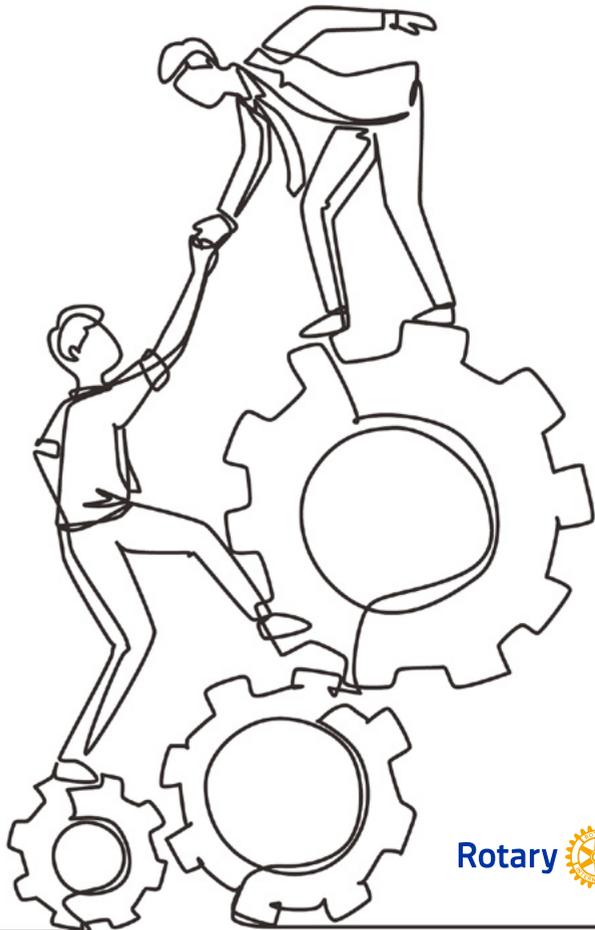


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WELCOME

Sarah van Heerden - Editor in Chief

As we step into the vibrant embrace of February 2024, I am filled with a profound sense of optimism and enthusiasm. This year, for our Rotary community, is not merely a passage of time; it's a canvas waiting for us to add the brushstrokes of growth and the vibrant shades of solutions.

Reflecting on our journey over the past four years, we've encountered challenges that, at times, may have seemed insurmountable. However, as we stand on the threshold of this new year, I see those challenges not as roadblocks but as stepping stones towards innovation and progress.

In 2024, let us collectively shift our perspective. What were once hurdles are now opportunities waiting to be seized. The resilience displayed by our Rotary family in the face of adversity has been nothing short of remarkable. For us, each challenge is nothing more than a catalyst for creativity, a spark that ignites the flame of solutions.

We have faced unprecedented circumstances that tested our resolve, yet here we stand -

stronger, wiser and more united than ever. The challenges of the past are now the foundations upon which we build a future of enduring impact. It's a testament to the unwavering spirit of Rotary.

This year, let us make a collective commitment to turn obstacles into opportunities, to find solutions where others see difficulties. Our ability to innovate and adapt is what defines us as Rotarians. The spirit of service and the pursuit of positive change are the driving forces propelling us forward.

As we embark on this transformative journey, let's channel our energy into projects that uplift communities and empower individuals - projects that make a lasting difference.

Remember, the challenges of yesterday are the stepping stones of today, leading us towards a brighter tomorrow. Together, we can make 2024 a year of unprecedented growth and solutions.

Here's to a year filled with impactful projects, transformative initiatives and the collective spirit that defines Rotary.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A VIRTUOUS CYCLE

I am enthused and encouraged by your embrace of mental health initiatives throughout the Rotary world. More than 1,000 of you have responded so far to an ongoing survey by the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives, offering your feedback on what Rotary can do to improve the personal well-being of members.

The top suggestions are illuminating. Rotary members are asking for more fellowship, camaraderie, conversation, cohesiveness and connection. They also want more recognition, validation and integration. They are seeking more service opportunities and they want more wellness activities, including mental health speakers, awareness efforts and education.

Our members not only appreciate the greater focus on mental health, but they also believe that making more of the Rotary experience will materially improve their lives. I find it interesting that members are not asking anything dramatically new of their club - rather they want more of what we do best. For example, connection can be improved during meetings simply by assigning seating once each meeting to encourage people to speak with someone new.

Here are some great ways that we can help achieve these results and make Rotary more appealing to those considering membership. First, we need to acknowledge the importance of increasing belonging in our clubs and to encourage Rotary members to make the most of every opportunity for new and stronger connections.

Public health experts worldwide are concerned about increasing levels of loneliness - the US surgeon general has even declared it an epidemic. Mental health experts agree that finding groups and clubs around common hobbies and interests is a strong way to create greater connectedness. This is what Rotary is all about. We need to make sure all of our members are fully engaged and that our communities are better aware of this inherent strength.

Second, if your club has found new ways to build connection, please share your stories with us at mindhealth@rotary.org so we can make them more broadly known within the Rotary world. Your good ideas might inspire others. Post your service project stories on Rotary Showcase.

And finally, I encourage you to share feedback from surveys like this with your club and bring forward your own ideas to improve your club experience and meet your peers' expectations. The journey we have begun is about more than mental health. It is about taking advantage of the full strength of our wonderful organisation and helping all members feel that they are part of a community that cares deeply about their personal well-being.

Everything you do to strengthen connections in Rotary, with each other and the people we serve, also helps improve mental health. And everything we do to improve mental health helps strengthen those connections. Let's continue this virtuous cycle.

GORDON MCINALLY
President, Rotary International



The groundwork for peace

Barry Rassin, Foundation Trustee Chair

Following the news is challenging these days. Stories of war and violence are deeply discouraging. It breaks my heart when I hear about innocent bystanders, particularly women and children, who are caught in the crossfire of conflict.

Is there anything we can do about it? We certainly can't turn away from the problem. I think in these times, we need to shift our focus from what we can't change to what we can do. We can also support what we know works.

February is Rotary's Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Month. It is one of our areas of focus because peace is central to everything we do in Rotary. Even though most of us aren't diplomats at the negotiating table or peacebuilders working on active conflicts, in Rotary's singular way, what we do works to promote peace and prevent conflict somewhere, every day.

Every Rotary member should remember this during the month of February: When you support any of the areas of focus of The Rotary Foundation, you are contributing to peace. Foundation grants that address fundamental issues - such as a global grant focused on enhancing basic literacy in a community - will cultivate a better understanding of the world and lead to greater economic stability, laying the

groundwork for peace.

You can say the same for all the areas of focus, from the environment to economic development. They help stabilise communities, lift families out of poverty and foster the pursuit of education.

Peace is and always has been interwoven into the fabric of Rotary beyond our projects, too. In 1999, when we established the Rotary Peace Centres through a visionary initiative of our Foundation, we reaffirmed this commitment. This month, we are once again renewing that vision, with Bahcesehir University in Istanbul, our host partner for the newest Rotary Peace Centre, as it takes its first steps to prepare for the initial cohort of students arriving in early 2025.

All along the way, as Rotary has evolved into a global force for good, it has championed peace and understanding in countless ways and our Foundation remains the great driving force behind that vision. It will be part of Rotary's eternal legacy.

And by supporting our work, you will be able to say that you are a part of that legacy. You can directly support it by visiting rotary.org/donate and selecting peacebuilding and conflict prevention as the area of focus.

So, yes, there is a lot you can do to support peace and prevent conflict. The next step is up to you.



Inspiration around every corner CORNER

It's a tale as old as the Rotary International Convention: Two members from different clubs bump into each other, start chatting and get the spark of an idea for a project.

So, don't be shy about starting a conversation with the stranger standing next to you or someone you meet over a meal at the convention 25-29 May in Singapore. After all, two people who talked at a bus stop at the 2016 convention in Seoul went on to plan a project fair in Africa.

Members regularly share stories about chance convention encounters that lead to meaningful projects - the kind that fulfil this year's convention theme: Sharing Hope With the World.

They have met while painting a playground during the 2012 convention in Bangkok, lingering after breakout sessions and, of course, visiting

House of Friendship booths. Members relish the chance to meet new friends from other countries to find global grant project ideas, but they also run into potential project partners from their own state, province or district.

After making a convention connection, Rotary members from countries across the world have worked with new partners on countless initiatives, including providing ShelterBoxes to refugees, launching a Rotaract multidistrict information organisation and recycling millions of plastic bottle caps to raise money to end polio.

A Georgia club's article about a global grant with a club in India to build toilet facilities captures the convention's influence: "This all began at the Atlanta RI Convention in 2017." What seed of an idea will you find in Singapore this spring?



The Garfield in Your Life – Got Lasagne?

Dr Patrick Coleman - Rotary Foundation Major Gifts Advisor

Cat lovers all over the world have stories – not one story, but several, bordering on dozens.

Eight years ago, Sherry brought an orange ball of fur home and placed it on my shoulder while I was working on my computer. I looked at ‘it’ and asked Sherry, “It isn’t going to wee on me, is it?” I had never owned a cat – I was (and still am) a dog person. I have owned dogs since my parents gave me a beagle for my birthday over 60 years ago. This was my first cat.

I soon discovered what all cat owners know – nobody owns a cat. Sherry called that little ball of fur Shorti because it was so small and cute. It began to grow into a cat! We soon discovered that it was a he and did the smart thing – made him an ‘it’ once again.

He was a hunter, capturing and killing all forms of reptiles in our house. I renamed him Killer. He also subdued the dog and any other creature in the area.

I have been told that cats were once worshipped in Egypt and they haven’t forgotten that. As Killer grew in stature, it began to walk through the house like a lion strolling through the savannah. I began referring to Shorti as The Golden Child because of the arrogant saunter.

Like the cartoon cat Garfield, The Golden Child (*yes, I capitalise all three words*) is prone to violent outbursts when he is disturbed from his naps (several a day). At any given moment, The Golden Child may become agitated and grab, bite, or scratch the very persons who feed



and provide any number of soft places to sleep – including the foot of our bed. Both of my hands and arms bear the scars of delaying dinnertime!

The cartoon cat Garfield has been a fixture of newspaper comic strips since 1978, so it's probably safe to say the lazy, lasagne-loving cat has lived many more than nine lives. The cartoon Garfield lives with his owner, Jon and Odie, a cheerful but dim-witted dog. Creator Jim Davis was inspired by his childhood cats - some 25 of them roamed his family's Indiana farm - and named the cartoon after his grandfather, whom Davis has described as a "large, cantankerous man." Yep! That describes The Golden Child!

Garfield was first published as Jon in a local newspaper in 1976; in 1978, it began its syndication in about 40 newspapers across the US. By the early 2000s, Garfield was read by an estimated 200 million people a day in 2,570 newspapers around the world.

Garfield's hilariously cynical personality is centred in most of the comic's funny, mischievous, or even mundane situations. He frequently pokes fun at Jon and/or Odie and devises elaborate plans to avoid making any effort whatsoever. Despite his laziness, Garfield cares for his friends and occasionally displays a softer side - especially when it comes to his food or his teddy bear, Pooky. He rationalises his laziness with this vindication: "Never confuse being lazy for being apathetic. We lazy people are not apathetic. Apathetic people don't care about anything. Lazy people care, we just don't do anything about it."

Is there a Garfield in your life? Do you recognise the Garfield-like character in someone content to nap through life, relying on someone else to do their part in society? Is there someone in your Rotary experience who, like the Garfield, only reacts when they don't get what they want? It is unfortunate, but such is life.

One key factor in making Garfield smile is to give a satisfactory club experience. Garfield needs lasagne to bring him joy! I am not sure

that having lasagne at every meeting would have the same effect, but our meetings need to be as inviting as Garfield considers his lasagne!

Some club events could include making banana split ice cream sundaes. My e-club played a few rounds of Family Feud online. We had lots of laughs over the answers given and actual responses from the game itself!

One of the primary reasons given for members resigning is that their club experience is not worth the time, effort or money investment of membership. That being the case, we need to ask ourselves what is the "lasagne" that we need to wake our "Garfields" from their nap times and enjoy Rotary again! We can't Create Hope in the World unless we create interest in our club meetings.



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CATALYSTS FOR PEACE



A Rotary Peace Centre intends to strengthen peacebuilding in the Middle East and North Africa. Words by Jason Keyser

When government officials in Saudi Arabia went looking several years ago for someone who could help establish mediation and conflict resolution as a pillar of the kingdom's judicial reforms, they ran into a problem. "This was a bit sad to hear, but they said they couldn't find an expert in the field who could speak Arabic," recalls Sherif Elnegahy. Fortunately, Elnegahy, a Rotary Peace Fellow from Egypt, had just co-authored a book on the topic - in Arabic - and it caught the eye of the justice minister himself. The Saudis had found their expert.

One of about 100 peace fellow alumni working in the Middle East or North Africa, Elnegahy has expertise that is in high demand in a region with a tremendous need for peacebuilders. Elnegahy, who completed his fellowship in 2016 at the former Rotary Peace Centre at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, remembers calling out the need for such a centre in the Middle East on his programme feedback form. Now, he has reason to celebrate. This month, after years of planning, Rotary is announcing its newest peace centre partnership, with Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul. "It's a dream coming true," he says.

The certificate programme will train peacebuilders who are from or have worked in the region or who do related work elsewhere in the world. "This new peace centre builds on Rotary's long history of working for peace," says 2006-07 Rotary President Bill Boyd, chair of the search committee for the site. "We will not solve every problem, but we will make a difference through the many peace fellows who will become catalysts for peace across the region."

The Istanbul centre is another step forward in Rotary's plan to establish a total of four certificate

programmes by 2030 in Africa, the Middle East or North Africa, Asia and Latin America. The programme at Bahçeşehir (pronounced BAH'-che-sheh-hir) is the second of those after the centre at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, which welcomed its first cohort in 2021. In addition, the two-decade-old peace centres programme has five master's degree offerings around the world.

Establishing a centre in the Middle East has long been a goal for Rotary. The need for trusted local leaders to become effective advocates for peace is greater than ever, as evidenced by the war between Israel and Hamas and other long-running conflicts in Yemen, Sudan, Syria and elsewhere. "This centre will provide a place for fellows to talk openly about long-standing conflicts and the future of the region and to explore new approaches and paths to building peaceful communities," says Laura Descher, director of the Rotary Peace Centres programme. "The programme presents an opportunity for them to examine issues of conflict, identity, poverty and displacement and discuss the complexities and possible solutions with each other."

Among the 1,700 peace fellow alumni working in about 140 countries today are leaders in governments, non-governmental agencies, education and research institutions, media and the arts, peacekeeping and law enforcement agencies and international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. Some have founded their own organisations. They are working with refugees and displaced persons, young people, women and children, those affected by conflict and poverty and others. While only a small



Peace fellow alum Mustafa Öztürk is an associate professor in the school of education at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. He trains teachers in inclusive practices to integrate immigrant and refugee children.

percentage of those peace fellows work in the Middle East, one of the goals for the new centre is to build on that network of professionals who can create the conditions needed for peace by addressing the underlying causes and drivers of conflict. That concept, known as Positive Peace, addresses issues like poverty, discrimination, ethnic tension, lack of access to education and unequal distribution of resources. To understand what that looks like, consider Elnegahy's work.

He is a former public prosecutor and a chief judge in his home country who now specialises in mediation and conflict resolution. Elnegahy criss-crosses the Middle East, advising UN agencies and programmes, the Saudi Justice Ministry, private companies and others. The work takes him from packed courthouses in the Persian Gulf region to village streets in Egypt's Nile Valley.

He has intervened in conflicts ranging from family revenge killings in Upper Egypt to disputes between major companies and communities, including one in which Egyptian farmers attacked workers and sabotaged the equipment of an oil and gas company. "The whole village went crazy over it," he recalls. The solution he worked out

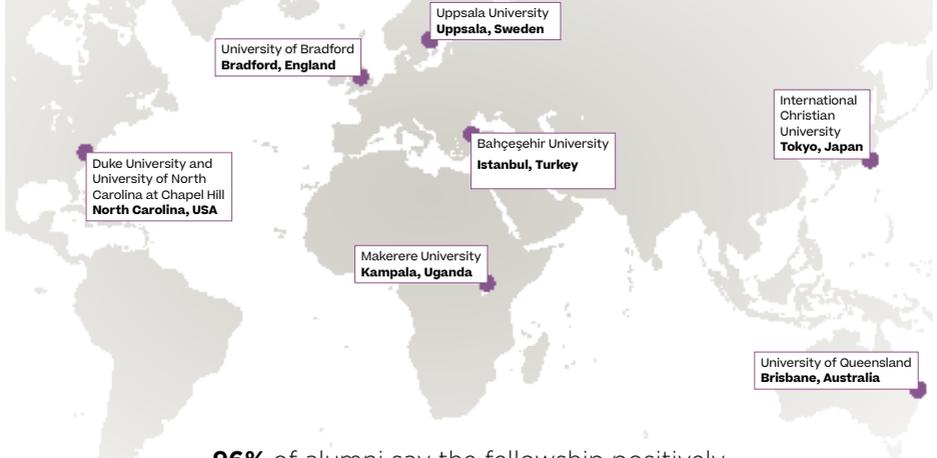
over three weeks of shuttle diplomacy led to the company offering to use its influence to get the farmers permits to build shops and small businesses to cater to the project's workers and bring the farmers income. "It was that simple," he says.

In a similar case, he is working to resolve a dispute over a project in southern Egypt that is crucial to the country's economy and to North Africa's drive to become a major renewable energy supplier. He has also trained court mediators to settle disputes in civil, family, commercial and criminal cases. While visiting some of his trainees in the Saudi city of Dammam, he was moved by the scene of three mediators dedicatedly working through a docket of cases involving hundreds of people standing shoulder to shoulder inside the courthouse. The vast majority were settling their cases before trial. "I felt that in a way I had touched their lives," Elnegahy says. "They were able to put their conflicts behind them."

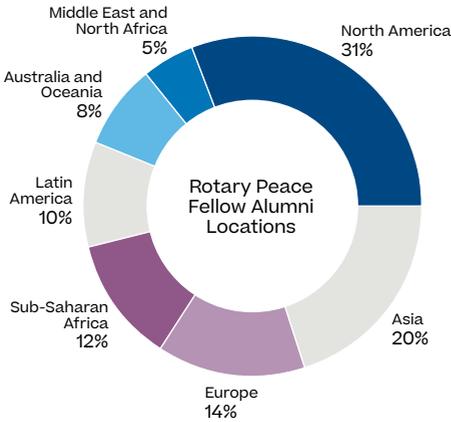
With his help, Saudi Arabia now has a robust mediation programme and has institutionalised the practice across the kingdom. The impact of such work goes beyond individual disputes.

A global network

The Rotary Peace Centres programme offers fully funded master's degrees or professional development certificates through fellowships based at seven premier universities around the world. The newest programme, at Istanbul's Bahçeşehir University, opens in 2025.



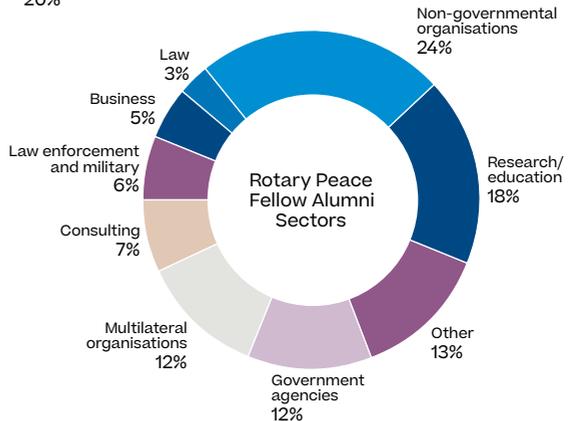
96% of alumni say the fellowship positively influenced their career paths



735 certificate programme alumni

1,023 master's programme alumni

88% of alumni say they have opportunities to connect and collaborate with Rotary networks and partners



“It establishes an atmosphere of conciliation; it becomes part of a community,” Elnegahy says. “It’s not just war or litigation; there are other methods. So I think it spreads a positive culture when it comes to how to deal with our differences.”

Now, he’s training the next generation, teaching mediation to law students in Egypt and facilitating a nationwide student mediation competition. He also worked with UN Women, a United Nations entity advancing gender equality, to design and present a training programme for young women peacebuilders from Arab nations. “The participants were amazing,” he says. “Any one of them is a future leader for sure.” The first cohort, in 2021, included women who went on to jobs with the UN agency that helps Palestinian refugees, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation and the African Development Bank.

While a peace centre in the region has been a dream for Elnegahy and Rotary for some time, the effort gained momentum with the single-largest gift to the peace centres programme, a pledge of \$15.5 million accepted by The Rotary Foundation from the Otto and Fran Walter Foundation in February 2021. The next challenge was selecting a university partner. Rotary has a smaller footprint of clubs in the Middle East and needed to be deliberate in choosing a host institution and it is convinced it found the right partner. “We’re bringing Rotary’s global network and our reach and they’re bringing their expertise about the region and about peace and development,” says Descher.

Among the criteria, it had to be in a country with a Rotary presence, it needed to be accessible to all international students and the university had to demonstrate a commitment to a true partnership with Rotary. More than 30 institutions in 11 countries were considered. Ultimately, three institutions were invited to submit full proposals. Besides Bahçeşehir, they were the American University in Cairo and Sabancı University, also in Istanbul.

Each had a particular strength in peace and development. At Bahçeşehir, for instance, peace fellows will benefit from a partnership the university maintains with the United Nations to advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which address challenges including poverty, inequality, climate change and peace and justice. “Rotary Peace Fellows will participate in high-level diplomatic trainings and connect with

United Nations experts working in sustainable peace governance,” explains Ebru Canan-Sokullu, dean of the university’s faculty of economic, administrative and social sciences and director of its United Nations training centre, called CIFAL Istanbul.

With campuses and offices in more than 10 countries and more than 7,000 international students in Istanbul alone, Bahçeşehir promotes a global focus. “The university also stands out as a microcosm of the Middle East and North Africa, hosting many students from this region,” says Esra Albayrakoğlu, the peace centre’s academic director.

When the Otto and Fran Walter Rotary Peace Centre at Bahçeşehir University welcomes its first students in 2025, its success will also hinge on the involvement of the region’s Rotary members, who will host and engage with the visiting peace fellows and connect them with peace fellow alumni in Turkey. The country’s three Rotary districts have a long history in peacebuilding, including facilitating a major peace conference for the Balkans in 2014. Suat Baysan, past governor of District 2420, chairs a committee that works with the new peace centre and Rotary International to engage local members with the programme. The job for Rotary members, including those in the fellows’ home countries, will be to support their work and offer guidance in the future, Baysan says. “That’s so critical,” he says. He knows it firsthand, having travelled the region for years as a telecommunications engineer. He compares the work of maintaining peace to the detailed care engineers take to keep Istanbul’s bridges safely suspended over the Bosphorus. “You have to take care of it all the time,” he says.

Sitting as a land bridge between Europe and Asia, the Anatolian Peninsula has been a crossroads of cultures and a centre of empires - Byzantine, Seljuq, Ottoman - since antiquity. Today, the modern Turkish republic, a NATO member country of about 85 million people, is a regional power with influence in both Europe and the Middle East.

Its position straddling continents also made it home to the largest population of refugees in the world in recent years. More than 3.7 million came from neighbouring Syria, where more than 12 years of war have wrought large-scale destruction and claimed at least half a million lives. Hundreds of thousands of additional refugees and migrants



The Otto and Fran Walter Rotary Peace Centre at Bahçeşehir University will welcome its first students in 2025. Applications for the one-year professional development certificate in peace and development studies close on 15 May. It will accept up to 40 students a year. The curriculum covers peacebuilding, sustainable development, conflict resolution, diplomacy, mediation and cooperation. During field studies, the fellows will examine refugee issues and land and religious conflicts and visit disaster sites and frozen conflict zones. Learn more about Rotary Peace Fellowships at rotary.org/peace-fellowships.

have come from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and other countries.

That rapid influx, along with inflation and other economic troubles, has strained resources and led to social tension. The catastrophic earthquake that struck Turkey and northern Syria a year ago magnified the trauma and pressures.

Peace fellow alum Mustafa Öztürk is an associate professor in the school of education at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. He designs and implements continuing education programmes for teachers, with a focus on training educators in inclusive practices to integrate refugee children and other disadvantaged students, many of whom have experienced serious trauma. Along the way, he's come to realise that teachers can be powerful agents of peace.

He saw it happen in 2021, when violence erupted in Ankara after the fatal stabbing of a Turkish teenager during a fight with a group of Syrians. Mobs responded by vandalising businesses, attacking houses and overturning cars in an area of the capital home to many Syrian migrants and refugees. Öztürk says it was the neighbourhood's teachers who helped calm tensions. "They were entering the streets and they were going to families' houses easily, without any risk to their safety because they were trusted by both sides and playing an effective role in negotiating," he says. "They have such a powerful role in bringing peace into schools and disseminating peace from schools to the wider society." Having a peace centre focused on the region, Öztürk believes, will open more such avenues for building peace throughout society.

Elif Avcı, another peace fellow from Istanbul, says the new peace centre can serve as a hub for research and advocacy. She began her career as a child and adolescent psychologist. Since completing her peace fellowship at the University of Bradford in England, she's been advocating for marginalised groups by helping them find a voice in local affairs and making sure those in power are listening. "The establishment of a peace centre in Istanbul has the potential to be a transformative force in our region and be a catalyst for sustainable peacebuilding," she says.

The opening of the new centre is cause for hope. The region's conflicts may seem intractable, but Elnegahy's view is that peace and justice are possible, even in the aftermath of humanity's worst atrocities. It's an outlook shaped by an experience during his own fellowship half a world away in Southeast Asia. During a site visit to Cambodia's Killing Fields, his faith was shaken seeing a woman crying in front of a tree where young children had been killed during the Cambodian genocide. That evening, he found himself at a circus, watching a performance that told the story of a child survivor of the Khmer Rouge who finds healing through art. The circus, he learned, was founded by survivors of that reign of terror who made it their mission to spread healing and joy. It was a stark demonstration, he realised, that we have the freedom, as individuals and as a community, to choose the path of peace. "It's up to us," he says, "to decide which mark we want to leave."

Additional reporting by Diana Schoberg.



Simply irresistible

President-elect Stephanie Urchick sees Rotary's Action Plan as key to a vibrant future

It's late October at One Rotary Centre, one of those autumn days that feels like summer, a last blast of warmth before the Chicago-area weather abruptly shifts. In less than a week, on Halloween, nearly an inch of snow will fall.

Luckily, Rotary President-elect Stephanie Urchick isn't one to wither in the face of change. Instead, she embraces it. On the bookshelf in her office at Rotary headquarters, among the club directories and banners, the commemorative plates and plaques and - surprise! - even some real books, there is a wooden sign adorned with multi-coloured leaves that reads, "Fall is proof that change is beautiful."

"It's the same reason I like butterflies," explains Urchick. "They start out in little cocoons and don't look like much, but then they burst out and become a beautiful creature."

Urchick, who wears an Action Plan pin this day on her black quilted jacket, champions the Rotary plan as a guide for Rotary clubs hoping to undergo a similar metamorphosis. "I'm all about helping clubs look for ways to change their culture so they become simply irresistible," she says. "If you look at our worldwide numbers, there's something like 150,000 people who come into Rotary every year, but there are 160,000 who leave. What that says to me is that some people are not finding value in their club experience. They're not really leaving Rotary; they're leaving a Rotary club. We need to get clubs to examine what's happening."

A member of the Rotary Club of McMurray, Pennsylvania, Urchick joined Rotary in 1991 and was quickly drawn to the work of The Rotary Foundation. As a new member, she heard about Rotary's work to eradicate polio and became intrigued. She became the Foundation chair for her club and then for her district. Later, at the zone level, she served as a regional Rotary Foundation coordinator, focusing on fund development and in 2012-14, she was a Rotary Foundation trustee at the international level. "There are so many great things that Rotary clubs do and much of it is because they have worked through the Foundation," she says.

As fall teetered between summer and winter, Urchick sat down with Rotary magazine senior staff writer Diana Schoberg to talk about her past and Rotary's future.

You'll be the second woman to serve as president of Rotary. Should we even be making that distinction anymore?

From my perspective, no. It's about being the best leader for the time. However, I also recognise that people, especially women, will look to the position of Rotary president and if they see a woman, they'll say, "Wow, if that's somebody who could do it, maybe I could do it too."

I'll also be one of only a few Rotary presidents who have been single while in office. Lots of people come up to me and say, "I'm single too and it's so great that you're in the position." To me, having a spouse does not determine whether you're qualified for this role. But again, it does mean a lot to people to see someone in this position who looks like them or who has the same life status as they do.

It's like another element of diversity. Do you think the view of diversity at Rotary has shifted over the past few years?

Diversity has always been one of our core values. But I think the way we've measured

diversity has definitely changed. Today it means so much more than it did 40 years ago when we were an all-male organisation. For instance, we now ask people to look at their community and see if their Rotary club mirrors that community. That could mean all kinds of things. It could be age; it could be gender; it could be religion or political affiliation. It could include things like a different perspective, the fact that people think differently. If your club mirrors the community, then you really have a handle on the future. And if it doesn't, you have an opportunity.

You became a Rotary member in 1991, shortly after women were allowed to join. Why did you join and why did you stay?

Well, I was recently divorced. And when you are married, you tend to do a lot of things together. You go out to dinner together, you go on vacation together and so on. I suddenly didn't have that. Much like Rotary founder Paul Harris, I was looking for ways to meet new people. A woman walked into my office and asked me about going to a Rotary club meeting with her. I didn't know anything about Rotary, but when she talked about the service and the internationality, I

got interested. So, I went and I ended up joining.

Originally for me, it was about the fellowship. I wanted to meet new people. And I did; I met all kinds of people. But I also immediately got involved in service activities. By the fourth meeting, I was doing the newsletter, so I was already doing club service. That club was active in Rotary Youth Exchange and Group Study Exchange and Rotary Foundation grants. It was all amazing to me. So, like most people, it was the service that kept me engaged in Rotary.

Why did you want to become Rotary president - and what makes you the right leader for the organisation right now?

Becoming Rotary's president was never really on my radar screen. I've served Rotary in so many different ways over the 30-plus years I've been a member. A special opportunity that really shaped my thinking was chairing the Strategic Planning Committee. We had the chance to look at the organisation's strengths and weaknesses and reach out to the Rotary and non-Rotary world to get information about what people thought would move us into a thriving future.

Rotary had had the same meeting model for decades. We met four times a month; we rang the bell; we took attendance, etc. Clearly the world had changed, but we hadn't. We really needed to catch up! Now we have e-clubs and passport clubs and satellite clubs and corporate clubs, all different opportunities for people to come into Rotary and to serve.

I started to look at all of that and I realised that we are positioned to move into a thriving future. That's what really propelled me to put my name forward. I truly believe that if Rotary districts and clubs use the Action Plan, we can thrive. It's a future where there are many more Rotary members involved in service and fellowship.

What skills from your past professional life will you lean on as president?

I have a background in three different fields. I sang with a band when I was in college and for a few years after that. I had the experience of getting on stage and inspiring people, getting them to dance and have fun. It may sound simple, but it really did develop a set of skills. My second career was in higher education. I worked in college and university settings. For much of

that time, I was helping students find careers and jobs. It was both fulfilling and eye-opening. My third career was as a self-employed person at my consulting and business development firm. I did a little bit of training and a whole lot of business development. I don't think there's any skill that we leave behind. They all become part of your package.

What was your band name?

The Harmonisers.

Will there be any Harmonisers music playing as you arrive onstage at any events?

No, I don't think so. I hope they'll be playing Robert Palmer's "Simply Irresistible."

You used that phrase earlier: "simply irresistible." Is there a significance to it?

That's what I want Rotary to be: simply irresistible. I'm hoping Rotary and Rotaract clubs will be simply irresistible to community members who have a heart for service and fellowship. They will use the Action Plan to assess where they are and figure out where they need to go. Hopefully the outcome is clubs that are more attractive and will retain more people.

Every club is different. There's not a cookbook that we can give to clubs and say, "Do this and you're going to be fine." Every club develops its own culture. Country to country, Rotary is done differently. You can have Rotary clubs in the same district that are very different. We need every club to take a moment, do an assessment and look at the four priorities of the Action Plan. Then they must ask themselves, is there something we can do a little differently or are we already doing the best we can in this or that category? If you're already irresistible, then stay that way. But we have to attract people to our existing clubs and we have to start new clubs. That's the way to grow Rotary and to have a future.

What's your theme and how did you come up with it?

It's simply The Magic of Rotary. People can put any verb they want in front of it. Believe in the magic of Rotary. Spread the magic of Rotary.

Build on the magic of Rotary. Celebrate the magic of Rotary. There are all kinds of words that we can use.

It came from a visit to the Dominican Republic. We were helping instal a water filter in a home where a grandmother, a mother and three little boys lived. We assembled the water filter and then put dirty water in it so that the family could see that it came out clean. The women learned how to use the filter and we were getting ready to leave when one of the children grabbed my sleeve and said, “Show me that magic again.” That caught me and I thought: It is magic. We’re helping create a change in their lives.

What will be your priorities as president and why did you choose them?

Advancing the Action Plan to grow membership is at the top of my list. I love this organisation, just like every member of Rotary whom I meet. I want Rotary to have a future.

My second priority is healing a divided world through Positive Peace. There are several ways to get involved. If everyone would live The Four-Way Test instead of just reciting it, we would have a more peaceful world. I hope clubs will rally around The Four-Way Test and use it in creative ways. And there is the peace pole project: Clubs can have peace poles erected in their local park, town square or college campus. The message of peace on the poles is a visible sign to the community that Rotary is a peace-

building organisation. Additionally, Rotary has a Positive Peace Academy, which is an online activity. Any Rotary member or non-Rotary member can take the time to go through that. And our Rotary Peace Centres are powerful activators in changing lives. We’re opening a new peace centre in the Middle East, in Istanbul. In February 2025, we will have a peace conference at that location.

My final priority will be continuity. That means two things: all of us in leadership positions working with our predecessors and those who follow us. It also means looking at the things that clubs have rallied around and things that have taken root. Just because a president leaves office doesn’t mean that you should drop a successful programme. What would have happened if Rotary had abandoned its efforts to eradicate polio after Clem Renouf or James Bomar were no longer president?

One of your favourite mantras is “life is more interesting on the other side of yes.” Can you talk about that?

Usually what I tell people is: “Say yes and then just figure it out.” “Hey, do you want to be newsletter editor?” “Yes.” “Hey, do you want to be president?” “Yes.” “Hey, do you want to do this?” “Yes.” The only time I say no is if I follow it up with the word “problem.” No problem. Life gives you so many opportunities. Say yes to them. You’ll have time to figure out what to do next.

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The **ROTARY ACTION PLAN**



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The leader his club needed

A fashion designer connects cultures in Rotary and beyond

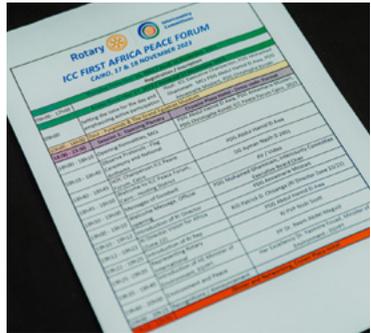
As a child in Nigeria, Ifechukwude Rex Oameh remembers slipping out of his back door to share food with a friend who didn't have enough. The experience drove him to give back and it's what ultimately led him to Rotary, where he's multiplied his impact. In July, he became the youngest and first black president of the Rotary Club of Blouberg (D9350). The 30-year-old is using the position to encourage young South Africans from diverse backgrounds to get involved in Rotary. "Being president will inspire our young Rotaractors to step forward and give Rotary more of their time," says Oameh, a dual member of Rotary and Rotaract.

Oameh first encountered Rotary through Interact in Nigeria, volunteering at orphanages and with food programmes. Since moving to South Africa to further his education, he has hosted his district's annual polio fundraiser and focused on addressing hunger, including bringing together Interactors, Rotaractors and Rotarians to make tens of thousands of sandwiches for distribution. "The power of those small projects is that they reach very close to the heart on a personal level," he says.

After joining the Rotary Club of Blouberg in 2020, he encountered some resistance to the idea of a young leader but also encouragement. "Our past president said he'd seen my kind of leadership and thought it was what the club needed," he says.

In his work as a fashion designer, Oameh seeks to broaden views and understanding. "When you make a unique design, it gives a view of your culture," he says. "I'm trying to share with the world what our culture looks like." - Arnold R. Grah





A UNITED AFRICA

The first Inter-Country Committee Africa Peace Forum, held in Cairo, Egypt, from November 17-19, 2023, marked a crucial milestone in fostering African partnerships for peace and prosperity. Organised by the ICC Africa Task Force, chaired by PDG Abdul Hamid El Awa of Egypt, the event brought together over 150 distinguished humanitarians and industry leaders from Africa and around the globe, under the patronage of RI Director Patrick Chisanga and RI Representative Nicki Scott.

The forum's focus on promoting peace, cultural exchange and mutual understanding resonated with Rotary International's service mission. Goals included promoting Positive Peace, enhancing cultural exchange, fostering mutual understanding, ICC mapping for long-term prosperity and forging a unified vision for sustainable peace in Africa.

Key activities included an opening ceremony hosted by senior Rotary leaders and guest

speakers, breakout sessions as well as panel discussions and workshops on community-based peacebuilding and the role of technology in peacekeeping.

An outcome of the forum was the establishment of a Special Humanitarian Aid Fund for Gaza to provide immediate relief and long-term support.

The forum also emphasised the importance of ICCs and proposed awareness campaigns, media outreach and quarterly progress reports to garner global support. Recommendations included hosting an annual Peace Forum in Africa, focusing on capacity building through training and seminars. The actionable plans set forth during the 1st ICC Peace Forum in Cairo marks a significant step forward in fostering a culture of peace and mutual understanding as the participants unite to move towards the vision of Africa united for peace and prosperity across the continent.



Rotarian and optometrist Thumi Mashiane with one of the many happy customers.

I CAN SEE!

The impact of free vision screening and eyeglasses distribution in rural Limpopo communities became evident during the Rotary E-Club of Baobab (D9400) Rotary Health Days. Responding to an invitation from the Rotary Club of Ignacio D5150 in California, USA, the Baobab e-club received a donation of 820 free eyeglasses for distribution to needy communities.

The club, with a recently established Rotary Community Corps (RCC) in Sekuruwe and ongoing efforts in Ga-Mashishi, identified these communities for the distribution. Baobab e-club, led by professional optometrist Rotarian Thumi Mashiane, enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to serve communities through her expertise.

At Sekuruwe Combined School, 250 learners were seen and approximately 20% of them were referred for further testing. With overwhelming attendance from elderly individuals, 21 pairs of glasses were dispensed, along with the promise of a return visit in January to complete the task.

Despite numerous papers highlighting the high incidence of impaired vision in the area, the

demand in Ga-Mashishi exceeded expectations. Rotarian Thumi closed her practice every Friday until December 1st, 2023 to address the community's eyeglass needs. During this time, she dispensed 268 eyeglasses, referred patients for special intervention and acknowledged the ongoing challenges.

Poor vision serves as a barrier to various aspects of life, including academic achievement, employment opportunities and overall well-being. The intervention provided by the e-club empowers community members to overcome these challenges.

There were many special moments during this project, but one that stood out was when a young learner exclaimed, "It is a miracle. I can see!" The project was an eye-opener for all involved, revealing both heart-breaking and heart-warming stories.

The Rotary E-Club of Baobab is considering extending this service in 2024. Plans include more frequent visits to communities, involving additional health care practitioners to address holistic health needs comprehensively.



Interact President Sean Waites receiving girls dignity packs.

61 YEARS OF INTERACT

In a global movement that began over six decades ago, Interact clubs, a youth-centric initiative of Rotary International, continue to make waves in communities worldwide. Originating on 5 November 1962 at Melbourne High School in Florida, USA, Interact clubs empower young people of high school age to serve their local communities while developing crucial leadership skills.

World Interact Week, an annual celebration during the week of 5 November, marks the founding of this impactful movement. The aim is clear: to instil a sense of service and teamwork in the youth. Currently, there are an impressive 15,000 Interact clubs globally, boasting 343,000 members across 145 countries.

The Rotary Club of Knysna (D9350) has chartered an impressive seven Interact clubs - one for each high school in the town. The clubs, established with the support of dedicated Interact teachers and Knysna Rotarians, operate independently. Members actively choose and execute their own service projects, aligning with the overarching goal of promoting goodwill and

international understanding.

Since the establishment of the first Interact club in Knysna at Oakhill School in 1994, the movement has grown. Concordia High School proudly hosts the newest club, initiated in 2013. Together, the seven clubs have been at the forefront of numerous community projects throughout 2023.

Their diverse projects include visits and donations to children's and retirement homes, participation in the Epilepsy SA residency, contributions to Animal Welfare, estuary clean-ups, polio and anti-bullying awareness campaigns and active involvement as chairside dental assistants during RotaryDent week.

To commemorate World Interact Week, local Interact club presidents and their teachers were honoured guests at a Rotary lunch meeting held on 7 November. Rotary Club of Knysna President Herb Hunter expressed admiration for the 229 Interact members in Knysna, acknowledging their energy and innovation in embodying Service Above Self to enhance the town for others.



Rotary Club of Blouberg (D9350) has become know for making burgers and hot chips that are quite simply the...

Best in the West

In the vibrant spirit of community service, the Rotary Club of Blouberg (D9350) has once again proved that their burgers and chips are deemed the ‘Best in the West.’ This annual culinary success story unfolds at the Eric Miles Cheshire Homes’ fete, where Rotarians showcase their gastronomic prowess to the delight of attendees.

The event, a pivotal fundraiser for Eric Miles Cheshire Homes, sees the Rotary Club of Blouberg members manning the popular ‘Chips ‘n Burgers’ stall. The proceeds generated from this culinary extravaganza are generously donated to support the Cheshire Home’s commendable initiatives.

Origins of this impactful collaboration trace back to the late 1970s when the Rotary Club of Milnerton initiated its involvement with Cheshire Home in Milnerton. Over the years, the Milnerton club undertook diverse projects, including transforming unused spaces into wheelchair-accessible accommodation, organising social functions for residents and facilitating the cultivation of resident-grown vegetables through

the provision of food tunnels.

Milnerton’s commitment to community service extended to the acquisition of a chip fryer, a crucial asset for running their inaugural Chips ‘n Burgers stall. The Rotary Club of Blouberg entered the scene in 1986, sponsored by the Milnerton club. In 2009, a significant milestone occurred when Milnerton and Blouberg decided to merge, combining their efforts to sustain thriving community projects.

Since the merger, the Rotary Club of Blouberg has enthusiastically continued the tradition of the Chips ‘n Burgers stall, thanks to the unwavering support of generous donors. The collaborative effort not only contributes substantially to Cheshire Homes but also serves as a ‘fun’ project, fostering camaraderie among club members and transforming the project into a social event.

The Rotary Club of Blouberg’s ‘Best in the West’ legacy not only satisfies taste buds but also exemplifies the power of community-driven initiatives that make a lasting difference in the lives of those they touch.



Empty Toy Box, a volunteer team, shares ECD knowledge and creates education toys using recycled materials.

Filling toy boxes

In 2017, Chymie Naidoo, then President of the Rotary Club of Polokwane (D9400), identified a pre-school in Magofe in need of assistance. Past President Susan van der Merwe recognised the need for training at the pre-school and approached Shayne Moodie, director of Empty Toy Box Education, a highly qualified Early Childhood Development (ECD) practitioner.

Established in 2018 at Golden Futures Crèche and Pre-School, the project, supported by Elvy Nkhawana and the Polokwane club, conducts eight free training sessions annually. Registers track attendance, leading to a certificate handover event for those with 75% and above attendance.

In 2018, 89 participants were trained. In 2019, the project served Raphho Primary School and Creative Kids Pre-School, engaging 106 participants. Little Scholars Day Care Centre hosted the project in 2020, with 165 participants benefiting over two years.

Kabosadi Disability Centre hosted in 2022,

involving 120 participants. In 2023, Hope Christian Crèche and Pre-School hosted, engaging 135 participants. The upcoming project in 2024 will be hosted by The Showers Christian and English Medium Learning Centre, Leokama Village (Moletji), starting in February.

Empty Toy Box, a volunteer team, shares ECD knowledge using recycled materials. The programme aims to create educational toys and empower practitioners for active learning experiences. Using recycled materials promotes community involvement, positive environmental impact and holistic child development.

The club supports with admin tasks, registers, databases and basic stationery. The spin-offs include projects benefiting ECD centres, such as shade nets, playground equipment, books, rainwater harvesting tanks and global grants for Enviroloo toilets. The dedicated team plans and delivers training, showcasing Rotary's impactful contributions to community development through the years.



Rotarians in Reservoir Hills joined forces with other community stakeholders to create a formidable platform that demonstrates their unwavering commitment to combating gender-based violence.

Safe and equal

In a significant milestone, South Africa celebrated the 25th anniversary of the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children campaign, an initiative of the United Nations.

Running from 25 November to 10 December annually, this campaign sheds light on the profound impact of gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) on society. Under the theme “SAFE and EQUAL” and the colour orange for 2023, Rotarians Norman Singh and Manser Akoo orchestrated a powerful awareness campaign in collaboration with key community entities in Reservoir Hills.

The Rotary Club of Reservoir Hills (D9370), Rotary Anns, South African Police Services, Metro Police and the Local Community Policing Sector joined forces to convey a resounding message against GBVF. On 2 December 2023, a collaborative effort unfolded outside a busy intersection, where pamphlets were distributed and the campaign’s significance was underscored. Subsequently, a motorcade traversed the community streets, adorned with banners and



information, attracting attention and amplifying the campaign’s core messages.

This united front of critical stakeholders in Reservoir Hills created a formidable platform to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to combating gender-based violence. The resounding message emanating from the collaborative effort was unequivocal – the abuse of women and children should not and must not be tolerated. The event served as a poignant reminder of collective responsibility in addressing and eradicating gender-based violence from our communities.

Pioneering paediatric dental unit



In a ground breaking move, South Africa is poised to witness a significant transformation in paediatric dental care with the launch of the nation's first specialised Paediatric and Special Needs Dental Care Unit. This initiative, a result of collaborative efforts between the Department of paediatric dentistry at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the Provincial Government of the Western Cape (PGWC) and the Rotary Club of Bellville (D9350), promises to revolutionise the landscape of paediatric dentistry in the country.

The project addresses the need for a dedicated, child-friendly facility, particularly in the Western Cape, aiming to positively impact service delivery to the children of the region. President Dalene Swart explained the importance of establishing a dedicated paediatric dentistry surgery unit equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. According to her, this not only enhances service quality but also serves as an invaluable training ground for postgraduate students.

The impact of the project extends beyond improving smiles; it represents a pivotal advancement in South African healthcare, specifically focusing on the oral health of children. Dr Nicoline Potgieter, president of the South African Association of Paediatric Dentistry, stressed the enduring plight of children

in South Africa who require expert oral health care. She noted that oral health directly impacts general health and the project aims to provide basic healthcare needs for children.

The project is a collaboration between Rotary club partners and the Tygerberg Oral Health Centre, a joint platform between UWC and PGWC. It aligns with UWC's mission to train paediatric dentists as specialists and PGWC's commitment to high-quality service rendering. The project aims to provide specialised training for paediatric dentists annually and benefit hundreds of children through disease prevention and interventions.

Funded with a capital expenditure of R1.2 million, the project draws support from various sources, including cash contributions from the Rotary Club of Bellville, Rotary Foundation and six other Rotary clubs from the UK, USA and Canada. A significant portion of the funds is allocated to state-of-the-art dental equipment, consumables and building materials.

Dalene Swart concluded by highlighting that the project goes beyond immediate community needs, emphasising its role in advancing medical care in South Africa and laying the groundwork for the long-term sustainability and transformation of dental care.



Eager children waiting for the Christmas party fun to get started!

Party time at Flamboyant

In 2023, the Rotary Club of White River (D9400) undertook several impactful projects, showcasing their commitment to community service.

Flamboyant School, a local institution aiding children facing learning barriers, received consistent support from the club. The club's substantial bursary fund annually contributed to Flamboyant School, facilitating numerous students' attendance and ensuring they received essential support for academic success.

Addressing the immediate needs of underprivileged children, the Rotary Anns in White River initiated a commendable effort. On a termly basis, sandwiches were prepared for an entire week, benefiting school-goers who arrived without breakfast. The primary school in White River identified the needy children, determining the quantity of sandwiches required. Each child received a sweet and a savoury

sandwich, sustaining them throughout the school day. Various service organisations rotated responsibilities weekly to ensure continuous support.

Christmas festivities took a philanthropic turn as the Rotary Club of White River collaborated with local private schools. Seven Christmas parties were hosted, featuring gift collections from Summerhill School in Hazyview and Uplands Preparatory School in White River. The club, with assistance from the community service club at Uplands College, arranged the distribution of gifts to diverse groups in need. The recipients included children awaiting foster care, a day care centre for children with disabilities, orphanages and families living in poverty near White River.

The meticulous organisation of gifts, categorised by age and gender, by a team of dedicated Rotarians and Anns.



Making waves with selfless service

The Rotary Anns of the Rotary Club of Reservoir Hills (D9370) have been buzzing with activity since their charter in July 2023, exemplifying the Rotary spirit of service above self. In their short existence, they have spearheaded a range of initiatives, leaving a positive mark on the community.

One of their noteworthy projects was the Pet Food Fundraiser, held during the Ladies Day event on August 12, 2023. Guests voluntarily contributed pet-related items, benefiting Paw Prints and Stray Paws Animal Rescue and Welfare. Simultaneously, posters were strategically placed at pet shops and veterinary clinics in Westville, amplifying the outreach of their efforts. The Anns' commitment extended to providing Paw Prints with quality second-hand items for their shop and supporting the shelter's upkeep. This demonstrated their dedication to holistic assistance for animals in need.

Another ongoing initiative is the distribution of snacks and knitted beanies and socks to the Phoenix Child Welfare Society and St Martins Home for Children. This act of kindness ensures warmth and comfort for those in need, aligning with the Anns' ethos of continuous support.

In the spirit of Christmas, the Anns initiated the "Santa in a Box" project, bringing joy to 73 children at St Martins Children's home. The Christmas gift boxes were filled with age-appropriate goodies and essentials for the children aged three to 17.

The Christmas Toy Drive, a community-wide effort, invites residents of Reservoir Hills to contribute preloved and new toys. Posters strategically placed in the community serve as a catalyst in promoting collection, with the toys destined for distribution at selected institutions catering to children in need.

The Anns also demonstrated a commitment to sustainability with their clothing collections project. Instead of discarding pre-loved clothing, the Anns arranged for donations, presenting neatly packaged and labelled items at a recent Diwali hamper drive. Recipients of the hampers were pleasantly surprised to find quality clothing alongside their annual supplies.

A heart warming afternoon was spent with senior citizens at Clare Estate Senior Citizens Association (CESCA). The Anns provided pre-loved eastern wear, fostering a sense of companionship and care for the elderly members of the community.

In a show of community solidarity, the Rotary Anns of Reservoir Hills launched the "Cupcakes for Cancer" initiative. An appeal for support, distributed via social media, garnered swift and generous responses from family, friends and community members. The funds raised will contribute towards assisting a young primary school child diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma, emphasising the Anns' commitment to making a difference in individual lives.



Health awareness day

In a commendable effort, the Rotary Club of Atlantis (D9350) hosted its second annual health awareness day for sixth and seventh-grade students at Avondale Elementary School on 9 November, 2023. The event aimed to educate students about potential health risks they may encounter during their teenage years.

Various health groups delivered insightful sessions, creating an eye-opening learning experience for the students. Shurita Hayes and Opho Maphela Mbongani, Avondale students, expressed gratitude for the valuable information received. They not only gained knowledge about health but also received safety and career advice relevant to their teenage years.

Listening to facilitators, the students found

inspiration for their future paths. Shurita Hayes shared her aspiration to pursue a professional career in law and environment, emphasising the desire to contribute to both communities and the country. Mbongani echoed the sentiment, highlighting the importance of health as a key goal for adolescents.

The event featured support from many organisations. Karin Smith, the coordinator of the Rotary Club of Atlantis and her dedicated team not only organised a fantastic event but also demonstrated a genuine commitment to making a positive impact in their community as Rotarians. The collective effort of the club and its partners showcased the importance of community engagement and health awareness for the youth.



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From great oaks little acorns grow

Travellers to Kruger National Park have likely passed by Mashadza Special Care Centre, a beacon of hope for children with disabilities. Initiated by a local health worker, the centre emerged from a dire situation where children faced neglect due to the challenges of caring for disabled children while earning a living.

The vision was simple: a centre providing day care for these children while their parents worked. Seeking support, she approached the Rotary Club of White River (D9400) for a Christmas party, igniting a chain of positive events. The club, known for fostering community spirit, readily agreed and donations poured in.

“Great oaks from little acorns grow,” and from this modest beginning, the centre flourished. Land and permission to build were secured, while local Nomads golfers rallied funds for construction. Collaboration with Rotary clubs in the UK and the USA, along with a matching grant, facilitated

equipping the centre and enhancing its facilities.

Over time, Swiss visitors partnered with the club, addressing various community needs. Financial assistance supported caregivers, a vegetable garden was established and essential infrastructure like security fencing and a borehole were installed.

While a chicken project faced challenges and folded, the club persisted. Recent efforts focussed on revamping the playground, ensuring a safe and stimulating space for the children’s physical development. The local airport company has generously offered financial support for this project.

A partnership with a seedling company resulted in a thriving vegetable garden, not only meeting the children’s nutritional needs but also contributing to the local community through vegetable sales.



This initiative not only contributes to environmental conservation but also empowers the younger generation to embrace sustainable practices for a greener future.

Trees for Durban

The Rotary Club of Durban-Morningside (D9370) recently undertook a commendable environmental project in collaboration with Sappi SA. Sappi generously donated 60 Warburia Salutaris (Pepperbark) indigenous trees to the club's Ash Maharaj. The initiative, conducted from October to December 2023, aimed to promote environmental awareness and sustainability.

In a proactive move, the club engaged with local schools, expressing the importance of their participation in the project. Many schools demonstrated a strong interest in environmental initiatives, fostering a positive response. The collaboration with Sappi not only included the donation of saplings but also featured a detailed guide on planting procedures. This encompassed aspects such as hole size, the incorporation of compost with in-situ earth, effective watering techniques and appropriate spacing between trees.

Upon receiving acceptance from schools, the club took measures to ensure the active

involvement of senior staff members during the tree-planting activities. The initial planting of one or two trees was executed by club members, setting an example for the learners. Subsequently, learners enthusiastically took charge under the supervision of school staff, including teachers and principals.

The distribution of trees to schools varied, with each school receiving an average of 8 to 12 trees, depending on available space. Notable beneficiaries of this impactful programme included Windy Heights (Malakazi), Orissa Primary (Orient Hills), Muzomuhle Primary (Umlazi), Bhekithemba Primary (Umlazi), Gitanjali Primary (Silverglen) and Brettonwood Secondary (Umbilo).

Ash Maharaj, the project leader, expressed excitement about the project's success. He highlighted the active participation of school principals and the enthusiastic response from learners. Maharaj believes that learners, inspired by the project, have developed a keen interest in cultivating food for personal gains.



Santa, ahoy!

The Rotary Club of Vanderbijlpark (D9400) hosted its community projects, Christmas Market and Carols by Candlelight at Stonehaven on Vaal, witnessing a remarkable turnout this year. Staff and visitors noted the unprecedented size of the crowd at Stonehaven.

Candles and carol song sheets enhanced the Christmas spirit, courtesy of the artists, Art Song. The nativity scene, a perennial favourite, captivated the audience on the banks of the Vaal river. Father Christmas made a dramatic entrance, arriving by boat and skiing on the river. Excited children and parents eagerly greeted his arrival.

The carols commenced with the MC, Pastor van Rensburg, delivering a Christmas message of hope. President Adri Roos expressed gratitude to the community for their support. Pinatas, a Mexican custom, generously donated by our member Lidia Mezo from Mexico, were auctioned to raise additional funds for projects.

Rotarians and friends joined the crowd, immersing themselves in the Christmas spirit through songs, candlelight and the glow of phone lights. The festive atmosphere was heightened by the participation of the community, stallholders and the dedicated staff of Stonehaven.



Liz and David Linn collecting books.

Connecting hearts and minds

In the late 1960s, David and Liz Linn's connection with Save the Children Fund (SCF) laid the foundation for a remarkable journey of compassion and education. Their story unfolds in Lesotho, a small nation enveloped by South Africa, where they supported children through SCF until 1991. Fast forward to 2004, the Linns embarked on their first African tour, meeting the recipients of their support in South Africa and Lesotho.

The turning point came in 2006 when they returned, driven by the desire to make a practical impact. Engaging in volunteer projects in Namibia and Lesotho, they encountered Fiona Nukuoro, whom they supported through secondary school to a university degree. Over 15 visits to Africa, including 14 to Lesotho, the Linns forged lasting connections, turning strangers into

friends and, in some cases, "family."

Amid their adventures, the Lesotho School Library Book Project emerged. During their 2006 visit, they collaborated with Transformation Resource Centre (TRC), an NGO focusing on social justice. The Linns, along with US Peace Corps workers, aided in establishing a library at the Good Shepherd Centre, benefiting teen mothers and local children.

Realising the importance of access to books for learning and pleasure, the Linns took on the challenge of providing suitable books to institutions like LCCU and Good Shepherd Centre. The idea evolved into a collaboration with South Pacific School Aid Inc. (SPSA) in Australia, leading to the birth of Books for Lesotho Inc. in 2015.

The project initially aimed at a mobile library but adapted successfully to establish libraries in schools. By 2018, the Rotary Club of Maloti (D9370) joined as an in-country partner, expanding to the Rotary Club of Mantsopa-Maseru in 2022. Funding for transportation of the books relies on generous donations from individuals, groups and businesses, with the Lang Foundation playing a significant role.

As of now, the project has shipped almost 300,000 books to nearly 230 schools, institutions and community libraries. Donations pour in from schools in South Australia, Victoria and NSW along with support from municipal libraries and charity bookshops.

The Linns invite everyone to be part of this "Nation Building Project" by supporting Books for Lesotho through donations or any form of assistance. With a budget of \$22,353 for 2023/24, the project faces a significant challenge, but the heartfelt thanks from the children and teachers of Lesotho keep the spirit alive.

For more information or to contribute, visit www.booksforlesotho.org and join hands in building a brighter future through the power of books.



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BLANKETS TO BINGO

The Rotary Club of Stellenbosch (D9350) has been active, engaging in various impactful initiatives across the community.



In a recent Bingo Evening Fundraiser at the Thirsty Scarecrow in Stellenbosch, South Africa, members, including John Whitehead, gathered to support the club's philanthropic endeavours.



Chris Chambers, along with Dr. Eksteen and Dr. Mathose, paid a visit to Stellenbosch District Hospital in South Africa. The purpose of the visit was to explore opportunities for the club to contribute meaningfully.



Angelique du Toit played a vital role in inspiring members of the Stellenbosch club during a recent talk. She emphasised the importance of hope, contributing to the club's ethos of fostering positivity and optimism within the community.

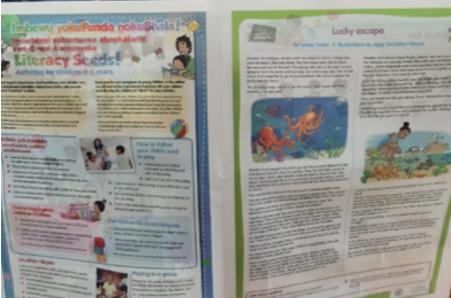


Sophia Warner and Chris Chambers, supported by the Rotary Club of Strand, donated beautifully crocheted blankets to the Pebbles Project, a local organisation in Stellenbosch. These blankets will be included in the "New Moms" packages distributed by the Pebbles Project.

These diverse activities underscore the Rotary Club of Stellenbosch's commitment to service and community betterment. With plans for future contributions, including the donation of a sonar machine to the local hospital, the club continues to make a meaningful difference in Stellenbosch and beyond.



In the Northern Cape, the Rotary Club of Kimberley (D9370) kicked off the festive season with its annual Tree of Joy initiative. This Christmas, the club generously gifted each of the 20 children residing at the Bophelo Children's Home in Kimberley. House Mothers Mellori van Wyk and Sanna Seekoei gratefully accepted the presents, along with some Christmas party treats, on behalf of the children, whose ages range from newborn to 18 years. The thoughtful donation aimed to bring joy to the youngsters during the holiday season.



The Rotary Club of Algoa Bay's (D9370) Heatherbank Reading Project has been going strong, with the children thoroughly enjoying it. An old ablution block at Heatherbank School was recently upgraded by the Rotary Club of Hulst (D1610) in the Netherlands.



In a successful conclusion to 2023, the Rotary Club of Flamingo-Welkom (D9370) achieved notable milestones. Rotarians, joined by friends, gathered an impressive total of 24 Santa Shoeboxes. The club's Elvée Lotter and Petru Koch (Santa Shoebox) played pivotal roles in this charitable initiative.



President Aneska Dupont of the Rotary Club of Amanzimtoti (D9370) recently presented a spekboom to Captain Sharleen van der Spuy, the dedicated liaison officer at the Amanzimtoti Police Station. Accompanying them was Past President Neil McDonald. This spekboom, part of the Rotary club's income-generating projects, serves a dual purpose—creating environmental awareness and fostering community involvement. Purchasers are encouraged to share slips with friends and family, promoting the growth of this remarkable plant in gardens.



Members of the Rotary Club of Johannesburg New Dawn (D9400) Karlien Kruger, Ivone Vosloo, Judy Symons, Suzy Sibanda, Joan Sainsbury (above) and District 9400 Membership Chair Jack Chen wrapped gifts at the Christmas Wrap fundraising project at Ferndale on Republic. They were among members from Rotary clubs in District 9400 who united for a heartwarming festive initiative, teaming up with Ferndale on Republic to professionally wrap gifts at a booth from December 9 to December 24. Over 1,500 gifts were wrapped, resulting in a R40,000 donation for diverse community projects. The project fostered fellowship, with many expressing interest in Rotary's activity, bringing joy as beautifully wrapped gifts were handed over.



In a heartwarming festive initiative, Royal View and the Rotary Club of Johannesburg New Dawn (D9400) collaborated to bring joy to children at the Salvation Army's Carl Sithole Centre in Soweto on Christmas Day. The generous supply of 50 hand-made cloth crackers, along with cupcakes, biscuits and sweets, created a festive atmosphere at the centre. Coordinated by the club, the initiative aimed to spread happiness and holiday spirit, showcasing the community-focused approach of both organisations. Royal View's contribution, marked by delicious treats and personalised hand-made cloth crackers, added a special touch to the celebrations. This collaborative effort reflects the true essence of the holiday season, emphasising the impact of collective generosity in bringing joy to those in need.



President Aneska Dupont and Rotarian Mkhululi Dlamini discussing the tree planting project at the Amanzimtoti Golf Club nursery. During the Easter weekend of 2022, the Amanzimtoti Golf Club faced significant destruction as the Mbokodweni River consumed holes, swept away two bridges, flooded the clubhouse and surrounding structures. Approximately 500 trees and the golf club's tree nursery were damaged. The Rotary Club of Amanzimtoti (D9370) is currently focusing on rejuvenating the club's tree nursery and replacing the lost trees. Participants contribute a fee, select a tree and have their names engraved on a plaque attached to the donated tree. The initiative extends to honouring loved ones, including deceased family members or pets.

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