceiving sound. It's about physical safety, economic productivity, and maintaining our cognitive health. It is our connection to each other and to the world. And yet few of us recognize it as such.

Most people think of hearing loss as merely an inconvenience, something that makes you ask, "What?" during dinner conversation. The reality is far more serious. What's happening in your ears directly affects your brain, balance, wallet, and quality of life. According to the World Health Organization, more than 430 million people worldwide require rehabilitation for hearing loss. By 2050, that number will reach 700 million, or 1 in every 10 people. Nearly 80 percent live in low- and middle-income countries where access to care is severely limited.

The economic impact is staggering: Unaddressed hearing loss costs the global economy almost US\$1 trillion annually, including lost productivity and health care costs. Yet an annual investment of less than \$1.40 per person could scale up ear and hearing care services globally, promising a return of nearly \$16 for every dollar invested over 10 years.

Over 1 billion young adults face permanent, avoidable hearing loss from unsafe listening practices, such as high volumes when using headphones or at sports and entertainment venues. We're seeing 30-year-olds with hearing profiles typical of 60-year-olds. The earlier hearing loss begins, the longer its effects compound, making prevention and early intervention crucial. In so many cases, either because of a lack of access or lack of awareness, people don't get that early care.

A PATIENT OF MINE, SARAH, was 68 when her daughter finally convinced her to get help. "I hear fine," Sarah insisted. "It's just that everyone mumbles these days." Her audiogram revealed moderate hearing loss in both ears, which had likely been progressing for years. What concerned me most was what this untreated hearing loss might be doing to her brain.

Recent academic research has revealed something transformative: Hearing loss is one of the most significant modifiable risk factors for dementia. The main finding of a landmark study on aging, published in *The Lancet* in 2023, was that hearing aids reduced cognitive decline by almost 50 percent over three years in at-risk older adults.

The connection works through several mechanisms. When you have hearing loss, your brain works significantly harder to process sounds and understand speech. This "cognitive load" diverts mental resources from memory and thinking. Brain scans show accelerated atrophy in areas processing sounds and memories. Mild hearing loss doubles dementia risk, moderate loss triples it, and severe loss increases risk fivefold.

Social isolation compounds the problem. When conversations become exhausting, people withdraw from restaurants, group gatherings, and social activities. The Lancet Commission on Dementia Prevention identified hearing loss as accounting for 7 percent of dementia cases globally.

For Sarah, proper hearing aids were transformative. Within weeks, she felt

less mentally exhausted. Six months later, her daughter told me her mother was "back," attending book club, volunteering, engaging in conversations with confidence.

Michael, a 72-year-old retired teacher, came to see me after his third fall in six months. "I don't know what's happening," he said. "I just lose my balance." During his evaluation, I discovered significant bilateral hearing loss. Michael had no idea his hearing problems might be connected to his falls.

The link between hearing loss and falls is deeply concerning. Even mild hearing loss triples fall risk. For every additional 10 decibels of hearing loss, the risk increases by 140 percent. More than 1 in 4 older adults in the U.S. fall each year, leading to broken bones, traumatic brain injuries, and death. These falls cost the health care system more than \$80 billion annually.

Three mechanisms explain this connection. First, your ears pick up subtle auditory cues that help with spatial awareness. Second, the same tiny hair cells detecting sound also control balance through the inner ear's vestibular system, which sends the brain information about motion. Third, when your brain works overtime processing sounds, it has fewer resources for maintaining balance and coordinating movement. Studies show that consistent hearing aid use can reduce fall risk by as much as half. Properly fitted hearing aids helped Michael regain confidence and stability. He hasn't fallen since.

Hearing loss, too, has been linked to chronic diseases such as diabetes. When blood sugar levels run high, the delicate blood vessels and nerves in your inner ear can become damaged, similar to what happens in the eyes or kidneys. Over time, that damage can make it harder for your ears to pick up sounds clearly.

THE HEARING CARE LANDSCAPE has changed dramatically. Following approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2022, over-the-counter

The earlier hearing loss begins, the longer its effects compound, making prevention and early intervention crucial.

hearing aids have become widely available. Such devices now represent about 5.7 percent of hearing aid users in the U.S., with 70 percent owned by first-time users. This reduced barrier to entry is genuinely positive.

However, it's crucial to understand the limitations of over-the-counter hearing aids, which don't compare to medical-grade devices in speech acuity, noise reduction, and AI-powered features. Clinical hearing aids leverage artificial intelligence trained on massive datasets to distinguish speech from background noise with remarkable precision.

More importantly, over-the-counter devices bypass essential clinical care needed for proper diagnosis and management. A comprehensive audiological evaluation identifies the type and cause of hearing loss, assesses treatment options, rules out medical conditions requiring physician intervention, and establishes a baseline for monitoring changes.

Telehealth can extend that kind of professional care access, including to remote areas. Through such online platforms, including one I created, patients can receive expert guidance and remote programming without traveling to a clinic.

Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing hearing aids. Modern devices automatically adjust to listening environments, learning from user preferences and adapting in real time. Bluetooth connectivity enables seamless smartphone integration for direct streaming. Some devices now include health monitoring features, tracking physical activity and detecting falls.

Looking ahead, we will likely see hearing devices integrate with broader health technology ecosystems — monitoring vital signs, detecting early neurological changes, and interfacing with smart home systems. Advanced systems may start incorporating real-time translation and may someday be trained to recognize specific voices. The technology is moving beyond amplification toward comprehensive health management.

THIS PAST JANUARY, I joined a Rotary team traveling to the Dominican Republic to dedicate a new hearing clinic at the Good Samaritan Hospital in the city of La Romana. It was a collaborative effort built on partnerships with local health care leaders and Rotary clubs throughout the region.



Over three days, our team fit nearly 100 hearing aids, working alongside local health care providers who have continued serving patients long after we departed. We met with three local Rotary clubs — La Romana Río Dulce, Santo Domingo Bella Vista, and Santo Domingo Mirador — learning about their ongoing service projects and building relationships for future collaboration.

The trip reinforced the precept that sustainable change requires local leadership, local expertise, and long-term partnerships. The clinic at Good Samaritan Hospital is not an outpost dependent on international visitors; it's a fully equipped, professionally staffed facility that can now serve the community independently while also welcoming international volunteers who come to see patients and learn from Dominican colleagues.

We visited other Rotary projects throughout the region, including a water purification system in Monte Plata, a

sewing center for women escaping domestic violence in Santo Domingo, and a children's home in San Pedro de Macorís. The trip underscored how hearing health is integral to overall health, to education, to establishing and maintaining a livelihood, and to inclusion and connection.

The Hearing Rotary Action Group coordinates similar projects worldwide, recognizing that hearing health is a fundamental human need that transcends borders, with profound significance not just in economic terms but in human potential, quality of life, and societal well-being.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, when I first became involved in international hearing work in Malawi, I believed I was addressing a quality-of-life issue. I now understand that hearing health is essential health care, as fundamental as vision, cardiovascular health, or diabetes management. The evidence is overwhelming: Better hearing means reduced dementia risk, decreased falls, maintained independence, preserved cognitive function, continued social engagement, and sustained economic productivity. By helping people to stay connected and engaged with their communities, hearing health also has a role to play in easing the loneliness epidemic that has drawn increased attention.

We have the knowledge, technology, and accessibility to address this urgent need. What we must do now is raise awareness and build a greater understanding that hearing health isn't optional — it's essential. Recognize the warning signs: a loved one asking you to repeat yourself more often, turning up the TV, or withdrawing from noisy situations. They're not just missing words. They might be putting their brain health, physical safety, and future quality of life at risk. Sustainable hearing care solutions exist. The question is whether we will take the issue seriously enough to act. ■

Markus Hilbert, a member of the Rotary Club of Kelowna Sunrise, British Columbia, is a doctor of audiology practicing at Pardon Me Hearing. He provides clinical consultation via virtualaudiologist.com and works to advance hearing care quality and accessibility through his business-to-business platform ossicle.ca and consumer services at hearo.ca.

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PHOTO
AWARDS

WINNER:

LUCA VENTURI

Rotary Club
of Siena Est,
Italy



THE EXTRAORDINARY ORDINARY

The pictures featured in this year's photo awards are simply sublime





The English poet and printmaker William Blake saw angels in the treetops, spoke with his fellow poet John Milton — who died 83 years before Blake was born — and received insightful tips about engraving from his brother Robert, also dead.

As evidenced by his luminous poetry and prints, Blake was a visionary, someone with an eye for the miraculous, even when mired in the mundane. The photographers featured in this issue possess a comparable talent, but rather than rely on an assist from the seraphim, they use a camera to detect the wonders of daily life that are hiding in plain sight.

In Vienna, Luca Venturi lowered his lens and trained it on two pairs of poised legs, a wheel of yellow daffodils, and a child contemplating whatever it is children see when left alone with their thoughts.

Walking down a busy street in Taiwan, Yuan-Lung Hsieh strolled by a department store window; unlike other passersby, he stopped, pointed his camera, and caught the image of a shimmering wedding gown half hidden behind silken drapes.

In Oregon, JoEllen Reif turned a camera toward her granddaughter Willa standing wide-eyed in a doorway and immortalized an angel imbued with golden light.

William Blake celebrated that rare ability “to see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower.” The 13 photographs gathered here demonstrate that it’s not only visionary poets who can capture the magic of everyday moments that might have otherwise gone unobserved.

PREVIOUS PAGES: In a quiet corner of Vienna, as spring flowers bloom within a circular planter and two women converse against a stone balustrade — their personalities and presence suggested only by their stance and attire — a solitary child, sitting slightly apart, lingers within her private world.

HOW I GOT THE SHOT: What drew me in was the contrast between the composed presence of the adults and the lone child absorbed in her own small gesture. I waited briefly for the right balance — when the child’s posture, the feet, and the compositional elements aligned naturally — and then captured the image.



ON THE COVER

ERIC STRAND

*Rotary Club
of Fergus Falls
Sunrise, Minnesota*

HOW I GOT THE SHOT: My wife, Jessica, and I went to Puerto Rico with our two sons, Eli and Isaac, after the loss of our third son, Saul, at birth. In search of healing, we chose to travel to the sunlit ocean rather than linger in an empty-feeling house and endure a dark, cold Minnesota winter. I truly believe the trip provided a genuine benefit to us all, as revealed in this ecstatic moment when Isaac splashed in the ocean for the first time.



**WINNER:
PEOPLE
OF ACTION**

JENO JOHNSON

**Rotary Club of
Tiruchirapalli
Chola, India**

At a free medical outreach camp supported by Dr. K. Manoharan — a member of the Rotary Club of Tiruchirapalli Midtown and a Major Donor to The Rotary Foundation — a woman clasps her hands in gratitude for the compassionate care she has received. For the residents of the agricultural communities served by the camp, this was their only access to advanced medical care.

HOW I GOT THE SHOT: I'm a wedding photographer and good at anticipating moments and being ready in the right place with the right lens. I was watching for emotional moments at the camp, so when I saw this woman literally in tears, I acted quickly to catch her as she thanked the doctor (Manoharan's son). I was emotional too and got goose bumps.

MIKE LIEBMAN

*Rotary Club of Denver
Cherry Creek, Colorado*

The moon rises over a monolithic iceberg in Lazarev Bay in Antarctica. The sky's pinkish glow is a phenomenon known as the Belt of Venus, which is caused by the redirection of sunlight by atmospheric particles. The blue sky below the Belt of Venus is caused by Earth's shadow hitting the atmosphere.

HOW I GOT THE SHOT: I took this photo while sailing on the *National Geographic Endurance*. Although there was an entire field of icebergs, I looked for a distinctive, monumental one. It needed to be the main visual element of the composition, and I wanted to time my shot to get the most aesthetically pleasing relationship between the iceberg and the moon.







GEORGE BROWNELL

***Rotary Club of
Monrovia Suonu,
Liberia***

The Rotary Club of Monrovia Suonu went to Liberia's Margibi County to deliver school supplies to Julia Grace Academy, which educates and boards 800 children. At recess, students surrounded the Rotarians and began mugging for the camera.

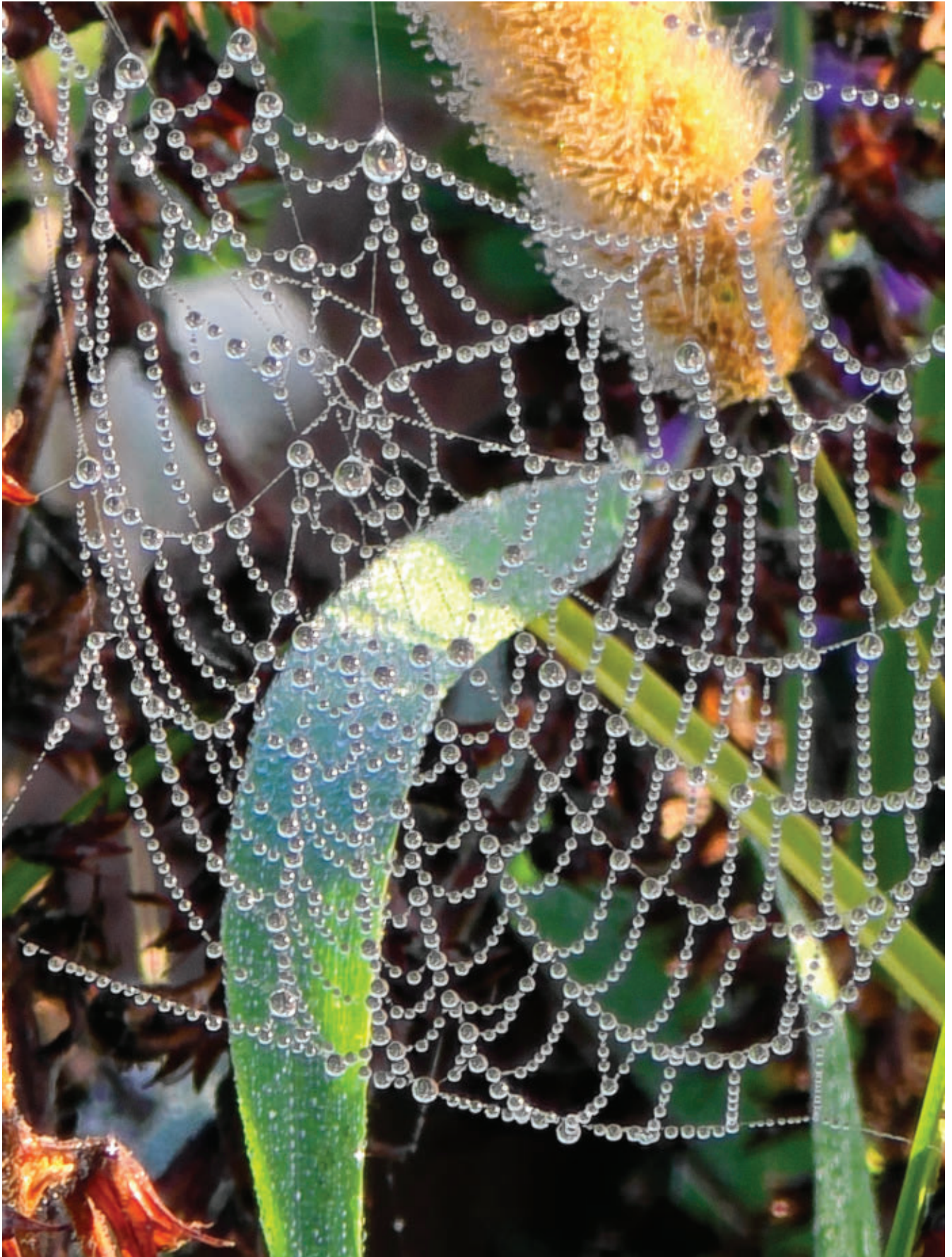
HOW I GOT THE SHOT: The energy at Julia Grace Academy was so pure and genuine. I was simply blessed with the opportunity to catch images of children being children. As I tried to photograph candid moments, the children flocked around and showed me their coolest poses. They may not understand the significance of being at the academy — which is truly teaching future nation-builders — but their demeanor and confidence are clearly visible in this photo.



MARK CAMPBELL

***Rotary Club
of Santa Rosa
Sunrise, California***

As the sun rises outside a roadside café in California's Sonoma County, morning dew bejewels an intricately woven spiderweb.



JOHN BUTTERFIELD

Rotary Club of Dublin-Worthington, Ohio

A woman makes her way through a courtyard of the 16th-century Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque in the heart of Sarajevo's historic Ottoman-era market area. While the Bosnian city today is home to skyscrapers, modern avenues, and a mix of cultures, the narrow lanes of Baščaršija, Sarajevo's old bazaar, are a living repository of the city's history and traditions.

HOW I GOT THE SHOT: I spent time observing the interaction of people outside the mosque, seeking moments that embodied Sarajevo's way of life. In this image, I focused on a young woman with a guarded expression, which contrasts with that of the older man in the background. In this everyday moment, there's a sense of the connection and perhaps tension across generations.





STEVE BEGNOCHE***Rotary Club of Ludington, Michigan***

Monstrous waves whipped by a winter gale explode after hitting a breakwater off Lake Michigan's eastern shoreline, dwarfing a 57-foot-tall, 102-year-old lighthouse in Ludington, Michigan. The force of a Great Lakes storm is not to be underestimated; gales can turn into hurricane-force winds and have caused thousands of shipwrecks.



TERRI LATTA

Rotary Club of Lake Norman/Huntersville, North Carolina

Indifferent to the riot of color that surrounds it, a determined duck paddles across the lake that lies at the base of the majestic, 14,000-foot-tall Maroon Bells. Situated within the White River National Forest about 10 miles southwest of Aspen, Colorado, the twin peaks get their distinctive reddish-purple coloring from iron-bearing rocks that have oxidized over millions of years.







SHRAVAN M.

Rotaract Club of Shimoga North Elite, India

Embodying a guardian spirit, a masked dancer performs in a Bhuta Kola ritual in Puttur, India. Dressed in elaborate makeup, costumes, towering headgear, and ornaments, dancers in this annual ritual enter a trance to become the spirit itself. With drums, chants, and fire, the intense and deeply spiritual performance reaffirms the community's sacred bond with its ancestral guardians.

YUAN-LUNG HSIEH

Rotary Club of Tainan Cherng-Ta, Taiwan

In the bustling port city of Kaohsiung in southern Taiwan, a woman with a pink umbrella walks past a store window where a partially hidden wedding gown offers a tantalizing promise of potential happiness.



KENJI OGURA

*Rotary Club of Duluth Superior
Eco, Minnesota*

As he paddles across Lake Superior, a kayaker does double duty as a cameraman, using an overhead drone to photograph his buoyant voyage and the crazily concentric aquamarine ripples left in the wake of his bright orange watercraft.



JOELLEN REIF

*Spouse of William Reif,
Rotary Club of Canby, Oregon*

On her seventh birthday, Willa Talbot daydreams in a sunny doorway while vacationing with her family at Black Butte Ranch in central Oregon. “Sometimes a photograph can bring such joy,” says Willa’s grandmother JoEllen Reif. “This one made me and my family very happy.” ■



The birth of Route

By
GEOFFREY
JOHNSON

Without Cy Avery, travelers
from around the world may
never have learned how
to get their kicks

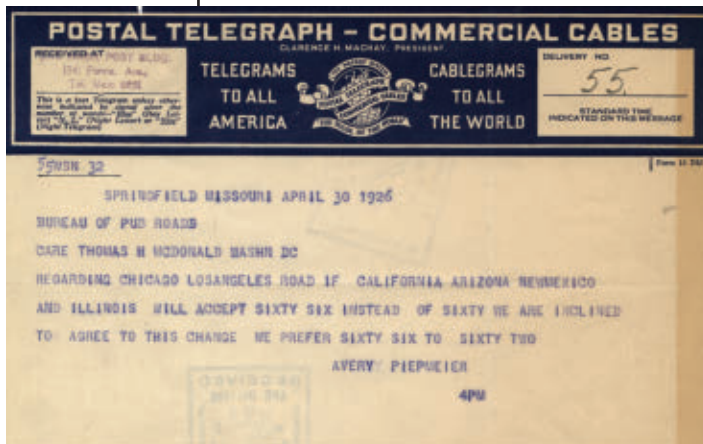


“66 is the mother road, the road of flight.”

— John Steinbeck,
The Grapes of Wrath



One hundred years ago, a 31-word telegram went out from Springfield, Missouri, to Washington, D.C. Addressed to Thomas H. MacDonald, the chief of the U.S. government's Bureau of Roads, its contents can be summed up in three words: “We prefer 66.”

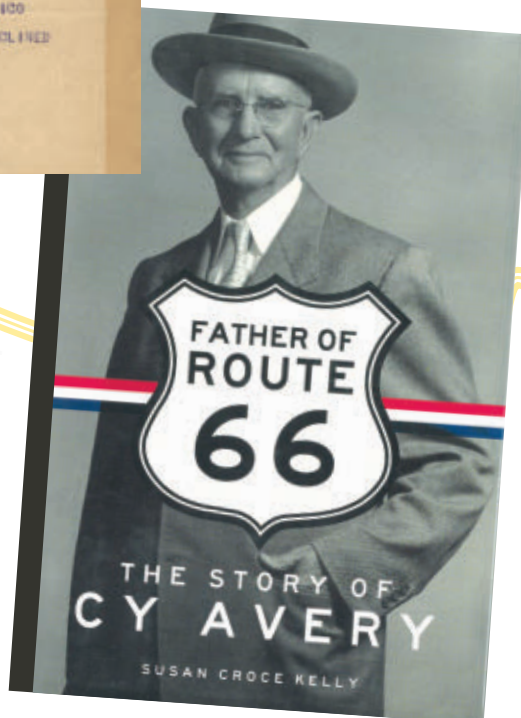


Santa Monica



Los Angeles

Bottle Tree Ranch



A Tulsa Rotarian, Cyrus Avery got his own biography in 2014. “Without Avery,” wrote one Mother Road historian, “it is doubtful that U.S. 66 would ever have become a reality.”

Signed “Avery Piepmeier,” the telegram resolved a long-simmering dispute about the name — or in this case, number — of a new federally mandated highway stretching from Chicago to Los Angeles. During its brief 59-year lifespan, that 2,400-mile thoroughfare would achieve mythical status, one that long outlived its purported demise.

As for Avery Piepmeier, he was not one person but two. Bion Harman Piepmeier was the 41-year-old chief highway engineer for the state of Missouri and a member of the Committee of Five — which, counting its chairman, actually comprised six men — charged with numbering the new network of interstate highways.

Cyrus Stevens Avery, Piepmeier’s colleague on the committee, was a more multifaceted figure, a man whose trajectory straddled two centuries and spanned much of a continent. Born in Pennsylvania in 1871, Cy traveled West with his father by covered wagon when he was 13, helping to establish the family’s new home in the future state of Oklahoma, known then as the Indian Territory. A few years after the rest of the family arrived, the Averys moved again, this time to southwestern Missouri, but Cy would eventually make Oklahoma his permanent home. He and his wife, Essie, resided in Oklahoma City and Vinita before finally settling in Tulsa in 1907, the year Oklahoma became the 46th state.

Over the course of his life, Avery held many jobs, among them schoolteacher, insurance agent, and oilman, partnering for a while with Harry Sinclair, whose gas station signs, adorned with a green brontosaurus, remain ubiquitous on U.S. highways. A civic-minded individual, he served as a Tulsa

PHOTOGRAPHS: (TELEGRAM) COURTESY OF HISTORY MUSEUM ON THE SQUARE; (KALCHBRENNERS) NANCY KALCHBRENNER; (SIGN) GETTY IMAGES; PREVIOUS PAGE: GETTY IMAGES

County commissioner, president of Tulsa's chamber of commerce, and as an official in the Depression-era Works Progress Administration. He helped oversee a \$7.5 million project that brought clean water to Tulsa, for which he received the princely salary of one dollar a year.

In addition to being a savvy investor in land, Avery was a farmer, managing his 1,400-acre spread north-east of town in a way that drew compliments from the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture. Later in life, he set up a ranch. "My newest ambition," he said at the time, "is to prove you can put every known tame pasture plant into a native meadow and never plow the land or use mechanical planting." As his biographer, Susan Croce Kelly, wrote, Avery "could have been a poster boy for 21st-century sustainable farming."

Avery was also an active Rotarian, a member of the Rotary Club of Tulsa. In 1922, the club hosted multiple events to improve dialogue between businessmen and farmers; as this magazine reported, that exchange culminated with "a monster afternoon and evening meeting and barbecue" at Avery's farm. "Not less than six farmers at this meeting, whose previous knowledge of Rotary was gained by reading newspaper accounts of club meetings, were so impressed that they wanted to make out applications for membership on the spot."

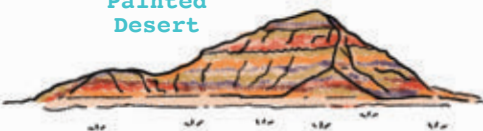
Despite the many demands on his time, Avery, perhaps recalling that rugged journey West with his father, was forever a champion of good roads. He served as president of the Oklahoma Good Roads Federation and chairman of the state highway commission, and in 1925 he was chosen to represent

WESTWARD HO!

Five years ago, [Nancy and Mark Kalchbrenner](#) (below) turned 66. Which is why, as they drove home to Chicago from Denver, they made a 450-mile detour to Albuquerque, where they picked up the trail of Route 66. "Mark said, 'This seems so hokey and lame,' but he totally came around," says Nancy, the president of the Rotary Club of Chicago. "We had the best time. It was lovely, as were the people we met along the way."



Painted Desert



✖ If you're planning a Route 66 road trip, Kalchbrenner, a Chicago tour guide, recommends Jerry McClanahan's *EZ66 Guide for Travelers*. This summer, the Chicago club will inaugurate its own bus tour, which will highlight Rotary landmarks and the route's westbound starting point at Adams Street and Michigan Avenue.

Madonna of the Trail



Oklahoma on the newly created Joint Board on Interstate Highways. It was a pivotal choice.

"Without Avery it is doubtful that U.S. 66 would ever have become a reality," wrote Michael Wallis in *Route 66: The Mother Road*, a book that's both homage and history. "As a result, he has become known to thousands of admirers as the 'Father of Route 66.'"

**"If you ever plan to motor west
Travel my way, take the highway
that's the best
Get your kicks on Route Sixty Six!"**

— Bobby Troup

While the creation of a network of highways crisscrossing the United States was complicated by various conflicts among municipal, state, and national interests, one of the greatest and most surprising challenges was the decision about what those roads would be called. "The most contentious battle," as Richard F. Weingroff, the "unofficial historian" of the Federal Highway Administration, explained, was fought over the name of the crescent-shaped road extending from Chicago to LA — a highway that, if things had gone as planned, would have borne the uninspiring designation of Route 62.

And all might have gone as planned had it not been for Cy Avery and the serendipitous timing of a Rotary district conference.

The saga began in August 1925 with a two-day meeting in Washington of the Joint Board on Interstate Highways. On Avery's motion, the board adopted a shield-shaped sign to serve as the highways' emblem; on a close vote of 10 to 9, the board decided not to include the names of states on the sign. As Weingroff writes, the board, "with no discussion," also approved a motion that the different highways comprising the interstate system "be numbered rather than named."

Public opposition to using numbers rather than names had surfaced even before the August meeting. One of the most vocal opponents was the *Lincoln Highway Forum*, a newsletter celebrating the



transcontinental Lincoln Highway. "Shakespeare asked 'What's in a name?' and indicated that there was really very little," opined the *Forum*. "Shakespeare, however, didn't know much about modern methods of making names valuable by making them known to the public and by associating them with something desirable and attractive. ... Names mean something to us, numbers very little."

Now things lay in the hands of the Committee of Five, which had established an elaborate interconnecting pattern of even-numbered east-west and odd-numbered north-south highways. As it turned out, multiple states wanted to use the number 60 to designate their portion of the interstate highway, with Gov. William Fields of Kentucky declaring that his state would withdraw from the national numbering system if it didn't get that desired denomination.

Fields had a point. Following the logic of the committee's established pattern, Route 60 should have gone east from Virginia through Kentucky and on to points farther west. Defying logic, Missouri's B.H. Piepmeier and, to some extent, Avery insisted on keeping 60 for the Chicago-LA route. Following a meeting in Chicago early in 1926, the joint board's chairman and secretary, without consulting the Committee of

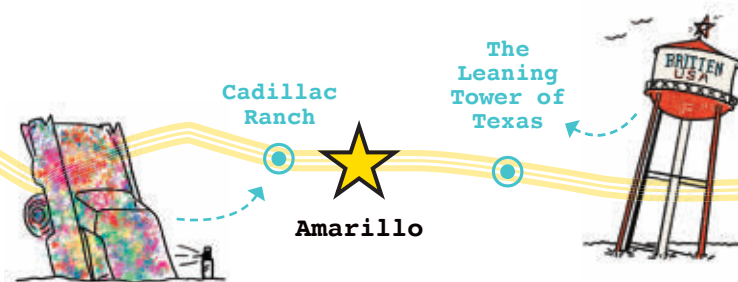
On 29 April 1926, hundreds of Rotarians visiting Springfield, Missouri, for a district conference staged "the most elaborate parade" in the city's history. The timing of the conference played a serendipitous but pivotal role in the naming of Route 66.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (PARADE) HOTEL HISTORY MUSEUM ON THE SQUARE; (CROST) JOERG METZNER; (SCULPTURE) COURTESY OF BRIDGET BECHTEL/SCULPTURE WALK SPRINGFIELD

Cadillac Ranch

The Leaning Tower of Texas

Amarillo



Five, assigned 60 to a route from Virginia to Missouri via Kentucky and designated Chicago to LA as Route 62. Avery was appalled, his anger compounded by the fact that Oklahoma had already printed maps and manufactured road signs with the number 60.

That is when fate, in the guise of a Rotary district conference, intervened. A year in the making, the conference opened in Springfield, Missouri, on 29 April 1926. “City welcomes Rotary visitors,” blared *The Springfield Leader* in a banner front-page headline. “City invaded by district delegations,” the paper added, with hundreds of Rotarians representing four states. Among them was Cy Avery of the Rotary Club of Tulsa.

Springfield essentially turned over the city to its giddy Rotary visitors. On the afternoon of the 29th, reported the *Leader*, “the most elaborate parade ever seen in Springfield was staged on the streets ... by Rotarians of the 15th district.” It was followed that night by further “impromptu parades ... along brilliantly lighted streets [featuring] every conceivable festivity which might add to the joyous nature of a great celebration.” That went on until “a late hour,” with the streets “crowded with persons thoroughly imbued with the spirit of festivity.”

Despite all the Prohibition-era imbuelement, Rotarians accomplished much during their daytime business sessions, including the unanimous election of their next district governor. And Cy Avery landed on a brilliant alternative to his 60 versus 62 conundrum. He had traveled to Missouri with his fellow Rotarian, John Page, Oklahoma’s chief highway engineer. Once in Springfield, they met with Piepmeier at the Colonial Hotel, which had been built by another good-roads booster, John Woodruff.

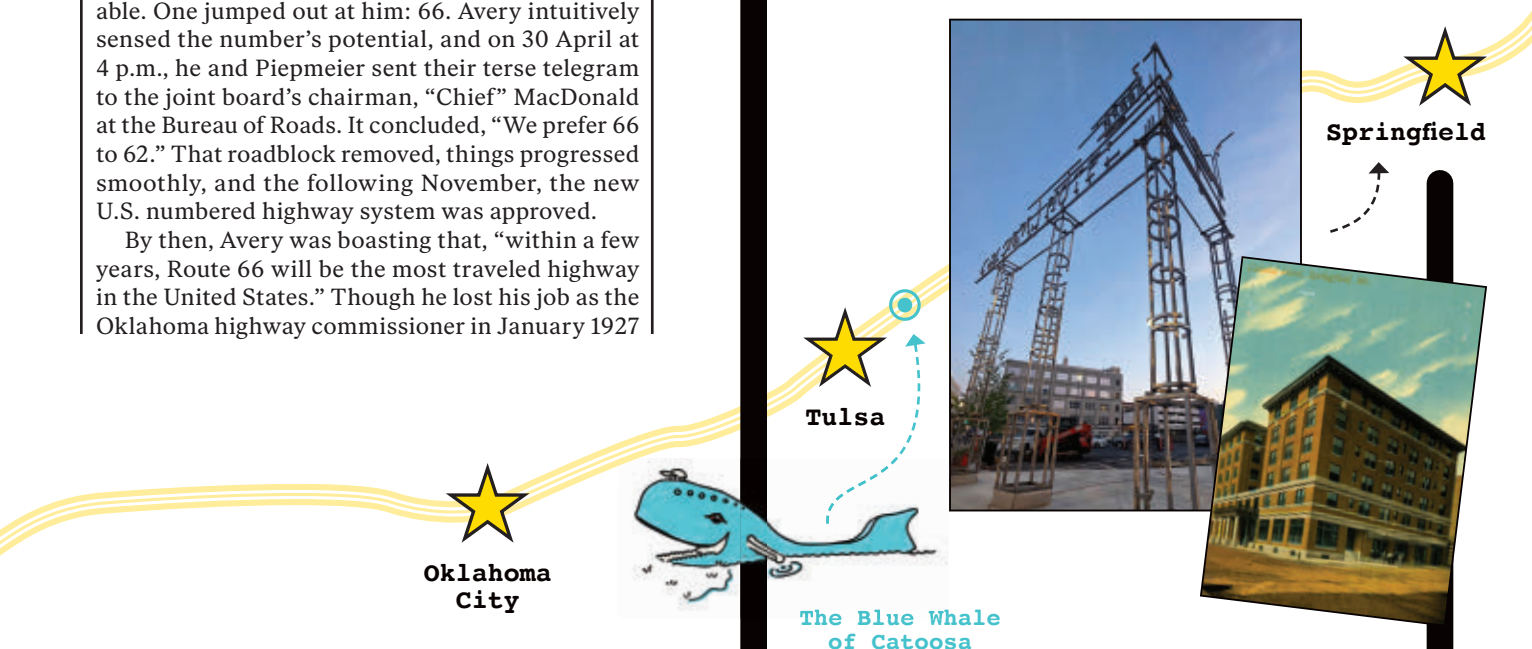
At Avery’s suggestion, Page reviewed the master list of highway numbers that were still available. One jumped out at him: 66. Avery intuitively sensed the number’s potential, and on 30 April at 4 p.m., he and Piepmeier sent their terse telegram to the joint board’s chairman, “Chief” MacDonald at the Bureau of Roads. It concluded, “We prefer 66 to 62.” That roadblock removed, things progressed smoothly, and the following November, the new U.S. numbered highway system was approved.

By then, Avery was boasting that, “within a few years, Route 66 will be the most traveled highway in the United States.” Though he lost his job as the Oklahoma highway commissioner in January 1927



✖ One hundred years after its founding — and 41 years after it was officially decommissioned — Route 66 remains a viable roadway. Just ask **Don Crost** (above), a member of the **Rotary Club of Evanston Lighthouse** north of Chicago. Last fall, driving his cobalt blue 1953 Chevy pickup, Crost navigated the Mother Road from Chicago to LA, raising money for ShelterBox.

✖ Recognized as the birthplace of Route 66, **Springfield, Missouri**, is going all out for the roadway’s centenary. At press time, the city’s four-day celebration included the dedication of Birthplace Plaza at 4 p.m. on 30 April, exactly 100 years after Cy Avery’s telegram went out from this city to Washington, D.C. The plaza occupies the former site of the **Colonial Hotel** (bottom right), the historic gathering place where Avery et al. concocted the legendary 66 moniker. The centerpiece of the plaza will be **The Ghost of the Colonial Hotel**, a sculpture (below) by the Spanish artist Juan Garaizabal commissioned by Sculpture Walk Springfield and the city’s six Rotary and Rotaract clubs, which represent more than 500 Rotary members.

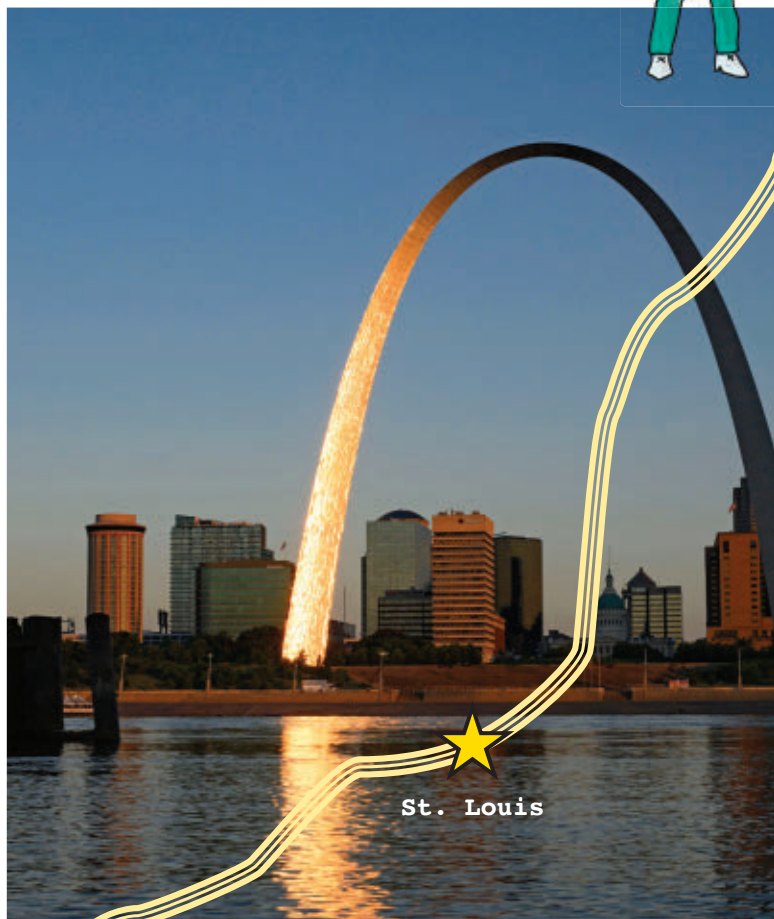




Gemini
Giant



Chicago



St. Louis

In St. Louis, Eero Saarinen's stainless-steel Gateway Arch (above) is one of many landmarks, both majestic and quirky, encountered along Route 66, whose western terminus is Santa Monica pier (opposite page) on the Pacific Ocean.

after the state got a new governor, he remained the highway's biggest booster. He was the driving force behind the creation of the U.S. 66 Highway Association, and in front of an adoring crowd at the organization's inaugural meeting, he claimed the honor of being "Member Number 1."

At that February 1927 gathering, Avery found one more way to leave his indelible imprint on the fledgling highway. Henceforth, he said, Route 66 should be known as the Main Street of America.

And for nearly half a century, it was just that.

"The interstate's shadow is overtaking Route 66."

—New York Times, July 1981

On 26 June 1985, the route numbering committee of the American Association of State Highway and

Transportation Officials convened in Duluth, Minnesota. Among the items on the agenda: driving the last nail in the coffin.

Ever since President Dwight D. Eisenhower had authorized the U.S. Interstate Highway System in June 1956, Route 66 had been in decline. Southwest of Chicago, the highway's eastern terminus, Route 66 had given way to I-55 in the 1960s and '70s; in 1984, the *Chicago Tribune* dismissed America's main street, or "what's left of it," as "just another salad bar highway."

That's why, when the route numbering committee met in Duluth to "eliminate" Route 66, it specifically singled out the stretch between Scotland, Missouri, and Sanders, Arizona. The rest of the route had already headed quietly for the exits. "Final chapter is written for Route 66," lamented *The New York Times* as it reported on the committee's decision. An adjacent story noted the deployment of the first supersonic B-1 bomber. Which meant that the country's most famous highway, which had taken flight on a vestige of the 19th century — Avery Piepmeier's telegram — was being escorted into oblivion by a harbinger of the 21st.

But a roadway that has been eulogized in a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, serenaded by Nat King Cole, and deified by a popular TV show doesn't go easy. In the immediate aftermath of the highway's decommissioning, individual states began establishing Route 66 associations and celebrating the famous roadway, which to a great extent was still there. The National Historic Route 66 Federation was established in 1995; four years later, the U.S. Congress passed a law to create the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, and the working title of the Disney-Pixar film *Cars*, released in 2006 after a big assist from highway historian Michael Wallis, was *Route 66*.

Even today, the legendary byway emits an international lure. "Route 66 is definitely a big thing in Chicago," says Nancy Kalchbrenner, who, when she's not presiding over the Rotary Club of Chicago (aka Rotary One), conducts tours of the Windy City. "But Route 66 is very popular around the world, especially in Europe. It's very common for Europeans to ask tour guides, 'Where's the 'begin' sign? And can you take our picture?'"

Cy Avery achieved a similar slice of immortality. His death, on 2 July 1963 at the age of 91, was front-page news in the *Tulsa Daily World*. "Never the skeptic; always the optimist with unlimited vision — that described Cy Avery," exclaimed the newspaper. "He had a shrewd eye for Tulsa's possibilities and he worked to accomplish them with energy and resource that seemed inexhaustible."

Tulsa's veneration of Avery, and of Route 66, was not short-lived. In November 2012, with three of Avery's grandchildren in attendance, the city dedicated

PHOTOGRAPHS: (ARCH) ANGELA WEISS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; (SIGN) DERIC J. BROWN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES; (INTERIOR) COURTESY OF HEART OF ROUTE 66 AUTO MUSEUM; (PUMP) GETTY IMAGES; (SCULPTURE) ALAMY

a 20,000-pound, \$1.18 million bronze sculpture called *East Meets West*. Designed by the Texas artist Robert Summers and situated in the Cyrus Avery Centennial Plaza, it depicts an encounter between a Model T heading out of town and a horse-drawn wagon coming from the Tulsa oil fields. The wagon driver struggles to control his horses as they rear up on their hind legs. In the back of the auto, a little girl clutches her frightened cat, while the wheelman of the Model T stands vigilant on his car's running board. A man whose trajectory crossed two centuries and much of a continent, the Father of Route 66 was not someone easily rattled.

That same year, *East Meets West* got a companion. Anticipating its 2015 centennial, the Rotary Club of Tulsa gifted the city a \$1 million art installation: a gigantic bronze globe situated on a large granite public plaza and surrounded by four bronze figurative sculptures, including *Freedom from Polio*, which depicts a girl jubilantly tossing aside her crutches. "Cyrus Avery didn't just give Tulsa a highway; he gave us a gateway to the world," insists Carl Vincent, the club's current president. "Today, *East Meets West* and our club's community plaza stand as bookends to a century of progress. Together, they remind us that Route 66 is more than a historic route; it is the physical manifestation of the Rotarian spirit of Service Above Self. This legacy of movement and connection remains as vital to Route 66 and the Rotary Club of Tulsa today as it was when the first stone for the Mother Road was laid." ■



✖ Springfield may be the birthplace of Route 66, but an online poll in 2018 named Tulsa its capital. After visiting Avery Centennial Plaza and the [East Meets West](#) sculpture (below) — with a bronze Cy Avery stepping out of his Model T Ford — head 15 miles south to Sapulpa and the [Heart of Route 66 Auto Museum](#) (above), a collection of antique cars and Mother Road memorabilia overseen by Richard Holmes, a member of the [Rotary Club of Tulsa](#).



✖ In the Texas Panhandle, the city of Amarillo will celebrate the [Route 66 centennial](#) 4-13 June. On the final day, Rotarians will serve as hosts and guides for visitors attending the festivities. "The event has been building over the past two summers, and the five area [Rotary clubs — Amarillo, Canyon, and Amarillo East, South, and West](#) — are excited to play a role in this significant milestone for our community," say Chrystene Speed, a member of the Amarillo West club.

✖ "We have a whole Route 66 culture out here," says Tawnya Hensley. "This year, we are upping it. I will be involved, as will our students." Hensley is the president of California's [Rotary Club of San Bernardino](#), and the students are members of a service-focused Interact club that the Rotary club sponsors. They will work with local artists to create permanent Route 66-themed murals that could help revitalize the roadway's former route.

OUR CLUBS



FROM THE BLOG

Fun. Flexible. For everyone.

Rotary Club of South West
Florida District 6960

By Priya Ahluwalia

When I first joined Rotary, I kept pondering a simple question: How does Rotary fit into real life today? Not in theory but in the lives of working parents, young professionals, entrepreneurs, creatives, and people who genuinely want to serve but are already juggling full calendars.

That question wasn't from a strategy session. It came from real conversations with friends who were curious about Rotary but unsure they could commit — professionals who wanted to have an impact without rigid expectations and families that wanted to serve together.

At the Rotary Club of South West Florida in District 6960, that question became a starting point. We didn't set out to grow quickly, but we did set out to build something that felt welcoming, relevant, and human. In a relatively short time, our club has grown to more than 130 members, including one international member based in Victoria, British

Columbia, who is helping us launch the Victoria Impact Club. We've become the largest club in our district. We've also built relationships with more than 50 local and regional business partners.

What began as a local experiment has quickly evolved into a scalable model, one that proves Rotary can grow organically while deepening service, leadership, and global connection.

What surprised me most wasn't the growth itself — the reasons people stayed were most unexpected. Members weren't joining for titles or obligations. They joined because they felt welcomed, energized, and empowered to be themselves.

That feeling eventually turned into our guiding mantra: **Fun. Flexible. For everyone!**

What have we learned along the way? Here are some key takeaways you can use to reignite Rotary in your area:

Make Rotary fun

Let's be honest — people are busy. If Rotary feels like another obligation, engagement drops quickly. We made a deliberate decision to bring joy back into Rotary through interactive meetings, engaging socials, hands-on service projects, and intentional celebrations of our members. I've seen firsthand how fun builds connection and how connection builds commitment.

Engage families, not just individuals

Our members don't live in silos. They have partners, children, careers, and responsibilities that matter. Instead of asking people to choose between Rotary and family, we chose to include families in the Rotary experience. Rotary became something families could experience together, and that made involvement feel sustainable, not stressful.

Stay flexible

Rigid attendance expectations don't reflect modern life. We broadened what "participation" looks like so that service projects, fundraisers, community events, and socials all count. Flexibility didn't reduce commitment; it strengthened it.

Focus on member-led projects

One of the most successful shifts we made was empowering member-led projects. When members are encouraged to bring their passions, ideas, and causes to the table, Rotary becomes personal. I've watched members who once came quietly to meetings step into leadership, launch initiatives they care deeply about, and invite others into Rotary with pride.

Use social media as a magnet

Many of our newest members first discovered Rotary through social media. We treat our digital presence as an open invitation, not a noticeboard.

Build partnerships and show up

By collaborating with local businesses — hosting events at their locations, supporting entrepreneurs, and creating mutually beneficial partnerships — we expanded our visibility and reach. Beyond that, we made it a priority to show up for our community. Make it a point to know about and attend networking socials, festivals, markets, school events, and neighborhood gatherings.

Visibility builds trust. Trust builds curiosity. And curiosity brings people through the door.

Rotary doesn't need to change its values to grow. It needs to evolve how people experience those values. By embracing **Fun. Flexible. For everyone!** and by empowering our members and meeting people where they are, we've built a club that feels welcoming, relevant, and energizing.

The future of Rotary is bright if we're willing to invite it forward. ■

Priya Ahluwalia helped start the Rotary Club of South West Florida and will serve as its 2027-28 president. She is district conference chair and chair of the Reignite Rotary Initiative to foster engagement and membership growth across District 6960. Ahluwalia is also a Rotary social media influencer. Follow her on Instagram @priyahluwalia.



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.



The Rotary Club of South West Florida in District 6960 endeavored to bring joy into its meetings, social occasions, and service. A jump in membership followed.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Speaking in tongues

A Rotary journey comes full circle in Taipei

Born into a multicultural family in Taipei, Betty Chen grew up watching language bridge worlds. Her father, an ethnic Chinese businessman from Indonesia, spoke Mandarin, Hakka, Indonesian, and English. When international visitors or trade delegations came to Taiwan, he often acted as an informal but effective interpreter. “It felt like such a noble task to help people who didn’t speak the same language understand each other,” says Chen.

It was perhaps inevitable then that Chen would follow her father’s path. Initially she chose to study English at his alma mater, National Taiwan Normal University. In her senior year, however, she decided to change direction after discovering the school’s prestigious Graduate Institute of Translation and Interpretation. After finishing her undergraduate work, she trained there in English-Chinese translation and interpretation across commercial and technical fields.

During her junior year at National Taiwan Normal University, the Rotary Club of Taipei Shihlin wanted to establish a bilingual Rotaract club and reached out to her department. As chair of the department’s student association, Chen ultimately became the charter president of a Rotaract club in 2003.

“It was much harder than I thought,” she says. “I had to recruit members, organize activities, and bring people together. But I learned so much from our sponsoring Rotary club. Rotarians taught me about service and, just as importantly, about public speaking.” That skill came in handy when, in 2005, she was selected as an emcee for an international Rotary Youth Leadership Awards event in Taipei.

After completing her graduate studies, Chen wanted to immerse herself in an English-speaking environment. A Rotary district scholarship, sponsored by Jackson Hsieh, a past district governor who later served as a Rotary International director, made that possible. In 2007, Chen traveled to the United Kingdom to pursue a second master’s degree at the University of Bath.



Rotary Scholar Betty Chen will co-host the Rotary International Convention in Taipei.

There, she was hosted by members of the Rotary Club of Bathavon.

“My host family picked me up at the airport, drove me to Bath, took me shopping, and helped me get settled,” Chen says. “I spent my first Christmas abroad with them and I had my first roasted goose.” Her host mother, a university professor, helped Chen prepare her dissertation.

As a Rotary Scholar, Chen gave about a dozen presentations about Taiwan to UK Rotary clubs. Each presentation and each long conversation with Rotary members became a kind of workshop. Humor, she learned, is one of the hardest things to translate because it depends on wordplay and cultural nuance. She experimented, testing stories and jokes with her Rotary friends to see what resonated with her audiences.

While in the UK, Chen developed interpretation skills that would be useful in government and diplomacy — timely preparation for what followed. A year after returning to Taiwan, she got a job with the Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During her probationary period, a senior interpreter for Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou fell ill. Chen was asked to step in, and her performance won her the job of serving as Ma’s personal interpreter.

The role came with unique challenges. Ma, who holds a doctorate focused on international law from Harvard, speaks fluent English, and he once served as an interpreter for

Chiang Ching-kuo, who governed Taiwan from 1978 to 1988. But protocol required him to speak Chinese in official settings. “I had to be accurate but also stay in sync with him,” Chen says. “I needed to use exactly the words he had in mind. He was very patient with me. After meetings, he would point out how I could improve. It was a wonderful learning experience.”

For 6½ years, from 2009 until the end of Ma’s presidency, Chen interpreted for visiting dignitaries, accompanied the president on international trips, and engaged with leaders from politics, business, and academia. In 2014, she received a surprise visit when Hsieh, her scholarship sponsor, led a Rotary delegation into the president’s office. “What are you doing here, Betty?” he asked, and when he learned about her job, Hsieh could not conceal his pride at what Chen had achieved. It was, says Chen, a special moment for both of them.

In 2016, Chen was hired by Taiwan’s Public Television Service as a weekend anchor for *Good Morning Taiwan*, an hour-long bilingual news program. From there she moved on to the media company TaiwanPlus, where she anchors news programs and hosts talk shows focused on Taiwan’s social and political issues.

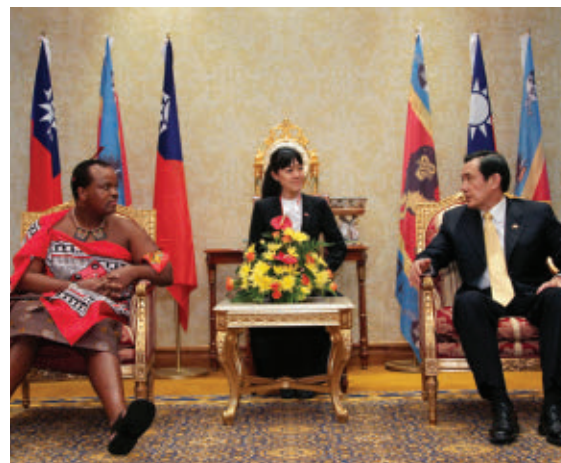
At the same time, Chen continued to build her career as a professional emcee for international events. One of her most challenging

assignments came in 2017, when she co-hosted the opening ceremony of the Summer Universiade (now called the World University Games) in Taipei. The multisport event drew more than 10,000 student athletes from 134 countries and was broadcast to a global audience of millions.

Everything had been meticulously rehearsed, but as the parade of nations began, a group of protesters blocked the athletes’ entrance. “We suddenly saw only the flag bearers entering with no athletes behind them,” Chen recalls. Chen and her co-hosts improvised for nearly an hour, filling the unexpected gap with cultural and historical insights about the event. “We kept the energy going,” she recalls, “sharing stories and encouraging interactions with the audience.”

Now, Chen is preparing for another global stage, one that brings her journey full circle. This month, she will co-host the Rotary International Convention in Taipei. For Chen, the moment is deeply personal. “This is another milestone in my Rotary journey,” she says. “It’s a signal to me that it’s time to come back to the Rotary family.”

This time, Chen says that she returns not as a student seeking opportunity but as an experienced professional ready to give back. “I hope I can contribute, even in a small way, to Rotary,” Chen says, “just as Rotary has contributed so much to me.” — WEN HUANG



Betty Chen
■ **Rotary District 3520 scholarship**, University of Bath, 2007-08
■ **Taiwan president’s interpreter**, 2009-16
■ **Translator and newscaster**, present
■ **Co-host, Rotary International Convention**, June 2026

From left: Betty Chen co-hosts the Summer Universiade in 2017; Chen serves as interpreter for Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou.

DISPATCHES FROM
OUR SISTER MAGAZINES
ROTARY NEWS INDIA

12 million breakfasts — and counting — to stop hunger



↑ The center has prepared and distributed more than 12 million puri-bhaji breakfast packets in its 28 years of operation. At right, Roma Birmani fries the bread.

The difference that one Rotary member's vision, compassion, and dedication can make in a town can be gauged from the story of a community kitchen started 28 years ago by Maharaj K Birmani to provide nutritious meals.

The food project was born to address hunger among people treated at a medical center that Birmani, a longtime member of the Rotary Club of Deolali, had started in town. Doctors disbursed free medicine, and Birmani, who ran a security systems business, added giveaways of milk and bananas when he saw that most patients were undernourished.

Soon, Birmani realized that his efforts did not bring about the results he wanted. After consulting doctors and dietitians, he

concluded that adequate nutrition was a way to improve the patients' health. Next, he consulted fellow club members on what could be done to provide filling meals.

After determining that the club could serve *puri-bhaji* — a traditional breakfast in India of fried bread (puri) and spiced potatoes (bhaji) — free of charge or at a low cost, Birmani launched a pilot project in the 1990s. The puri-bhaji is prepared using potato, urad dal (black lentils), green chiles, turmeric powder, curry leaves, and mustard seeds.

The dish became an immediate hit with those served, and 28 years into the project, utmost care has been taken to ensure that no one alters the original recipe or the use of quality ingredients. The cost of

the puri-bhaji packets has been revised over the years but remains low. Birmani's caveat has always been that if someone cannot afford to pay for the meal, the person receives the puri-bhaji for free (he subsidizes that cost). His mantra is that nobody in Deolali should go to sleep hungry.

The food has generated great interest. "Over the years, the taste has remained the same. The result is that people queue up in cars to buy our puri-bhaji packets for the simple reason that the taste is so good," says J Sundararaman, a past club president who volunteers at the puri-bhaji center.

That said, Birmani reassured local restaurant owners and street food vendors early on that the project's goal was only to help people in

the town who lacked enough food to stay healthy.

Once he made clear that his aim was not to start a food business, he was able to start the full-scale initiative. The venture became such a success that within two years the medical center that Birmani started was closed because people no longer needed treatment for nutritional deficiencies. There is now a second puri-bhaji center in a village near Deolali.

Members of the Deolali club have embraced the project financed by Birmani and his wife, Roma, and the Rotarians are highly involved. For example, when club members celebrate birthdays or wedding anniversaries, they buy a thousand or more packets of puri-bhaji from the center and pass them out in the community.

The operation employs about 10 people, with some rolling out and frying the puris and preparing the bhaji in the mornings. Other employees make home deliveries.

Almost 1,000 packets are produced and distributed at the center every morning, with 300 given out free and 700 sold at 10 rupees (11 cents) each. Some construction workers buy two packets — one for breakfast and the second for lunch.

Birmani, now in his 70s and

on dialysis, still goes to the center every day. Roma manages the center and helps make puris three times a week.

Sundararaman also visits the facility daily to help pack the food and ensure that things run smoothly. His attachment to this project is strong because “it was conceived initially when I was the club president,” he says proudly.

Like so many others, he celebrates special occasions by donating money for the food packets, “because we know where that money goes. Maharaj and Roma’s selfless service and dedication to the community is truly inspiring, as their efforts have left a lasting impact.”

The initiative is an example of a sustainable project for clubs.

As of September, the center had prepared and distributed 12 million puri-bhaji packets since its start.

“I’ve been witness to this project as a Rotarian, from the very first day of its inception until today,” an emotional Sundararaman says. “Believe me, it requires special skills and dedicated hands at the center, patience and compassionate hearts to serve people who depend on the food prepared here.”

Adapted from the original article by Rasheeda Bhagat.



Service during the pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the puri-bhaji center was a rare eatery that received permission to remain open from local health authorities. “During those days, this center demonstrated remarkable resilience and dedication to serve the community,” says J Sundararaman, of the Rotary Club of Deolali. “At that time, the poor and vulnerable people in Deolali heavily depended on us to get their food, and we did not let them down. Some of the Rotarian volunteers would come in the morning, and with the help of young people working at the center, pick up 100 packets of puri-bhaji and deliver them to people’s doorsteps.”

Fighting disease is one of Rotary’s areas of focus. To learn more, go to rotary.org/our-causes.

Maharaj Birmani, at right, started the community kitchen 28 years ago and still goes to the center daily.



HANDBOOK

Mind meld

Neuroscience explains why storytelling binds us together

In Portugal, when you want someone to get to the point, you tell them to “stop telling stories,” explains Sérgio Almeida, of the Rotary Club of Arouca. The implication, he says, is that stories are a way to obscure the truth. “In some cultures, sometimes when you talk about storytelling, it’s not so well perceived.”

Science, though, suggests otherwise: Stories are important to the brain and to human connection.

Almeida, president of the Porto-based Brain Research Institute, points to the work of Princeton University neuroscientist Uri Hasson and his colleagues, whose research has found that the brainwaves of someone listening to a story begin to mirror those of the person telling the story. That connection helps establish shared understanding and trust.

So why does this matter for us? Building connection through storytelling is central to Rotary, especially as clubs seek to communicate their impact to prospective members, donors, and the community at large.

So, go ahead, give it a try. The key, Almeida says, is finding a story that is relevant to the people you’re trying to reach. If you know they care about the environment, for example, tell the story of a project to protect critical habitat or restore a waterway. And most of all, make sure the story is authentic, as our brains can sense when something’s off (think of the AI slop floating around the internet).

“Our storytelling is not to sell you a product,” Almeida says. “Our storytelling is based in purpose: We want to make this world a better place.” ■

Watch
neuroscientist
Uri Hasson’s
TED Talk at
[ted.com/
speakers/uri_
hasson](https://ted.com/speakers/uri_hasson).





The brainwaves of someone listening to a story begin to mirror those of the storyteller, forming a connection known as neural coupling.

Stories activate multiple areas of the brain and are more memorable than individual facts.

CALENDAR

June & July events

GO FOR THE GOLD

Event: PineappleMan Triathlon

Host: Rotary Club of Melbourne Beach, Florida

What it benefits: Local and international projects and scholarships

Date: 7 June

The club has organized this athletic competition since the 1980s. Triathletes start with a swim in the Indian River Lagoon, bike along an oceanside highway, and finish with a run through residential neighborhoods. Others compete in duathlon (run and bike) and “aquabike” (swim and bike) races. Afterward, participants sit down to a breakfast prepared and served by Rotarians. Top finishers in various categories win fresh pineapples.

ALL THAT JAZZ

Event: High Country Jazz Festival

Host: Rotary Club of Boone Sunrise, North Carolina

What it benefits: Local nonprofits, Appalachian State University’s jazz studies program, and the Appalachian Theatre of the High Country

Dates: 10-14 June

In the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, this festival celebrates jazz across a multitude of events, from headlining evening performances at the historic Appalachian Theatre to late-night jam sessions, a free outdoor concert, a jazz brunch, and an educational lecture. This year’s headliners include the Grammy-winning Latin jazz duo of saxophonist Miguel Zenón and pianist Luis Perdomo and longtime jazz fusion band Spyro Gyra.

PEDALS AND PINTS

Event: Viking Tour Bike Ride and Brew Fest



TOTALLY CLAWSOME

Event: Lobsterfest

Host: Rotary Club of Glastonbury, Connecticut

What it benefits: Local projects

Date: 6 June

Now in its 49th year, this seafood spectacular is expected to draw more than 2,000 people to the local Elks Lodge and raise up to \$100,000 for the club. The main course is a choice between lobster and steak; attendees can bring their own beverages and appetizers. The festive evening continues past dinner with live music and dancing.

Host: Rotary Club of Poulsbo-North Kitsap, Washington

What it benefits: Local and international nonprofits and scholarships

Date: 13 June

The name of this event reflects the heritage of Poulsbo, which was settled by Norwegian immigrants and remains known as Little Norway. Cyclists can choose among 17-, 29-, and 57-mile courses, all of which showcase the natural beauty of the Kitsap Peninsula. Finishing at a downtown park, competitors trade their bike helmets for horned Viking helmets and can enjoy locally produced beer, cider, and wine. The brew fest is also open to nonriders and includes food vendors.

DASH FOR DAD

Event: Father’s Day 5K and 1-Mile Fun Run

Host: Rotary Club of Point Pleasant Boro, New Jersey

What it benefits: Local nonprofits and projects

Date: 20 June

Since 2008, this race has been a Father’s Day weekend tradition on the northern Jersey Shore, offering a flat and fast course starting from Point Pleasant’s Community Park. Over the years, the club has generated tens of thousands of dollars through the event, donating much of the money to the Melanoma Research Foundation after a family member of two past club presidents died of the disease.

SIP ON THIS

Event: Wine and BrewFest

Host: Rotary Club of Dallas, Pennsylvania

What it benefits: Local projects, nonprofits, and scholarships

Date: 27 June

A variety of Pennsylvania wineries, breweries, and distilleries offer samples of their products at this annual festival held at the Luzerne County Fairgrounds. Attendees can also partake in food from local vendors and explore an arts and crafts market. Live music will be

performed throughout the day. Those who purchase VIP tickets can enter the fairgrounds an hour early and access a lounge with snacks and soft drinks.

STARS AND STRIPES SPRINT

Event: Firecracker Run

Host: Rotary Club of Santa Cruz Sunrise, California

What it benefits: Local nonprofits that support youth

Date: 4 July

Runners of all ages gather at Santa Cruz's Harvey West Park for this Fourth of July race. The 10K course, dubbed the Thrill of the Hill, follows trails in the scenic Pogonip nature preserve, winding through meadows and coastal redwood forest. There is also a less strenuous 5K option and a 1K fun run for kids. Breakfast burritos and Italian ice await participants at the finish line, along with medals for top finishers.

THE PURSUIT OF CLEANLINESS

Event: Fountain Park Cleanup

Host: Rotary Club of Four Peaks (Fountain Hills), Arizona

Date: 5 July

In honor of the 250th birthday of the United States, Arizona's District 5495 set a goal for its clubs to collectively complete 250 service projects in 2025-26. Last year, the Four Peaks club got an early start with a communitywide project to help clear debris left at the site of the Fountain Hills Fourth of July fireworks display. The club is repeating the activity this year.

ROOT FOR THE HOME TEAM

Event: Night at the Reading Phillies

Host: Rotary District 7450 (Pennsylvania)

What it benefits: End Polio Now

Date: 17 July

Officially known as the Fightin Phils, the Reading Phillies are a minor league affiliate of the MLB team in nearby Philadelphia. For a Friday night game against the Altoona Curve, District 7450 is organizing a group outing to the Reading ballpark. Tickets include a



TREASURE HUNT

Event: Auction & Rummage Sale

Host: Rotary Club of Bainbridge Island, Washington

What it benefits: Local and international projects, local nonprofits, and scholarships

Date: 11 July

With the help of more than 2,000 volunteers, the club transforms a middle school campus into a vast marketplace where donated items are sold in some 30 departments, from fine antiques and furniture to boats and jewelry. The popular fundraiser has been held annually since 1960 and grossed more than \$1 million last year alone. Unsold goods are distributed to dozens of local organizations to encourage their reuse and help divert them from landfills.

pregame walk on the field, photos with the team mascot, and an opportunity to unfold the American flag during the national anthem. For each \$27 ticket sold, the district will donate \$15 to End Polio Now.

FOR ART'S SAKE

Event: Art Festival

Host: Rotary Club of Westlake-Bay Village, Ohio

What it benefits: Local nonprofits and scholarships

Date: 25 July

More than 60 talented artists will display and sell their work at this annual festival, held on the grounds between Westlake Porter Public Library and Westlake Elementary School. In addition to the art, the festival includes live music

and food trucks. First organized in 2021, it is now the club's signature fundraiser.

DUCK HOLIDAY

Event: Ducky Derby

Host: Rotary Club of Camas-Washougal, Washington

What it benefits: Local and international projects

Date: 26 July

This summer tradition, part of the annual Camas Days weekend, sees 5,000 rubber ducks float down the Washougal River near its confluence with the Columbia. The club sells numbered tickets, each of which corresponds to a different duck, and the first three ducks that cross the finish line win prizes for their ticket holders. The grand prize is a cruise for two.

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.



TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

For the common good

Nearly a year ago, I wrote my first message to you as Rotary Foundation trustee chair, encouraging you and all our members to take a fresh look at the Foundation and its unique way of making the world better.

In the months that followed, I invited Rotary members from around the world to share their own stories about projects they have led with Foundation support. They described the impact they witnessed firsthand and how thousands of lives have been transformed.

Now that you have heard about so many successful projects and the wonderful members and dedicated staff who make them happen, I ask that you, too, become part of this success story.

Your donation to The Rotary Foundation already makes a difference. However, I would like to take it a step further and encourage you to think bigger: Consider making a targeted investment in the area most important to you.

Each of us has a particular passion. Yet we all share something in common: We want people around the world to be better off. In Rotary, your dreams of a better world can become reality with the help of The Rotary Foundation. Because Rotarians don't just dream — they put their dreams into action. And these actions make a real and lasting difference in so many lives.

With your investment in polio vaccinations, you work to ensure that no child will ever contract polio again. With your investment in Rotary Peace Centers, you contribute to world peace. By investing in our Annual Fund, you ensure that effective projects will continue to be sustainably funded.

Not every contribution to the Foundation needs to be large. Every gift helps us achieve the lasting impact you have read about this year. The world needs Rotary more than ever. It needs our courage, optimism, and commitment to the common good. This is why we need you.

We have a variety of areas of focus in Rotary. Whether you choose to support maternal health in Nigeria, literacy programs in Belize, economic empowerment in communities recovering from hardship, or freshwater protection projects, your investment will create a lasting, measurable impact. Giving to the Foundation is about so much more than funding projects. It's a way to show compassion and empathy for others. As I have said many times before — and believe more now than ever — everything we do opens an opportunity for someone, somewhere.

I am grateful for this opportunity to serve.

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.

Rotary Fellowships

Rotary Fellowships are international groups whose members share a common interest. Being part of a fellowship is a way to make friends around the world, explore a hobby or profession, and enhance your Rotary experience. Membership in a fellowship is open to any interested individual.

New fellowships are added frequently; for the most recent list, see rotary.org/fellowships. If your recreational or vocational interest isn't represented, contact rotaryfellowships@rotary.org to learn how to start a new group.

- 4x4 Vehicles
- Agriculture and Farming
- Antique Automobiles
- Argentine Culture
- Artificial Intelligence
- Astrology
- Authors
- Badminton
- Beard and Moustache
- Bee
- Beer
- Bird Watching
- Bowling
- Camping
- Caravanning
- Chess
- Coffee Lovers
- Composting
- Computer Users
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Cricket
- Cultural Heritage
- Curling
- Cybersecurity
- Cycling
- Doll Lovers
- Draughts (checkers)
- E-Clubs
- Editors and Publishers
- Educators
- Egyptology
- Empowering Women
- Entrepreneurs
- Esperanto

- Ethics
- Fashion
- Fine Arts
- Fishing
- Fitness and Wellness
- Flying
- Francophonie
- Gaming Globetrotters
- Genealogists
- German Culture
- Gift and Estate Planning
- Gin
- Global Development
- Go
- Golf
- Gourmet Cooking
- Graphic Designers
- Health Care Professionals
- Hiking
- Home Exchange
- Horseback Riding
- Horse Racing
- Hunting
- Hypnosis and Healing
- Internet
- Italian Culture
- IT Professionals
- Jazz
- Kites
- Latin Culture
- Lawyers
- Leadership
- LGBT+
- Magicians
- Magna Graecia



Gourmet Cooking members on a roll

- Mental Wellness Counselors
- Mentoring
- Metalhead
- Metaverse
- Military Veterans
- Motorcycling
- Mountains
- Music
- Old and Rare Books
- Padel
- Palmwine
- Past District Governors
- Peace Fellows
- Performing Arts
- Photographers
- Public Health
- Public Speakers
- Quilters and Fiber Artists
- Real Estate
- Recreational Vehicles
- Rotary Global History
- Rotary Means Business
- Rotary on Pins
- Rotary on Stamps
- Rowing
- Rugby Fans
- Rum
- Runners
- Scouting
- Scuba
- Sea Lovers
- Shooting Sport
- Skiing
- Startup Investors
- Strategic Planning
- Sub-Saharan Culture
- Surfing
- Table Tennis
- Tea Lovers
- Tennis
- Total Quality Management
- Travel and Hosting
- Triathlon
- Urban Gardening
- Vegans
- Vintage Collectibles
- Weather Enthusiasts
- Whisk(e)y
- Wildlife Conservation
- Wine
- Yachting
- Yoga
- Young Rotarians

2026 CONVENTION

Take me to Taipei



It's time! Get ready to be wowed by the Rotary International Convention in Taipei.

You'll get updates straight from top Rotary leaders, enjoy performances that awe, and feel inspired by world-class speakers. You don't want to miss the keynote talk by Malala Yousafzai, the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate and an advocate for girls' education. (And remember, registration stays open online for last-minute bookings to Taiwan for the convention 13-17 June, and some members register on-site.)

So what's your advice for first-time attendees when they arrive? Are you one of the many members who make a beeline to the House of Friendship, the town square of the Rotary community? Or maybe you like to make an entrance with your pals from home, ready to cheer and dressed to show your national pride at the opening flag ceremony.

However you approach the convention, spend a little time reviewing the breakout sessions to personalize your learning schedule to grow your passions and help your club thrive. And relish the time you'll spend bumping into old friends and meeting new ones while exploring the exhibits.

Outside of the convention, you'll have easy access to top attractions: skyscraper icon Taipei 101, dumpling houses and outdoor food markets, and the National Palace Museum with hundreds of thousands of imperial artworks and artifacts.

"If you're somebody who likes to travel and meet new people, who wants to connect with leaders from other countries to gather more ideas, more solutions, more resources," says Joshua Arias, of the Rotaract Club of Santo Domingo Bella Vista, Dominican Republic, "this is a perfect convention." ■

CROSSWORD

Get the picture?

By Victor Fleming
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas

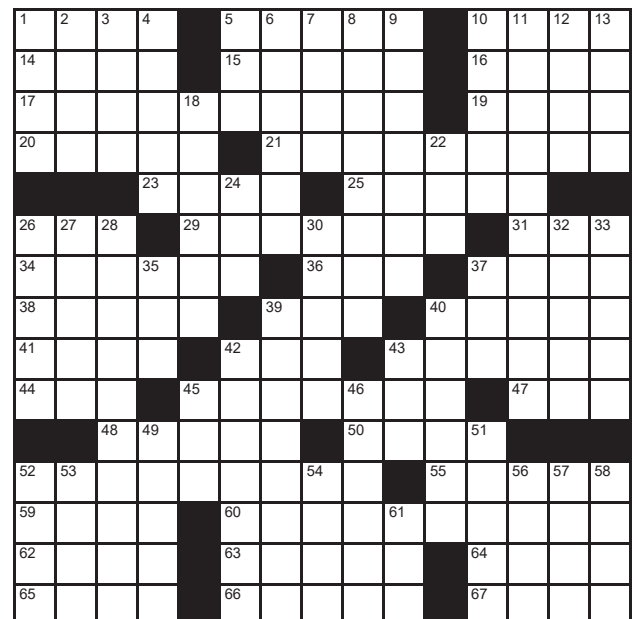
ACROSS

- 1 Grp. for volleyers
- 5 ____ nova
- 10 Carry Nation's org.
- 14 Iridescent gem
- 15 Tie ____
- 16 Bar beverages
- 17 TV game show that's had six hosts
- 19 Area to be mowed
- 20 "Am not" retort
- 21 On the way
- 23 "Guided" vacation
- 25 Great expectations
- 26 Corp. alias
- 29 High schooler at an academy, maybe
- 31 Old stack for a DJ
- 34 Hour before midnight
- 36 "I've been ____!"
- 37 ____ shot
- 38 Glaringly sensational
- 39 "Wham!" relative
- 40 Garlic mayonnaise
- 41 Word with ego or field
- 42 "Welcome" rug
- 43 Nowhere near correct
- 44 ____ Journal (attys' mag.)
- 45 Deteriorate
- 47 Bill ____ the Science Guy
- 48 "Rawhide" singer Frankie
- 50 Triple Crown champ Seattle ____

- 52 No men allowed
- 55 "Yes indeed!"
- 59 Dance ____ (celebrate Irish-style)
- 60 It results in new shares being issued to shareholders
- 62 Law scholar Guinier
- 63 One-named singer
- 64 21st-century currency
- 65 True ____ (1994 film)
- 66 Clarifying Latin phrase
- 67 Flow gradually

DOWN

- 1 State sch. in Fayetteville
- 2 Box a bit
- 3 Hardly wild
- 4 Best guests' roster
- 5 Blue blanket baby
- 6 Burning
- 7 "You ain't ____ nothin' yet!"
- 8 Left-hander
- 9 Smartphone operating system
- 10 Fort ____ (Indiana city)
- 11 Student who gets laughs
- 12 Garr or Hatcher
- 13 Federal govt. finance division
- 18 Moved in an arc
- 22 Chest-beating mammal
- 24 Banquet dispenser
- 26 Burke of 1980s TV
- 27 Short publicity notice
- 28 Explosive dropped from above into water
- 30 It may follow the first word of each of this puzzle's 10-letter answers
- 32 Name in Chicago politics
- 33 Ill will
- 35 Big shot, briefly
- 37 ____ vous plaît
- 39 Registered, as an invention
- 40 Changes
- 42 Snowboard kin
- 43 Co. featured in *You've Got Mail*
- 45 Card game
- 46 ____ out (intimidates)
- 49 Under the ____ of (sponsored by)
- 51 Uses a towel
- 52 Off the ____ (bizarre)
- 53 California town with an Indigenous name
- 54 Not win
- 56 Art class aid
- 57 Add to the staff
- 58 'Vette roof option
- 61 Cartoonist's Krazy ____



Solution on opposite page

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P	E	S	T	S	E	D	I	S	E	I	L	E
O	R	E	A	H	S	K	E	I	N	I	L	A
T	I	L	S	K	C	O	T	S	G	I	J	A
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E	S	C	E	O	H	O	T	O	R	T	O	R
T	I	S	N	A	R	N	I	O	S	R	E	S
R	A	D	Y	A	D	I	F	E	L	I	T	A
E	S	A	L	V	E	N	O	E	N	O	P	A
U	C	M	W	C	A	B	O	B	A	T	U	S



So savory, so bacon-y

Kugelis is the breakfast (and lunch and dinner) of champions

When Patricia Roach Smith's great-grandparents, John and Ursula Mikolaitis, immigrated to the United States in 1907, they brought with them a taste of home: the recipe for kugelis, a traditional Lithuanian potato casserole. That recipe has been passed down through generations of the family and is cooked to this day. "I have my original recipe from my mother, which came from her grandmother," Smith says.

Known in Lithuanian as bulvių plokštainis, the dish is the "ultimate comfort food," Smith says. Her family's recipe includes grated potatoes, bacon, onion, fat, eggs, farina, and evaporated milk. Though it's often referred to as a potato pudding, "it's more solid than that," she says. "The flavor is like a very savory, bacon-y potato pancake. It's got that crispy texture."

CULINARY KIN: With potatoes a staple food across Eastern Europe, kugelis has cousins throughout the region, including the Belarusian and Polish potato babkas and the Ashkenazi Jewish dish kugel, a baked casserole that can be sweet or savory and made with potatoes or egg noodles (the dish gets its name from the German word kugel, meaning ball, the shape of early variations).

EAT IT WITH: Applesauce, ideally homemade, or sour cream, Smith says. In her family, kugelis is always served alongside the main meal. "Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, maybe graduation — any time our whole family would get together, somebody would bring kugelis," she says. "My mother called it the breakfast (and lunch and dinner) of champions" — and Smith's daughter even has a sweatshirt saying as much. ■

Patricia Roach Smith
Rotary Club
of Jayhawk
Breakfast
Lawrence,
Kansas

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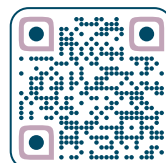


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