

Philippine Rotary

MARCH 2025 MAGAZINE

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Maria Ressa

Journalist, free press advocate,
and first Filipino Nobel Peace
Prize Laureate, is the 27th
Rotary Peace Award Recipient



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YEAR

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Water is something we all need to survive, but billions of people live without safe drinking water. A gift to The Rotary Foundation's Annual Fund supports member-led projects that help people access clean water, sanitation, and hygiene. Your donation will fund sustainable, life-changing efforts in the communities that need our help the most.

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One small act

March is here, and for Rotary International, that means celebrating Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Month — a time to shine a spotlight on one of the most transformative areas of our work.

This month is an opportunity to reflect on *The Magic of Rotary* and the profound impact we create when we come together with determination and purpose.

Years ago, I experienced this magic firsthand in the Dominican Republic. When a group of members helped people install water filters, three children watched with amazement as dirty water entered one end of a filter and clean water emerged from the other. When we paused the demonstration, one child tugged at my sleeve and pleaded, “Show me the magic again.”

To them, it felt magical. It was also the result of countless hours of effort — planning, transporting, and installing the filters — alongside local partners who were dedicated to making clean water accessible. In that moment, I realized that what seemed like a small act could change residents’ lives. That is *The Magic of Rotary*.

This story is a testament to the incredible potential of our global family to create change. Water projects exemplify our reach, our partnerships, and our unwavering commitment to improving lives. Consider Rotary’s work with USAID. That partnership has enabled us to work with communities and governments to improve access to sustainable water and sanitation services for thousands of people in the Dominican Republic, Ghana, the Philippines, and Uganda.

Partnerships remind us that Rotary’s impact is amplified when we work together. Through our strategic alliance with the United Nations Environment Programme, we’re advancing the Community Action for Fresh Water initiative. This program equips Rotary members with the tools and resources to protect, restore, and sustain freshwater ecosystems.

When we make use of Rotary grants and advocate for clean water in our communities, we create a ripple effect that extends far beyond individual projects.

As we embrace the spirit of the month, I encourage every Rotary member to seek out new partnerships. Collaboration multiplies our efforts and helps us reach more people in need.

Whether it’s joining forces with local organizations, forming alliances with international agencies, or mobilizing your community, every step we take together brings us closer to a world where everyone has access to clean water and safe sanitation.

The Magic of Rotary shines brightest when we work in harmony with others to create lasting good. Together, we can turn dreams into realities that transform lives and communities. The result may feel like magic at times, but we know it’s from the power of our collective commitment and compassion. Let’s harness this magic to make a difference this month and beyond.

STEPHANIE A. URCHICK

President, Rotary International



▲ ON THE COVER: Journalist Maria Ressa, the first Filipino Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, is the 27th Rotary Peace Award recipient. Photo by Isabella De Maddalena/opale.photo.



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Good news about the PRM

The PRMFI Board of Trustees had a meeting with the RI magazine staff held last January 9, 2025 virtually via Zoom to discuss the PRM's results from the 2024 global reader survey conducted by RI. The RI magazine staff was headed by Gundula Miethke, Regional Content & Magazines Lead of the RI Global Communications Group.

Here are the quantitative and qualitative reports provided by RI as to the results of the readership survey for PRM, including RI's internal review highlights:

RI's Internal Review Highlights

Internal review shows a good to very good compliance with designated content, good responsiveness and good to very good timeliness as well as adherence to brand standards.

- Magazine creates good original content with a variety of regional projects, initiatives and interests.
- Magazine publishes longer features like the one about the Philippine initiative for best environmental projects and promotes regional activities concerning Areas of Focus.
- Magazine does a good job in incorporating the flagship magazine layout with their own layout.
- The digital presence is very well structured, good to navigate and includes pictures and a video section. The Breaking News ticker needs a little updating.
- The digital magazine flip through version is easy to navigate but does not include QR codes or links that would make it interactive. The mobile presence is well designed and works well. The current issues is not directly listed and clickable though (latest issue is May).
- The support for RI initiatives and events like People of Action, Polio and Convention promotion is very good.

Overall, the magazine is very professional and attractive. The high journalistic standard of the articles and the variety of topics helps in keeping our members informed and engaged and is a good tool for promoting our brand in public.

I congratulate PDG Sonny Coloma for doing a magnificent job as Editor-in-Chief, and the rest of the PRM editorial staff in doing a fine work and making our PRM to be above standard.

In closing, I would like to plead to every Rotarian in the Philippines to read and share our excellent magazine. We are doing this all for you, Rotarians in the Philippines. I beg you to read and share PRM so that you will experience and appreciate its excellent quality.

EMILIANO D. JOVEN
Chairman, PRMFI



“The high journalistic standard of [PRM's] articles and the variety of topics helps in keeping our members informed and engaged and is a good tool for promoting our brand in public.”

Philippine Rotary

THE MAGAZINE OF CHOICE

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Rotary 

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Women power in Rotary

Rotary International took a historic step in 1987 when it opened its doors to women, a decision that has profoundly transformed the organization. Today, women are not just active members — they are the driving force behind Rotary's growth and dynamism. Across the globe, Rotary clubs are seeing an increase in membership, largely fueled by the enthusiastic participation and leadership of women.

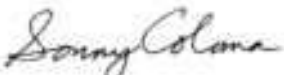
In July 2021, 32 years after the 1989 Council on Legislation voted to admit women into Rotary, Jennifer Jones began serving as the first woman President of Rotary International. She visited the Philippines in November 2021, projecting her extraordinary communication skills. Stephanie Urchick followed in her footsteps, and is currently serving as RI President.

Women bring fresh perspectives, boundless energy, and an innate commitment to service. They have strengthened the culture of collaboration within clubs, expanded Rotary's reach into communities, and led impactful initiatives that address pressing societal needs. Their influence is evident in the rise of female club presidents, district governors, and even a Rotary International president. These milestones highlight the indispensable role of women in shaping the future of our organization.

The data is clear: clubs that actively engage and empower women are thriving. Membership growth has become more sustainable in clubs where women take the lead in recruitment, mentoring, and project implementation. Women have introduced new networks, fostered inclusivity, and redefined the way Rotary connects with younger generations. This trend is not just promising — it is essential.

To sustain this momentum, clubs must continue fostering an environment that encourages women to step forward, take on leadership roles, and inspire others to join. This means embracing flexibility in meetings, recognizing work-life balance needs, and ensuring that opportunities for growth and leadership are equitably distributed.

As we celebrate the achievements of women in Rotary, we must also commit to strengthening their role in shaping our future. By supporting and empowering women in Rotary, we ensure that our mission of service above self continues to thrive for generations to come.



SONNY COLOMA
Editor-in-chief



“The data is clear: clubs that actively engage and empower women are thriving... Women have introduced new networks, fostered inclusivity, and redefined the way Rotary connects with younger generations. This trend is not just promising — it is essential.”

District 3850 covers a vast area, but distance has never been a barrier to success. The district's journey over the past eight months proves that what truly matters is the "Magic of Rotary".



D3850 FOCUS

Beacon of service and passion

by Lovely Sevilla

Rotary International District 3850 has always been a beacon of service, resilience, and passion. Over the past eight months, under the leadership of Governor Richard 'Voting' Centino, the district has reached unprecedented heights, setting new records in membership growth, championing charitable contributions, and impactful projects that embody Rotary's commitment to "Service Above Self."

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

A strong Rotary district is built on the foundation of its members — individuals who dedicate their time and efforts to make a difference. At the beginning of this Rotary year, District 3850 had 1,347 members. Through strategic recruitment and engagement, the district now counts on 1,517 members, breaching the 1,400 mark for the first time. Governor Voting's leadership and the commitment of past district governors are the two key factors in attaining record membership growth.

During the International Assembly in Orlando, Rotary International President Stephanie Urchick

called on Rotary leaders to invite, induct, and engage at least 100 new members while ensuring their retention. District 3850 not only met this goal but exceeded it by welcoming 197 new Rotarians who embody the principles of dedication, integrity, and service.

More members mean more hands to serve, more ideas to implement, and more impact in communities. This remarkable achievement reinforces the district's expanding influence and ensures a brighter future for Rotary in the region.

END POLIO NOW COMMITMENT

District 3850 has been actively involved in the global fight for polio eradication, organizing various campaigns such as Padyak to Keep Polio at Zero in Bongao, RunWalk to End Polio Now in Ipil-Sibugay, and Shoot to Zero in Zamboanga City. These events have raised awareness and generated funds to support Rotary's mission.

The district has already contributed \$15,105.21 to the PolioPlus Fund, with additional contributions expected. These efforts reaffirm an unwavering commitment to ensure that polio becomes a thing of the past.



TRF: A LEGACY OF GIVING

The Rotary Foundation fuels initiatives that transform communities, and District 3850 has remained steadfast in its commitment to giving. The district set an ambitious fundraising goal of \$150,000, and it is well on its way to achieving this target, having already raised \$137,641.38 — 92 percent of the goal.

These contributions support various initiatives, including education, healthcare, and community development. A recent example is the graduation of 13 teachers from vocational training programs in South Korea, an effort that underscores Rotary’s commitment to empowering educators and improving technical skills.

Additionally, the district is actively engaged in securing Global Grants. These initiatives ensure that Rotary’s generosity continues to reach those who need it most.

FELLOWSHIP AND CAMARADERIE

Rotary is more than an organization — it is a movement built on friendship, service, and shared values. To strengthen these bonds, the district launched the first-ever District-wide Friendship Games, promoting camaraderie through sports. As a sports advocate, Governor Voting recognized the power of physical activities and friendly games in bringing people together, fostering teamwork, and reinforcing Rotary’s core values.

Beyond competition, these games serve a greater purpose. They reflect the upcoming Rotary Year’s theme, “Unite for Good,” demonstrating that when people come together — whether in service or sports — they can bridge differences and work toward a common goal.



DISCON 2025: FIRST IN CEBU

Another milestone for District 3850 is the upcoming District Conference (DISCON) 2025, scheduled for March 20-22, 2025, at the iconic Waterfront Hotels and Casino in Lahug, Cebu City. This event is historic, as it will be the first DISCON held outside the district’s geographical boundaries. Adding to the prestige of the event is the presence of Past Rotary International President and current TRF Trustee Jennifer Jones, who will serve as the Rotary International President’s Representative (RIPR). With the theme “Love & Magic, Aboard,” the conference will celebrate the district’s achievements and set the stage for an even brighter future.

ROTA CON 2025: SPLENDID REPORT

On March 1, 2025, DG Voting proudly delivered a comprehensive report on the current status, initiatives, and progress of District 3850 at the Rotary Concerns (RotaCon) 2025 Forum held at Twin Lakes Hotel, Tagaytay.

MAGIC OF ROTARY

District 3850 covers a vast area, but distance has never been a barrier to success. The district’s journey over the past eight months proves that what truly matters is the “Magic of Rotary” — a shared passion, unity, and dedication to service. No matter where Rotarians are located, they are connected by a common purpose, working together to create lasting change.

As the district looks ahead, there is a sense of gratitude and optimism. With unwavering belief in the power of Rotary, the members of District 3850 will continue to serve, inspire, and build a brighter future. When people believe in the Magic of Rotary, nothing is impossible. ■

Clockwise from opposite top: DG Voting’s End Polio Now dubbed “Shoot to Zero” campaign receives a resounding support in Zamboanga City; RC Zamboanga City West opens a child development center through a Global Grant; With Past RI President Jennifer Jones, the first woman president of Rotary International, as his RI President’s Representative (RIPR), DG Voting proudly announces that his Discon, titled “Love & Magic, Aboard,” was held at the Waterfront Hotel & Casino in Lahug, Cebu City, the first Discon of D3850 held outside of the district; DG Voting joins his co-District Governors at the Rotary Concerns (RotaCon) 2025 Forum held at Twin Lakes Hotel, Tagaytay (from left, Domilo “Milo” Lucenario of D3780; Roberto “Bobby” Zamora of D3800; Eduardo “Ed” Trajano of D3770; Prescila ‘Prescy’ Yulo of D3830; Caroline “Caycay” Andrade of D3860; Arnold Mendoza of D3820; Richard “Voting” Centeno of D3850; and Hubert Quiblat of D3870. At the center are Past RI Director Guiller Tumangan and outgoing Chair of the Philippine College of Rotary Governors Leody “Oddie” Tarriela). There, DG Voting delivers a comprehensive report on the current status, initiatives, and progress of District 3850.

OUR CLUBS

Top row: A maternity clinic in Calarian, Zamboanga City, is built through a Global Grant; D3850's Sportsfest 2024 is enthusiastically supported by Rotarians.



Second row: A wheelchair is gifted to a young polio victim by RC Metro Roxas; D3850 holds "Padyak," a friendly bicycle race to raise awareness of the district's "Keep Polio at Zero," DG Voting's End Polio Now campaign in Bongao, Tawi-tawi.



Third row: An avid supporter of sports activities, DG Voting throws the ceremonial ball at the opening of the District Sportsfest 2024; D3850's Vocational Training Team on Bread and Pastry receives a warm welcome in D3662, South Korea.



Bottom row: Another group photo of D3850's Vocational Training Team on Bread and Pastry with D3662 in South Korea; DG Voting and Spouse Sophie are formally acknowledged at the Discon Governor's Ball.





Top row: DG Voting Centino and Spouse Rochie planned for a grandiose Discon with District Trainer James Makasiar and Discon Chair Global President Sonny Co as early as two years ago; DG Voting cuts the ribbon to a clean water system for a community that had no access to potable drinking water.



Second row: DG Voting gives away wheelchairs for residents of Baran-gay Poblacion, Bongao, Tawi-tawi; DG Voting's term marked a historic first- D3860's membership finally grew to 1,517 from 1,347 after many years of struggling to grow beyond 1,400 members.



Third row: Past RI President Jennifer Jones delivers a speech at the Discon of D3850; Rotarians and families participate in "Run-Walk to End Polio Now" in Ipil, Sibugay, Zamboanga.



Bottom row: Rotary Club of Bacolod joins the Philippine Dental Association of Negros Occidental Chapter in a dental mission held in Bacolod City; One of many dental patients at the said dental mission in Bacolod City.



D3850 FOCUS Service beyond duty

by Lovely Sevilla

In the realm of leadership and service, District Governor (DG) Richard ‘Voting’ Centino stands as a beacon of dedication, generosity, and philanthropy. His Rotary journey is a testament to his unwavering commitment to Service Above Self, embodying the true spirit of giving.

KING OF GENEROSITY, SINGING DG

To the Rotary Club of Ozamiz North, DG Voting is more than just a leader — he is an inspiration. Known as the King of Generosity and the Singing Governor, he brings warmth, camaraderie, and joy to every gathering. His ability to entertain and connect with people through classic love songs has made him a beloved figure, not just in his club but across the District.

FAMILY MAN WITH PASSION FOR SPORTS

Beyond Rotary, DG Voting is a devoted family man. Affectionately called Lolo Voting by his grandchildren Chelsi, Chase, and Scarlet, he cherishes moments

Clockwise from top left: Known as “The Singing Governor,” DG Voting brings warmth and camaraderie to fellowships; DG Voting’s happy Rotary Family consists of Rotarians committed to help meet his goals; Fondly called “The King of Generosity” DG Voting engages the youth in his community in sports activities which he personally sponsors, such as in this sportsfest that he launched; DG Voting personally promotes team-building in basketball and volleyball to develop the youth through sports. His “Harbor Pilot Basketball 21Under” was crowned Back to Back Champions of the Misamis Occidental Provincial Cup.

spent with family, especially during road trips. His love for sports has not only been a personal passion but also a way to bond with his loved ones.

Married to Roselyn Ybañez Centino, an educator, DG Voting’s family is deeply rooted in the Rotary movement, with his children actively involved: Kent Richard as a Past President and Assistant DG, Kathleen as a Past President of the Rotaract Club of Ozamiz North, and Kristine, a lawyer and a member of the Rotary Club of Cebu Fuente. Even his grandchildren are Paul Harris Fellows, reflecting their family’s enduring commitment to service.

SPORTS AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CHAMPION

One of DG Voting’s most impactful advocacies is youth development through sports. Under the banner of Harbor Pilot Sports, he has established basketball and volleyball teams, creating platforms for young athletes to showcase their talents and gain exposure by playing alongside professional players. By organizing friendship games and inviting national athletes, he





Above: “Lolo Voting” and his Spouse “Lola Rochie” dote on their grandchildren, taking them on frequent road trips. Son Kent Richard is a Past President and Assistant DG, Daughters Kathleen is a Past President of the Rotaract Club of Ozamiz North, and Kristine, a lawyer, is a member of the Rotary Club of Cebu Fuente. **Opposite bottom:** Professionally, DG Voting is Chief Pilot of Iligan Harbor Pilotage Services Company Incorporated.

fosters discipline, sportsmanship, and ambition among aspiring athletes.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE LEADERSHIP

Professionally, DG Voting serves as the Chief Pilot of Iligan Harbor Pilotage Services Company Incorporated, overseeing key port areas in Lanao del Norte, Misamis Occidental, Zamboanga del Norte, and parts of Misamis Oriental. Despite his demanding career, his passion for service remains steadfast.

His Rotary journey began in 2008, and within just three years, he became Club President (RY 2011-2012) under the governorship of Melvin dela Cerna. Recognizing his leadership potential, he was appointed Assistant District Governor the following year by Past District Governor Rafael “Biboy” Jocson.

With his unwavering commitment to Rotary, DG Voting achieved Major Donor Level 3 of The Rotary Foundation this Rotary Year — a remarkable milestone that showcases his generosity and dedication.

DG Richard “Voting” Centino is a man whose service extends beyond duty — it is a calling. Whether through his leadership in Rotary, his passion for youth development, or his role as a family man, he continues to inspire those around him. His legacy is one of generosity, leadership, and an unrelenting commitment to making a difference. ■

Rotary
Club of Paranaque Central
District 3830

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ROTARY CLUB OF MAKATI JOSE P. RIZAL

MUNA: Youth leaders' shaper

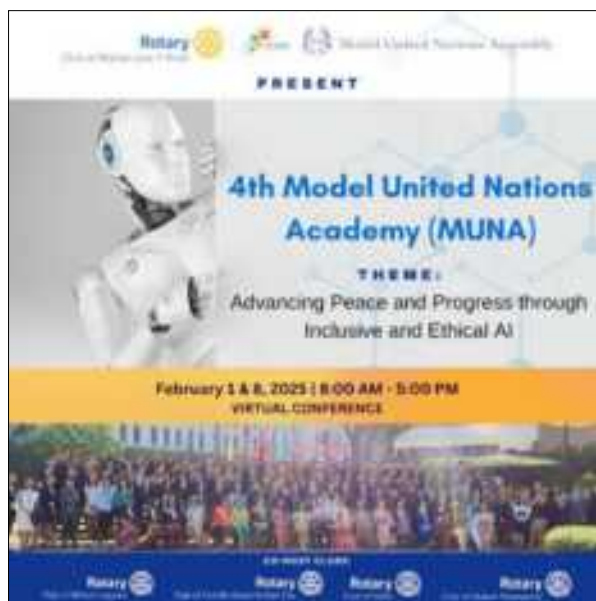
by Patti King

The Model United Nations Assembly (MUNA) has been a cornerstone of youth leadership and global awareness for decades. As one who has witnessed its evolution and growth from its inception in 1997 to its expansion into the Model United Nations Academy (MUNA Academy), a fully online event, I believe that this noteworthy initiative reaffirms Rotary's commitment to empowering young leaders and truly embodies The Magic of Rotary.

The MUNA concept was introduced in the Rotary Club of Makati Jose P. Rizal in 1995 by Sydney Bates. In 1996-1997 MUNA became an international and youth service project of our club during my year as club president, and was carried on by succeeding club leaders, including Sydney who was our president in 1998-1999.

Tapping our connections in the World Health Organization (WHO), Equitable Computers, MacDonald's and the International School, we held the first MUNA in 1997, a resounding and historic success, earning District recognition. Our Club Presidents, officers, and members embraced the MUNA through the years, fully supported by the District, other clubs, and schools both here and abroad.

In the aftermath of the New York City Twin Towers' disaster on September 11, 2001 (now remembered as '911'), MUNA was shelved for two years. But we returned with a purpose, enlisting



the Brent faculty and students' support.

Meanwhile, the MUNA had become the inspiration for the College of Saint Benilde to establish a collegiate-level program. Other schools and Rotary Districts also started their own Model United Nations clubs and events. At one point the United States Embassy in Manila allowed us to use its facilities for our orientation seminar. We also started sponsoring students from local public schools.

In 2009, Typhoon Ondoy inflicted heavy damage on the WHO office building in Manila. The 12th MUNA was held at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) and was part of the celebration of 90 years of Rotary in the country. The 13th MUNA was

held at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM). By then, MUNA was now recognized by District 3830 in three Rotary Avenues of Service: International, New Generations, and Vocational.

MUNA 14 went back to the newly renovated WHO premises. Delegates came from all the international schools in the Philippines. Even the WHO officers, staff and personnel had become familiar with this event and through the years have proudly been part of this noble project. The 15th MUNA was joined anew by local schools

Another calamity struck — the global coronavirus pandemic in 2020 — that again brought on a temporary pause to MUNA. Amidst the lockdowns and dread-



Clockwise, from top left: 4th MUNA poster; Past President Patti King of RC Makati Jose P. Rizal was the mainstay organizer and prime mover of MUNA; DG Prescy Yulo addresses MUNA delegates (bottom) in virtual session.



Clockwise, from left: In-person MUNA is convened at the World Health Organization (WHO) headquarters in Manila; MUNA sessions simulate business sessions at UN General Assembly with delegates donning their national costumes.



ful effects of Covid-19, our club navigated the online platform and continued its service projects in the virtual space.

So the Model United Nations Academy or MUN Academy became a reality.

It aimed to promote awareness of MUNA to public schools, enabling selected public school students with essential skills to become MUNA delegates. The medium- to long-term goal was to bring about the incorporation of MUNA in an academic curriculum and its recognition as an official school activity. In partnership with the Department of Education and De La Salle College of Saint Benilde; and supported by seasoned MUNA delegates from Ate-neo, British School Manila, Cole-

gio San Agustin, Faith Academy and German European School Manila as student volunteer subject matter experts, participants in MUN Academy learned as leadership, writing, negotiation and public speaking skills.

MUN Academy's maiden launch was on November 20, 2021, via Zoom, with more than 150 student participants from the School Division Offices of Quezon City and Tarlac.

As the club gained confidence in utilizing the virtual platform, it staged its 22nd MUNA. Simulating the face-to-face proceedings, the club enlisted the full support of Faith Academy as the lead school in organizing the structure and content of the conference. Held on Jan. 22-23, 2022, it was the first

100 percent live MUNA online event. Graduates of MUN Academy from public schools attended the event as observers while some participated as delegates in committees.

The social landscape slowly transitioned to face-to-face meetings. Thus, we collaborated with St. Benilde College in mounting the 24th MUN. RCMJPR's delegation was composed of students from German European School Manila, Airlink Aviation College and Tarlac National High School.

Take note that high school members of the club delegation won the following awards and recognitions in this collegiate-level event: Most Outstanding Delegate High School Level, German European School Manila; Best Position Paper in Economy and Society, Tarlac National High School; Verbal Commendation Award, Tarlac National High School; and Honorable Mention Citations, Tarlac National High School.

Last year, we continued our advocacy of orienting the public school sector with MUNA learnings. After five years, we returned to the WHO regional headquarters in Manila for MUNA 23, with the participation of the UP Los Banos MUN experts.

This year, we have decided not to hold our own Model United Nations Assembly. This is because more and more schools have embraced what our club started in the Philippines and have fully matured into Model United Nations advocates with their own clubs and events.

We have moved to the next level: mounting discussions on global issues participated in by students from private and public schools. This fully online event is a historic merger of the Model United Nations Assembly (MUNA) and the Model United Nations Academy (MUN Academy).

This project affirms the club's commitment to provide a venue for young leaders to become involved citizens of the world, in sync with this year's Rotary International theme: The Magic of Rotary. ■



ROTARY CLUB OF MAKATI JOSE P. RIZAL

Rotary outreach for infants at PGH

by Gigi Buenaventura

On February 6, 2025, the neonatal intensive care unit of the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) received a human milk pasteurizer and blast chiller through Global Grant No. 2454069 from The Rotary Foundation (TRF). The grant was supported by donations from the Rotary Club of Makati Jose P. Rizal, its sister club from District 3620 — Rotary Club of New Daecheon (RCND Korea), and Bryan Distributors and Services Inc., represented by its President-Emeritus Carol Siy, RCMJPR past president.

This grant enhances PGH’s capabilities in handling and pasteurizing human milk for infants. The clubs’ joint efforts demonstrate the importance of global partnerships in advancing healthcare initiatives. The deed of donation was signed by Dr. Aurora Gloria Labadia, PGH lactation and human milk bank unit head; RCMJPR President Lourdes ‘Dee’ Lison-dra and Immediate Past President Josie ‘Jos’ Teano; and RCND President Kim Eun Tae.

Clockwise, from top left: Human milk pasteurizer and chiller installed at the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) in Manila; RC Makati Jose P. Rizal Rotarians are joined by their project partners from RC New Daecheon of South Korea, PGH doctors and staff

Present at the colorful ribbon-cutting ceremony highlighting the donation were D3830 Governor Prescy Yulo, and Immediate Past District Governor Jay Tambunting. The formal deed signing and unveiling of a marker of donation at the PGH Guazon Hall were witnessed and supported by the following clubs: RC Makati Valero, RC Makati Ayala West, RC Circuit Makati, and RC Business and Servant Leaders Global.

This Global Grant dubbed as “Gatas Mo, Buhay Ko — Alay Ng Rotary — Version 2.0 - 2023” strengthens and extends the operations of the hospital’s human milk bank facility to meet specific needs of indigent adults, and infants. It supports Rotary’s Maternal & Child Health area of focus; as well as The Children’s First One Thousand Days project, while demonstrating RI President Stephanie Urchick’s theme, The Magic Of Rotary. ■

The author is a member of the Rotary Club of Makati Jose P. Rizal, D3830.

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INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Imbibing RI's internationality

by Reggie Nolido

It has truly been a rigorous but fulfilling journey.

Preparing for my term as District Governor of Rotary International District 3830 has been quite exhaustive. We started training with the Pre District Governor Nominee Training Seminar in Club Filipino (November 2023), then the District Governor Nominee Seminar in the Kaoshiung Zone Institute (December 2023), then the Pre District Governor Elect Learning Seminar in AIM (November 2024), then the District Governor Elect Learning Seminar in the Taipei Zone Institute (December 2024), to finally end with the International Assembly (IA) at the Rosen Shingle Creek Hotel and Convention Center in Orlando, Florida held last February 10 to 13, 2025. But it was all worth it.

The IA was especially significant in that it was here where I truly felt the internationality of Rotary. Even before the event we were already thrust into different smaller groups with our “cohorts”,

which in my case meant being grouped with my classmates (my fellow District Governors-Elect) from North Carolina, California, India, Australia and Denmark. It was interesting swapping stories with a very disparate group of individuals whose experiences were significantly different from ours but were all born out the common desire to do good for our communities.

The IA proper placed us in the midst of 530 classmates, with our respective spouses and partners, all coming from over 200 countries and territories. It was during the first plenary session that our Rotary International President-Elect Mario Cesar Martins de Camargo from Brazil unveiled the theme for our year of service, “Unite for Good”, a simple but concise message that fully encapsulates the twin goal of uniting and uniting for a purpose, i.e. to do good in the world.

In his speech, RIPE Mario said that, “Rotary’s greatest asset is not our history, our projects, or even our unmatched global reach. It is

Top row: DGE Reggie joins other Filipino DGEs at the International Assembly in Orlando, Florida. From left, Reggie Nolido (D3830), Jeremie Lo (D3820), Dantor Torres (D3790), Mary Mei Rodrigo (D3810), Pip Acepacion (D3850), Marlowe Selecios (D3870), Gina Sanchez (D3800), Veronica Yu (D3780), Jong Fernandez (D3860) and Alex Santos (D3770); Spouse Sue Ann attended her own breakout sessions and even received an invitation to speak to a club in England via zoom.

Second row: DGE Reggie and Spouse Sue Ann (extreme right) mingle with a very disparate group of Governors-Elect and their partners/spouses from around the world; RIPE Mario Cesar Martins de Camargo at the unveiling of the theme for the incoming Rotary Year, “Unite for Good”. In photo are, from left, Spouse Sue Ann, DGE Reggie, RIPE Mario and Spouse Denise da Silva de Camargo.

our members.” He then added that the three pillars of growth to develop a vibrant and dedicated membership are Innovation, Continuity and Partnership. He emphasized the need to innovate and think beyond the tried and tested. He decried the fact that our membership has stagnated over the past several decades and that the challenge is to present Rotary in a new light, to make Rotary available to a larger audience, in the hope that more will embrace the life of Service Above Self.

Then followed three and half days of plenary and breakout sessions touching on every possible aspect of Rotary Leadership, while sharing ideas with fellow leaders from all corners of the globe. To say that we learned a lot would be an understatement. Sharing from classmates from all over gave us a glimpse of how Rotary is in their communities. We are truly lucky to be part of an organization where our diversity is celebrated and is a tool for impactful service.

With me throughout is of course my spouse Sue Ann who attended the Partners’ assembly. She too had her own breakout sessions and events where she impressed her “classmates” with her knowledge and experiences. She has even received an invitation to speak to a club in England albeit through a zoom meeting. I will forever be grateful to her for her support and participation.

Then of course, I could not have done this without my nine other Philippine District Governor classmates in Zone 10A. Not only did we uphold the reputation of Philippine Rotary as a dynamic and enthusiastic group, we were even considered (unofficially) the best dressed bunch, what with our distinct green, yellow and grey suits and our elegant and stunning Filipiniana alampay (in Filipino culture, a traditional shawl that symbolizes hospitality, respect, warm connections, friendship and cultural heritage). It is not an exaggeration to say that participants from everywhere stopped us and took pictures of us all throughout the assembly.

Lastly, I am profusely thankful to my club, the Rotary Club of Makati, for being there to support me in this journey every step of the way. The encouragement of my club members has been invaluable through all this.

Our year of service is coming up. Let us make our year together the best it can be for Rotary! ■



Above: The Filipino Governors-Elect stood out in their elegant and stunning Barong Tagalog adorned with a modern version of the alampay, a Filipino shawl that symbolizes hospitality, respect, warm connections, friendship and cultural heritage. They are joined by RIPE Mario Cesar Martins de Camargo and his spouse Denise da Silva de Camargo.

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PROUD MEMBER

Global Grant Denture Project: Bridging Smiles and Lives

by **Albert B. Lacanlale**

In the Philippines, dental health is a pressing issue. Around 90% of Filipinos suffer from tooth decay, and 70% of the population lacks access to basic dental care. This crisis is especially hard on the elderly, many of whom can't afford the treatment they need. In places like Pampanga, the impact of tooth loss is severe. Elderly people struggle to eat, speak, and even engage socially because of missing teeth. For these individuals, affordable and quality dental care is crucial.

The problem goes beyond just physical health. Many elderly people in low-income families cannot chew properly, which means they cannot access nutritious food. This leads to poorer health, but it also affects their self-esteem. The psychological toll of tooth loss can make them feel isolated and ashamed. With the COVID-19 pandemic, things only got worse. Health restrictions limited access to dental care, leaving many people without the treatment they desperately needed.

However, hope came in the form of the Global Grant Denture Project, a collaboration between the Rotary Clubs of Dolores (Pampanga) and Sae Songtan (South Korea). The goal of this project was simple: to provide denture treatments for elderly people, many of whom had been forgotten by the healthcare system.

Thanks to funding from Rotary International's World Fund and local contributions, the project aimed to restore not just smiles but dignity and function to the lives of the most vulnerable.

While the project initially planned to serve 400 people, the need was greater than expected, and 561 individuals received treatment. Each person received dental care worth about PHP 7,000 — an amount that many could not afford on their own.

The services provided were comprehensive. They included tooth extractions, fitting of custom dentures, and follow-up care. For many recipients, this was a life-changing experience. What had once been a painful and isolating condition became a newfound sense of confidence and belonging. They could eat with family, smile freely, and join in social activities without fear of embarrassment.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, including delays and the need for vaccinations, the project moved forward. The dedication of the Rotary members, supported by local health authorities, made the project a success. Special mention should be made of key individuals like Chairman and Grant Past President Jose Lysander Galang from the Rotary Club of Dolores, and Past President Kim Ku Dong from Sae Songtan Rotary, whose efforts were instrumental in making this project happen.

The impact of the project went beyond just the physical benefits of receiving dentures. People who had been silent and withdrawn because of missing teeth now found themselves able to speak, laugh, and connect with others. The benefits were not only cosmetic; they helped people regain a sense of dignity, which in turn helped to rebuild the social fabric of the community.

The success of the Global Grant Denture Project offers a powerful lesson in the importance of collaboration. By working together, local and international organizations, along with dedicated volunteers, can tackle large-scale issues like oral health. But this project also teaches us that the work isn't over after the treatment is given. Moving forward, it's essential to focus on preventative care and education about proper oral hygiene. This way, future generations will have the tools to take care of their teeth and avoid the same issues.

The Global Grant Denture Project is more than just a local success story; it's a model for future initiatives aimed at improving dental health in underserved communities. It shows that by addressing oral health, we are not only improving individual lives but also strengthening entire communities. After all, smiles are more than just about teeth — they're about connection, dignity, and a sense of belonging.





TRIBUTE

Freshman and grandma's International Women's Day letters



On International Women's Day — March 8, 1999 — Joseph Camacho Reyes, a freshman at De La Salle Greenhills, wrote an Open Letter to all Women, coinciding with the global celebration of International Women's Day.

His grandmother, civic leader Leonarda Navato-Camacho, wrote him back in reply.

Noting that women workers were paid only a fraction of their male counterparts' remuneration, he expressed the hope that in the future, he would be happily married to a woman, and they would be living in an environment where equality between men and women is the norm.

March 9, 1999

OPEN LETTER TO ALL WOMEN

To all women of my generation,

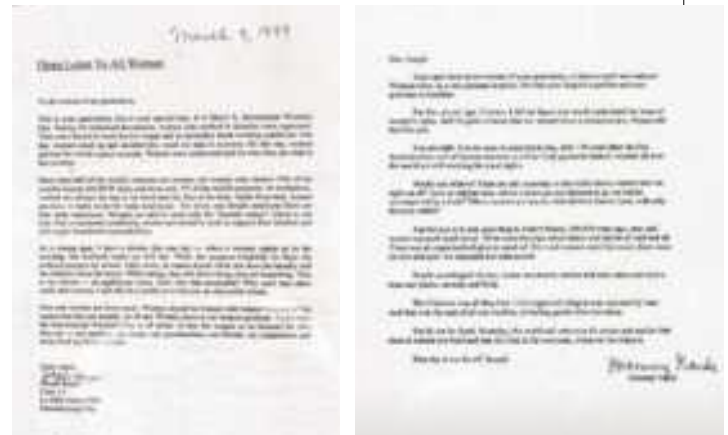
This is your generation, this is your special day. It is March 8, International Women's Day. During the Industrial Revolution, women who worked in factories were oppressed. They were forced to work for low wages and in incredibly harsh working conditions. One day, women stood up and decided they could not take it anymore. On this day, women showed the world a great example. Women were underrated and it's time they get what is due to them

More than half of the world's laborers are women, yet women only receive 10% of the world's income (NCRFW data) and owns only 1% of the world's property. In workplaces, women are always the last to be hired and the first to be fired. Aside from that, women are fired to make room for male employees. For every one female employee there are four male employees. Women are said to work only for "lipstick money" which is not true. Due to economic conditions, women are forced to work to support their families and still juggle household responsibilities.

As a young man, I have a dream, that one day—when a woman wakes up in the morning, her husband wakes up with her. While she prepares breakfast, he helps the children prepare for school. After work, he makes dinner while she does the laundry and the children clean the house. While eating, they talk about things that are happening. That is my dream - an egalitarian home. Now isn't that acceptable? Why can't men share work with women. Can't this be a reality or is this just an impossible dream.

Men and women are born equal. Women should be treated with respect because of the reason that they are people, we all are. Women deserve our deepest gratitude. That's what the International Women's Day is all about. A time for women to be honored for who they are—our mothers, our sisters, our grandmothers, our friends, our companions and most of all our fellow people.

Truly yours,
Joseph Reyes
Class 1-I, La Salle Green Hills
Mandaluyong City



Above: The original letters written by Joseph Reyes and his grandmother Leonarda Navato-Camacho, transcribed on this page.

Dear Joseph:

Your open letter to the women of your generation, written to mark International Women's Day, is a very pleasant surprise. Not that your English is perfect and your grammar is excellent.

But that, at your age, 14 years, I did not figure you would understand the issue of women's rights. And it's good to know that we, women have a champion in a 14-year-old boy like you.

You are right. It is not easy to understand why, after 150 years after the first demonstration ever of women workers in a New York garments factory, women all over the world are still working for equal rights.

Would you believe? There are still countries in the world where women have no rights at all? Such as Afghanistan, where women are not allowed to go out unless accompanied by a male? Where women are heavily clothed from foot to head, with only the eyes visible?

And believe it or not, according to history books, 250,000 years ago, men and women enjoyed equal status. Those were the days when nature was the be-all and end-all. There was no organized religion to speak of. Men and women were free souls; there were no rich and poor, no educated and uneducated

People worshipped the sun, moon, mountains, oceans and seas, lakes and rivers, trees and plants, animals and birds.

The Universe was all they had. Until organized religion was invented by man.

And that was the start of all our troubles, including gender discrimination.

But do not be fazed. Someday, the world will return to its senses and realize that there is indeed one God and that this God is for everyone, whatever the religion.

That day is not far off, Joseph.

Mommy Nards

TRIBUTE

Lighting up mornings

Doors symbolized 'Rotary Opens Opportunities', the theme chosen by then RI President Holger Knaack, for 2020-2021. Serving with him in District 3830 was

Maria Concepcion Navato Camacho, aunt of Joseph Camacho Reyes.

Then Governor ChaCha tapped her sister, Maria Socorro, who also belonged to the Rotary Club of Makati San Lorenzo, to join her at the 2019 Hamburg convention and at the International Assembly held in San Diego, California, a weeklong intensive training program for incoming district governors.

In March 2020, a nationwide quarantine and lockdown were implemented in response to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. This was a month after ChaCha held her Presidents-elect Training Seminar (PETS) in Antipolo City.

The District Training Assembly and the traditional District Handover program were conducted virtually and online.

Fast forward to March 2021. During the wake for his father, Joseph and his mother caught the COVID-19 virus, and were confined immediately at the Philippine General Hospital. Joseph passed away, the day before his mom, Maria Socorro Camacho, died, too, in the same hospital.

Joseph's auntie, Maria Concepcion, or ChaCha, was crestfallen. Her Ate Marissa was her bosom buddy and mentor.

A special tribute was given to Marissa Camacho at the District Conference held in March 2021.

The tribute was themed, Light of a Million Mornings, a song composed by Pam Rozell:

*The light of a million mornings filled my heart
The sound of a million angels sung my song
The warmth of a love so tender
Touched my life and suddenly
The light of a million mornings starts in me.*



Above: Mommy Nards and grandsons; Mommy Nards and Joseph.



Above: Past District Governor ChaCha Camacho with her mother, Narda and sister Marissa; At the International Assembly in San Diego, California.



Above: At the Rotary head office in Evanston, Illinois; Visiting Past RI President MAT Caparas in California.

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LEADERSHIP

Careers, connections, and comradeship

Women in Rotary get a professional boost, and it's not all about networking

One day in July, a typical Zoom meeting starts — typical, that is, in every way but one. As Rotary members join from different corners of the world — Nigeria, Thailand, Norway, and more than a dozen other countries — it gradually becomes evident that every participant is female.

This is a networking group for women who have served Rotary as trustees or directors, or in other leadership roles. Organized during the COVID-19 pandemic by Johrita Solari, a past RI vice president and director, the group has about 35 members. The discussions are wide-ranging, addressing everything from ongoing projects to career issues.

The meetings don't have a particular goal. They simply provide an opportunity for connection. "It's about having conversations on how to be better than we are and how to support each other," says Solari, a member of the Rotary Club of Anaheim, California.

The group is one of many avenues that women in Rotary use to form valuable professional relationships. Many women say Rotary helps them establish professional contacts, expand their skill sets, and — perhaps most important of all — find continuing inspiration to reach higher in their careers.

The chance to get an edge in the business world is particularly crucial for women. Despite having cemented their presence in the workforce in many countries, women still often find that subtle or not-so-subtle discrimination gets in

the way of getting ahead. Globally, less than a third of leadership positions are held by women, according to a report by networking site LinkedIn. That's despite women's equal or even majority presence in entry-level roles.

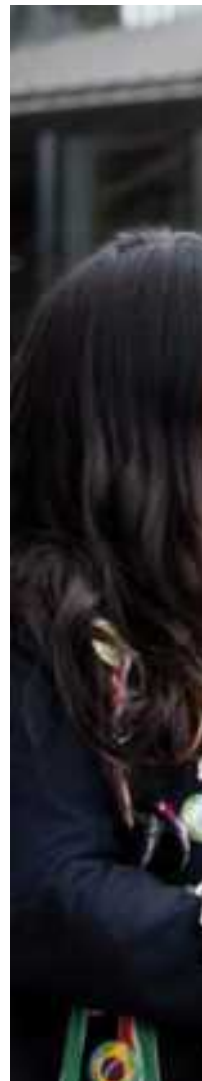
"Because we're a predominantly patriarchal society, I think men tend to gravitate towards their fellow men as opposed to women" in the professional world, says Sybil Bailor, immediate past president of the Rotary Club of Freetown, Sierra Leone. She works in project management and runs a boutique hotel. "There are certain do's and don'ts, spoken or unspoken, when you're approaching men in terms of networking and business," she adds.

And there are countless other challenges the group members describe. For example, there may be unwritten rules about what women are supposed to wear to the office, as one Rotarian learned when she showed up for her new job with a large UK-based law firm.

"On my first day, I had on a red dress," says Funda Gögebakan, immediate past president of the Rotary Club of Eğitim Hayallerine İnananlar, Turkey. "They said, 'Yeah, you look good. But according to our firm's rules, we advise you strongly to choose gray or black ones.'"

One frustration for women in some countries is being excluded from casual get-togethers outside of work. That's why it's essential for women to find other networking opportunities, says Hyun-Sook Lee, past president of the Rotary Club of Icheon Namcheon, Korea.

Visit rotary.org/fellowships to find an interest group for you.





Rotary Youth Exchange alumni network at the 2023 Rotary International Convention in Melbourne, Australia.

“In Korea, after-work gatherings, especially those involving alcohol, are a big part of professional networking and information sharing,” says Lee, CEO of the Icheon branch of a large chain of movie theaters. “These gatherings were often where relationships were built and crucial information was exchanged. I don’t drink alcohol and have rarely attended these events, which has sometimes made me feel like I was missing out on important opportunities to advance my career.”

That’s where Rotary comes in. Besides offering a way to build professional relationships in mixed-gender social settings, Rotary provides many other networking opportunities. About two-thirds of female members who participated in Rotary Action Groups, Rotary

Rotary’s leadership model is more flexible, and ultimately more powerful, than anything offered in the corporate world.

Fellowships, and Rotary Friendship Exchanges did so as a way to make professional connections. As RI President Stephanie Urchick points out, the nature of the organization fosters the deep relationships that are essential for productive networking.

“Rotary was the original networking organization,” says Urchick, who belongs to the Rotary Club of McMurray, Pennsylvania. “Rotary is a place where people all have that DNA that says, ‘We want to serve, we want to make the world a better place.’ That’s not always true in other circles.”

Rotary’s global reach allows for opportunities like Solari’s Zoom call, which serves as both a networking session and a practical lesson in cosmopolitanism. Past RI

Director Suzi Howe, who owned a Montessori school for many years, often called on her Rotary connections to introduce her students to international guests.

“I had a Rotary Youth Exchange student from Russia come and visit the school, and a Nicaraguan children’s choir,” says Howe, a member of the Rotary Club of Space Center (Houston). “The internationality of Rotary is a gift that we have.”

Many women credit Rotary with teaching them to lead. On the Zoom call, Nicki Scott, a past RI vice president and director, says persuading fellow members to get excited about a service project is a true test of leadership. “When you’re working in a volunteer environment as we are, you have to learn to build trust first,” says Scott, a member of the Rotary Club of West England District 1100 Hub. “Being brave enough to step into leadership roles teaches you so much. It’s a priceless MBA of leadership skills.”

Others say the leadership model that Rotary imparts is more flexible, and ultimately more powerful, than anything offered in the corporate world. “When you are in a corporate job, you can command people, right? But not when you are in Rotary,” says Joanne Kam, a past district governor and a member of the Rotary Club of Suntec City in Singapore. She works in real estate and owns a wellness company. “You don’t give out salaries. Everyone is here to serve. So you have to lead and inspire and motivate in a different way.”

Rotary also offers a multitude of opportunities for mentorship, something women often lack in their professional lives. Only about 27 percent of women in senior leadership positions around the world report ever having had a formal mentor, compared with 38 percent



Former Rotary Scholar Hannah Warren (left) founded a fair-trade clothing company in India that supports women with a living wage, health insurance, and child care.

of men, according to a 2024 survey by a leadership consulting firm.

“One of the strongest things that we can do for each other in Rotary is mentoring,” Urchick says. It’s a topic she’s familiar with, having worked for decades as a leadership consultant and an administrator in higher education. “That’s a message I frequently share with clubs. Clubs can take a look at their own culture and ask, How are there ways that we can foster mentorship?”

Ultimately, membership in Rotary confers a benefit that is even more valuable than professional connections or business lessons: a sense of possibility that many women didn’t feel before. As Kam says: “We don’t get paid. The bonus is our own personal growth, our own self-actualization.”

That awareness pervades Solari’s Zoom call. The members have convened to talk about what they’ve accomplished in their careers, but few limit themselves to that narrow metric of personal satisfaction. They speak not just of connections and leadership but of inspiration and imagination.

“I’ve personally gained by being more empathetic, more tolerant, more patient. Rotary teaches you all that,” says Geeta Manek, a past Rotary Foundation trustee and member of the Rotary Club of Muthaiga, Kenya. “It starts with trust. There’s so much more to Rotary than just doing projects. We empower ourselves. We learn so much.”

— ETELKA LEHOCZKY WITH
ADDITIONAL REPORTING

BY SEOHA LEE

BY THE NUMBERS

2/3

Approximate portion of female Rotary members in action groups, fellowships, and Friendship Exchanges who participate in part to make professional contacts

<1/3

Leadership positions held by women globally

2x

Attrition rate of roles on diversity, equity, and inclusion teams within large U.S. firms in 2023, compared with non-DEI roles

Short takes

A new Rotary Fellowship focused on artificial intelligence was added in the fall.



The Rotary Foundation raised over \$1.4 million in support of Giving Tuesday, which fell on 3 December.

The RI Board renewed Rotary’s partnership with the Peace Corps through October 2027.



PROFILE

Environment matters

A Rotarian lifts up her neighborhood

Sharon Adams
Rotary Club of
Milwaukee North
Sunrise

It was Christmastime almost 30 years ago, and Sharon Adams had recently moved back to her hometown of Milwaukee. She lived in a historically Black area once home to social clubs, stores, and entrepreneurs, but by then lined with abandoned homes. One night, Adams sat at the dining room table with her husband, Larry Adams, who is a builder. Lights flickered in a vacant home across the street. She asked Larry what they were. He said people were smoking crack. Not long after, Larry asked her what she wanted for Christmas. “I want you to fix that house, please,” she said.

This conversation snowballed into the creation of Walnut Way Conservation Corp., a resident-led nonprofit the Adamses co-founded to rehabilitate homes, support and operate small businesses, and advocate for residents on key issues. Walnut Way has since built and restored over 100 homes and created over 20 green spaces.

Early in the organization’s formation, Adams got to know the residents of the neighborhood. “I met some of the most wonderful people who love their home, refuse to be defeated, watching block after block being torn down,” she says.

Today, Adams is the executive director of Community Water Services in Milwaukee, where she helps prevent lead poisoning to protect the health of children and pregnant women, continuing her work to improve her community. “If you ask me why I joined Rotary, it’s because I love to work locally and be connected globally in impactful service,” she says.

The house across the street from hers is now a duplex that’s home to two families, and one of the residents is a county supervisor.

— JP SWENSON

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

Hundreds of Rotary clubs will take part in an annual Epic Day of Service on 17 May. Join them by registering your club’s project at epicdayofservice.org.



People of action around the globe

By Brad Webber



United States

The Rotary Club of Wellington, Florida, went the distance by staging a military-style race in which competitors wore heavy backpacks filled with donated food items. More than 100 participants, including U.S. Army and Marine Corps representatives, stepped off on 10 November during the Veterans Day weekend food drive, says club member George Kinoshita. The club modeled the event on the military endurance training known as ruck marches that involve carrying weighted backpacks. The club requested a minimum of 8 pounds of food donations, but many runners hoisted nearly double that, filling their bags with canned beans and cranberries, boxes of stuffing, and other foodstuffs. The club later handed over the Thanksgiving meal staples to the town's seasonally operated pantry. The Wellington High School Interact club conducted a 50-50 raffle, and members hoofed it or served as course guides.



Canada

Fourteen clubs in Ontario are participating in a District 7070 initiative to sew reusable menstrual pads for girls in the Dominican Republic led by Janet Thorsteinson, a member of the Rotary Club of Whitby Sunrise. Among the most prolific is the Rotary Club of Campbellford. Since it introduced "Sewing with Janet nights" in September 2023, club members and friends have sewn more than 1,000 pads using sewing machines and fabric that Thorsteinson provided. Nearly two dozen people participate in each session. "The idea of allowing more members to be involved in an international project was very appealing," says Rob Pope of the Campbellford club. Thorsteinson agrees. "Sewing events create opportunities for fellowship, creating a Rotary buzz and a draw for new members to get involved," she says.



6.7%
Portion of U.S. households that used a food pantry in 2020



\$688 million

Global value of household sewing machine exports in 2023



South Africa

You never know what kind of proposals will land in a club's inbox, says Bev Frieslich, a past president of the Rotary Club of Cape of Good Hope. She and her club took to heart an email from a Ugandan Rotarian with an admittedly audacious ask: to help him spring a surprise marriage proposal on his significant other, Barbara Nyakato, while she was touring Cape Town. "When I thought of a romantic proposal to my dear girlfriend, Rotary was an obvious and automatic choice," says Richard Kalungi. He and Nyakato are members of the Rotary Club of Kampala South. On 3 December, Frieslich brought Nyakato to Fish Hoek Beach under the guise of a club function. "Once she overcame her shock that Richard was there, she wept tears of joy and love," says Frieslich, who helped Kalungi with the shopping, organized a dinner reception, arranged a professional photographer, and provided Kalungi with lodging for the escapade. "Whoever said Rotary is boring?" says Frieslich.



New Zealand

Members of the Rotary Club of Waikato Sunrise are flying high thanks to an annual hot-air balloon festival where they raise money and community awareness of Rotary. The 2025 Balloons Over Waikato event, slated for 18-22 March in the club's hometown of Hamilton, will feature about two dozen balloons along with fireworks, music, amusement rides, and food tents, says Willemien Wennekers, a club member and past manager of the festivities. Rotarians serve as crowd ambassadors and help staff the information tent and VIP area. They also sell merchandise and run a "walk-through balloon" that's inflated but moored flat along the grass, allowing visitors to walk inside, Wennekers says. The \$5,800 raised by the club during the 2024 event was donated to True Colours Children's Health Trust, another of the event's charity partners.



12,874

Tourists from Uganda who visited South Africa in 2023

1783

First crewed hot-air balloon flight

Filipino journalist **Maria Ressa** named the **27th Rotary Peace Award Recipient**

Maria Ressa was named the 2025 Rotary Peace Award laureate for her “efforts to defend freedom of expression that is essential for democracy and lasting peace.” In 2021, Maria Ressa, CEO of digital news outlet Rappler, won the Nobel Peace Prize alongside Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov for their “efforts to safeguard freedom of expression” in the Philippines and Russia. Maria Ressa is the first Filipino to be awarded this prestigious honour.

Maria Ressa, a multi-awarded journalist uses the highly lauded online news site, Rappler to carry out vital investigative reporting on corruption, abuses of power, and human rights in the Philippines. Ressa is recognized for her vital role in upholding the truth and media freedom. She is a global icon for press freedom.

Rotarians take action to address the underlying causes of conflict, including poverty, discrimination, ethnic tension, lack of access to education, and unequal distribution of resources by implementing service projects and supporting Peace Fellowships and scholarships. Our commitment to peacebuilding today answers new challenges. We are approaching the concept of peace with greater cohesion and inclusivity, broadening the scope of what we mean by peacebuilding, and finding more ways for Rotarians to get involved.

Peace is a cornerstone of our Rotary mission. The first question of our guiding principle, The Four Way Test — IS IT THE TRUTH? is testament to our shared belief in the power of truth in peacebuilding. Rotary’s award to Maria is also a celebration of the work of many others fighting to uphold truth in a divided world. It highlights the impact of artificial intelligence, the ways new technology can reinforce or undermine peacebuilding efforts, and the expansive threat of misinformation. The 2025 Rotary Peace Award will be a beacon of hope and of inspiration to all Rotarians and everyone, everywhere.







‘We get to peace where impunity ends’

From the acceptance remarks of Maria Ressa during the conferment of the Rotary Peace Award held in Makati City, 11 March 2025

What a wonderful room full of people. It's so wonderful to see your faces. My gosh. I feel, well, it is historic. It's a historic day. Let's start with... the very first Philippine President to be arrested is... (Wait, here's the irony of all of it) is arrested by President Marcos's administration. It's interesting, right? Of course, how can we not (affirm that) at the core of everything is the rule of law, and of course, we have to always stand by the people who uphold the rule of law...

I think it's ironic. Every time I'm outside the Philippines, people ask me, So how is the Philippines today? And because we're Asia's largest Roman Catholic nation, I just say, No, we used to be in hell. Now we're in purgatory. And America is just heading to hell. I don't want to take up that much.

And first of all, thank so much for recognizing our work at Rappler. I think the only way to get to peace is to get to a point where impunity ends. The rule of law is strong and keeps the peace. I'll make just three quick points because what we went through in the

Philippines, we're seeing play out in other countries around the world today.

The irony for me is that, everything is so full of irony nowadays. The irony for me is the lessons that we learned in the Philippines now is being filled out in other parts of the world. The rise of the far-right, as of last year, 71 percent of the world is now under authoritarian rule. Even as we get better, which is an opportunity for the Philippines, the world is shifting, is literally like quicksand under our feet today. And the struggle is (to uphold) the rule of law. Does the global international rules-based orders still exist? Do treaties still hold? All of this. My thoughts are really simple. How did we cover an administration where a president lied repeatedly? Does that sound like another country? You stick to the facts. You always add context.

I watched this (videoclip) two Fridays ago in the United States when President Trump and Vice President Vance were in the room with Ukraine's President Zelensky. The United States literally turned the world upside down in a vote at the UN the Monday before, four days before, by voting. A basic tenet of the United Nations is that no sovereign nation will invade another. And yet, for the very first time, the United States voted with Russia, with North Korea,

Above: Maria Ressa receives the 27th Rotary Peace Award from Past RI Director Guillen Tumanan. They're flanked by (from left): RC Makati San Lorenzo President Ellie Gatmaitan, PDG Sonny Coloma who was the Governor when the award was instituted in 1998-1999, and PDG ChaCha Camacho.



(and) with Iran. Even China abstained in this vote. They voted to say that the invader is not the invader, and the country that was the victim is, in quotes, the invader. It was a way to change their habits.

We went through this in the Philippines two years before I was first arrested, on social media. Filipinos spent the most time online and on social media globally for six years. It ended in 2021. But in 2017, pro-Duterte and pro-Marcos networks on Facebook trended #ArrestMariaRessa, 2017 trended number and then I was arrested two years later on Valentine's Day. The day before Valentine's, I posted bail on February 14th. That was the day the world turned upside down for me because I believed in law.

These acts were blatantly unconstitutional. So the world can turn like this, and our world is turning. And the way we stick to the floor is by holding on to the facts, remembering the context of it, and that commitment will help stop impunity. Today, we actually have a sense of justice. It will be challenging because every act of bravery also changes the world slightly. What does that mean? Why did we require 7,000 police to actually be able to carry out the act? We'll see what the days are. President Duterte is actually in Villamor Airbase right now. If you follow Slobodan Milosevic, the last president that I remember, he was immediately flown to The Hague and stayed under arrest at The Hague for five years before the trial. Let's see.

The last point, Every day we do not exercise our rights is a day that democracy gets weaker. It's a lesson for not just that we learned in the Philippines, but also for the world. I thank you for this incredible honor. Thank you for every act you do that upholds the rule of law, that upholds our common goals, and the goodness of human nature...

Last thing for your family and friends, get off social media. It really is a bit corrupting. Thank you for the emails, for thinking of us at Rappler, and we're here. We'll hold the line with you... Thank you very much.



About Maria Ressa

A JOURNALIST in Asia for nearly four decades, Maria Ressa co-founded Rappler, the top digital-only news site that is leading the fight for press freedom in the Philippines. As Rappler's CEO and president, Ressa has endured constant political harassment and arrests by the Duterte government, forced to post bail ten times to stay free. Rappler's battle for truth and democracy is the subject of the 2020 Sundance Film Festival documentary, *A Thousand Cuts*.

In 2021, she was one of two journalists awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her "efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace."

Ressa was named one of Time magazine's 2018 Person of the Year, was among its 100 Most Influential People of 2019, and has also been named one of Time's Most Influential Women of the Century. She was also part of the BBC's 100 Most Inspiring and Influential Women of 2019 and Prospect magazine's world's top 50 Thinkers. In 2020, she received the Journalist of the Year award, the John Aubuchon Press Freedom Award, the Most Resilient Journalist Award, the Tucholsky Prize, the Truth to Power Award, and the Four Freedoms Award. In 2021, UNESCO awarded her the Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

Among many awards for her principled stance, she received the prestigious Golden Pen of Freedom Award from the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, the Knight International Journalism Award from the International Center for Journalists, the Gwen Ifill Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Shorenstein Journalism Award from Stanford University, the Columbia Journalism Award, the Free Media Pioneer Award from the International Press Institute, and the Sergei Magnitsky Award for Investigative Journalism.

Before co-founding Rappler, Ressa focused on investigating terrorism in Southeast Asia. She opened and ran CNN's Manila Bureau for nearly a decade before moving to Indonesia and opening the network's Jakarta bureau, which she ran from 1995 to 2005. She then returned to Manila as the senior vice president in charge of ABS-CBN's multimedia news operations, managing over a thousand journalists for the largest news organization in the country.

Ressa wrote *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of al-Qaeda's Newest Center of Operations in Southeast Asia, From Bin Laden to Facebook: 10 Days of Abduction, 10 Years of Terrorism, and How to Stand up to a Dictator: The Fight for Our Future*.



Journalist, free press advocate, and first Filipino Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa is 27th Peace Awardee of Philippine Rotary

by **Cha-Cha Camacho**

The Rotary Peace Award in Rotary District 3830, Philippines named Maria A. Ressa, staunch advocate of press freedom and first Filipino Nobel Laureate, as its 27th Peace Awardee. Ressa joins colleague and friend Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, Former Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales, Former President Corazon C. Aquino, Former President Fidel V. Ramos, Jaime Cardinal Sin and Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle in a growing list of Filipino Rotary Peace Awardees. The Rotary 3830 Peace Award is bestowed on individuals and organizations whose work and actions exemplify Rotary's commitment to world peace.

Ressa is being recognized for her unwavering commitment to upholding the truth and championing media freedom even in the face of intimidation from state forces. As co-founder and CEO of Rappler, she endured political harassment and arrests by the Duterte government.

"In 2017, pro-Duterte and pro-Marcos networks in Facebook trended #ArrestMariaRessa. And then, I was arrested

2 years later. The day before Valentines, that was the day the world turned upside down for me. Because I believe in the rule of law. I thought that the constitution, these acts were blatantly unconstitutional," Ressa related during her speech.

Her life's work is a testament to her dedication "to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace," as the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize would phrase it. Her roughly 40 years in journalism has taken her from investigating terrorism in Southeast Asia as Jakarta bureau chief for CNN, to opening Manila's CNN bureau in 1987; followed by heading then largest news group in the Philippines (ABS-CBN), to ultimately founding Rappler. She has authored a few books going into deep dives on her investigation subjects, among the latest of which is *How to Stand Up to a Dictator*.

She wrapped up with a message of unity and hope, "Thank you for the emails, for thinking of us at Rappler. And we're here. We'll hold the line with you. Thanks."

The 27th Rotary Peace Award has been conferred by the Rotary Clubs,



This page: Makati San Lorenzo Rotarians line up to greet guests. Lower photo shows (from left) Past District Governors Cha Cha Camacho, Ernie Salas, Willie Segovia and Al Montecillo.

led by the Rotary International District 3830's Rotary Club of Makati San Lorenzo, and presented at the Yuchengco Museum on Ayala Avenue, Makati City. Makati likewise has been declared a Rotary Peace City since 1999.

About the Rotary D3830 Peace Awards

AS A humanitarian organization, peace is a cornerstone of our mission. As Rotarians, our essential call to action is to be peacebuilders. Rotary creates environments where peace is possible by adhering to Rotary's ideals of amity, fellowship and service to others. To become effective catalysts for peace, Rotarians work at the grassroots level through an array of humanitarian and educational programs to address the underlying causes of conflict and war,

including poverty, discrimination, ethnic tension, illiteracy, and unequal distribution of resources.

Every February 23, Rotary's anniversary and World Understanding and Peace Day, the Rotary Club of Makati San Lorenzo honors individuals and organizations whose actions and advocacies promote world understanding and peace through selfless service to others.

Peacebuilding continues to grow out of initiatives of Rotarians around the

world and the efforts of Filipino Rotarians through the Annual Rotary 3830 Peace Award has been pivotal in seeing this expansion.

Our commitment to peacebuilding today answers new challenges: how we can make the greatest possible impact and how we can achieve our collective vision "to see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change across the globe, in our communities and in ourselves."



**H.E. President
Corazon C. Aquino¹**
1998-99



**H.E. President Fidel
V. Ramos¹**
1999-2000



**H.E. Jaime L.
Cardinal Sin¹**
2000-2001



**H.E. Ricardo
Cardinal Vidal¹**
2001-2002



**Former Defense
Sec. Angelo Reyes¹**
2001-2002



**Former DENR Sec.
Regina Lopez¹**
2002-2003



**Fr. James Reuter,
SJ**
2003-2004



Miss Rosa Rosal¹
2004-2005



**Fr. Marciano
Evangelista**
2005-2006



**Sister Pilar
Versoza¹, RGS**
2006-2007



Mr. Tony Meloto
2007-2008



**Former Governor
Grace Padaca**
2008-2009



**90 years of Rotary
in the Philippines
Celebration**
2009-2010



**Former Senator
Richard Gordon**
2011-2012



**Former Sec.
Teresita Deles**
2012-2013



**Former DILG
Secretary Jesse M.
Robredo¹ and**
2013-2014



**Former Vice
President Maria
Leonor G. Robredo**
2013-2014



**Justice Conchita
Carpio-Morales**
2014-2015



**Miss Charo Santos-
Concio**
2015-2016



**Sister Eva Fidela
Maamo, SPC, MD**
2016-2017



**H.E. Luis Antonio
Cardinal Tagle**
2017-2018



Miss Mel Tiangco
2018-2019



**Kadtuntaya
Foundation, Inc.
(KFI)**
2019-2020



**PRIP Mateo
M.A.T. Caparas¹**
2020-2021



**PRID Rafael
"Paing"
G. Hechanova¹**
2021-2022



**Bai Rohaniza
Sumnada Usman**
2022-2023



**Prof. Miriam
Coronel Ferrer**
2023-2024



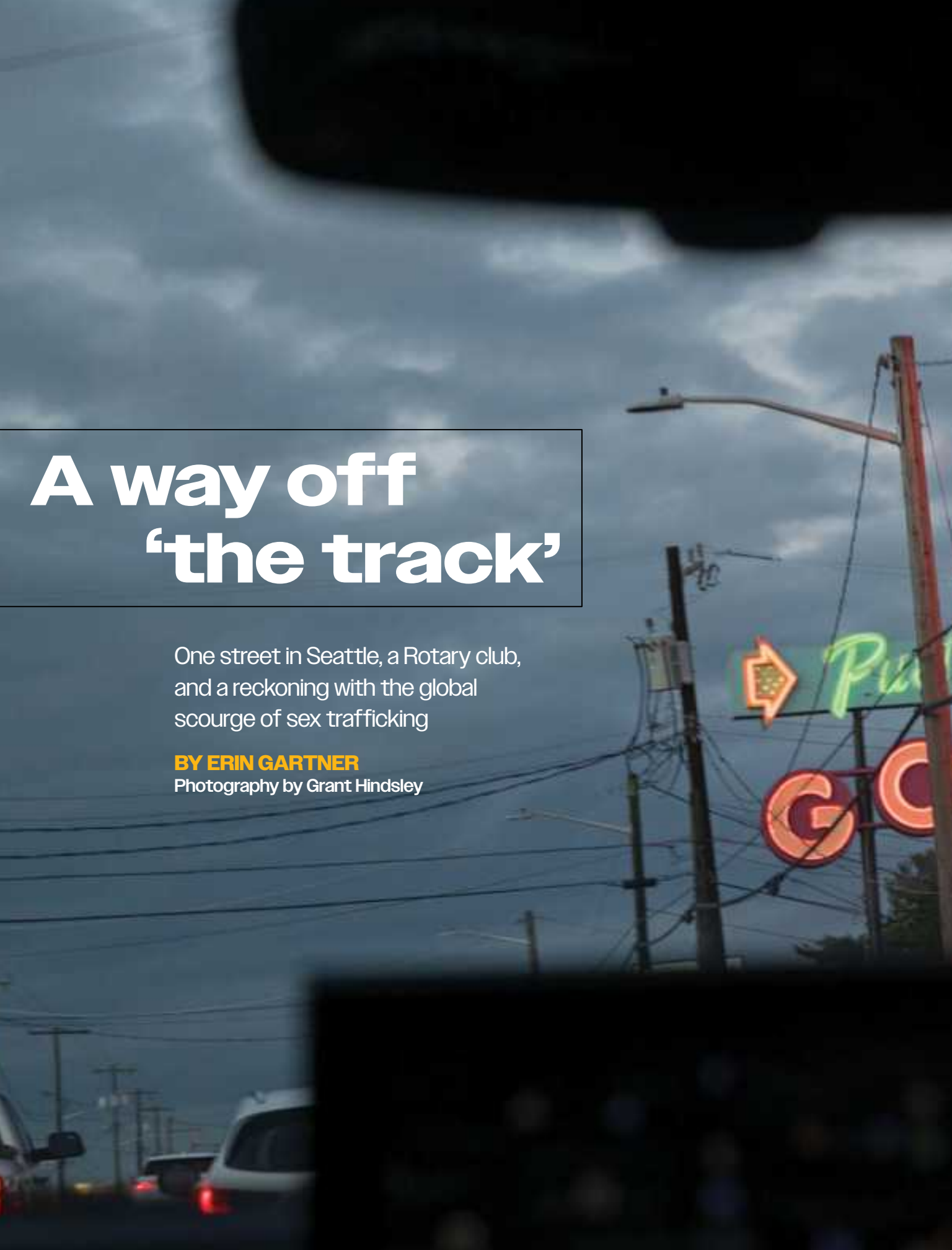
Maria Ressa
2024-2025

A way off ‘the track’

One street in Seattle, a Rotary club,
and a reckoning with the global
scourge of sex trafficking

BY ERIN GARTNER

Photography by Grant Hindsley



Nites
Inn
MOTEL

NO VACANCY

FREE WIFI HBO
LOW DAILY
REMODELED

LOW
RATE



RIGHT
LANE

BUSES
ONLY

BUSES ON
SIDE FINE



Dozens of gunshots pierce the quiet, jarring me awake at 3:30 a.m.

It's a warm night in early July, must just be fireworks, I say to myself before falling back to sleep. Later, I learn about the 30-plus cartridge casings that police found at the intersection three blocks from my home in north Seattle. A neighbor's security camera captured what I had missed while sleeping: the explosion of gunfire, muzzle flashes, wisps of debris blasted off a wall, a group of hooded shooters emerging from a dark alley firing handguns without pause: tat, tat. Tat, tat, tat.

Seconds earlier, a man had approached a woman dressed in a top, panties, and stilettos. Another man confronted him, pulled a gun, and the firefight ensued, with the targeted man leaping almost comically as if to avoid being hit. Police said at least one woman was shot and injured during the melee, one of several shootings last summer at the corner of Aurora and 101st.

Police attribute much of the violence to sex traffickers jockeying for turf. Girls, some not even teenagers, have been forced into the commercial sex trade here. The roadway has for decades been associated with the city's seedier elements, like drugs and prostitution, but sex trafficking has flourished and become far more conspicuous in recent years. The city accused two of the motels along the strip of facilitating prostitution and forced them to close over the summer of 2023. Not long after, the activity moved south along Aurora Avenue North. It landed in the surrounding neighborhoods, including mine. All out in the open. The streets and the parked cars — the neighborhood itself — became the new motel.

"It was insane how quickly it erupted," says Andrew Steelsmith, another neighbor whose security camera footage of the disturbances that year seemed to touch a nerve in the city. The former Coast Guard law enforcement officer and his family have lived here since 2016. At least one

bullet has hit the fence behind his house. The videos he's posted over the years track the accelerating chaos. What started as one or two cars passing each night when he moved in turned into more than 100. "There were five, six, or seven women standing in the road, and a line of traffic waiting like a drive-through," he says.

Frustrated by the spike in violence and his now weekly walks with neighbors to pick up fast-food wrappers, used condoms, and other trash, Steelsmith began piecing together his dashcam and security video, including a time-lapse sequence showing the astonishing number of cars rolling through. He posted it online, and it quickly sounded a wake-up call, grabbing the attention of the community and local officials. "I released that video, which really showed what everyone was missing when they were sleeping," he says.

It showed me, too, what I was missing when my eyes were closed.

Just a few miles north of Seattle's glittering downtown, home to some of the world's richest tech companies, this turbulent section of Aurora Avenue North burrows through block after block of drab urban terrain, auto body shops, nondescript shopping centers, restaurants. The roadway is completely different from the days when it was part of U.S. Highway 99, or the Pacific Highway, a celebrated road-trip route that ran from Mexico to Canada in the early 20th century.

Walk a couple of blocks west, though, toward Puget Sound, and you enter another world, a neighborhood of 1920s bungalows, newly built townhomes, and large single-family houses, some near collapse and others selling for over \$1 million. On a typical Saturday afternoon, children run and bounce around well-kept playgrounds, dogs excitedly play fetch in adjacent parks, and soil-smudged neighbors tend to their plots in community gardens billowing with flowers and leafy vegetables. Couples push strollers as they walk home from coffee shops, breweries, and grocery stores.

My husband and I moved to the area three years ago. After more than a decade working in journalism in Chicago, I was looking for a career change and found a role in corporate communications with Amazon in Seattle. We canvassed the city for months looking for a home in the city's pricey housing market and landed in a neighborhood bordering Aurora Avenue North.

Like many neighbors, I didn't know how deeply some of the area's problems ran or how they'd shifted in recent years. Then luxury cars with tinted windows began slowly circling day and night, dropping off young women in tight, short dresses or other scant clothing. Gunfire became a nightly occurrence. We no longer felt safe walking in the evenings.

One chilly fall morning, as I walked to a bus stop along Aurora on my way to work, I rounded a corner and came face to face with a girl who looked no older than 15. She was balancing on red stilettos and wearing a red lace negligee. It was 7 a.m. on a Thursday. I boarded the bus stunned and watched her slowly cross the street. I looked for resources online but felt helpless as I read warnings about how violent sex traffickers were often watching the women from nearby vehicles.

A couple of months later, in early 2024, a bullet went through my neighbor's home in the middle of the night, barely missing his father-in-law as he slept in a guest bedroom. Nearby homeowners gathered later that week to share information, and I met Steelsmith. He had just left a meeting organized by Virginia McKenzie, an executive recruiter and longtime Rotarian who helped charter the Rotary Club of the Pacific Northwest Ending Sex Trafficking in 2021. The club grew out of a project within the Rotary Club of Seattle and, I was surprised to learn, is among a handful of cause-based Rotary clubs in the U.S. focused on human trafficking.

McKenzie had seen Steelsmith's video and asked him to attend the community meeting. There, he discovered an ecosystem of nonprofits, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, and others who were working to address the issue — and to help survivors of sex trafficking. I connected with McKenzie, too, and became a member of the young club. Thus began my journey of trying to understand this dark side of Seattle and many other cities across the U.S., along with the strength of survivors and the healing power of community. Or as McKenzie put it: "When you bring awesome people together, something awesome is going to happen."

Opposite top: The Seattle skyline is seen from a hotel that serves as a temporary shelter for sex trafficking survivors.

Bottom: A security camera captured a gunfight likely sparked by the sex trafficking trade on Aurora Avenue North.



The troubled Aurora Avenue North corridor is known as “the track,” an epithet earned over decades. But particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, the signs of forced sex work have become more visible. Dozens of the women walk the corners day and night in the summers. Nightly violence has followed, with pimps clashing over turf and high-speed chases between luxury cars. Police suspect most of the shooters are from outside of Seattle, and many of the women officers encounter were brought here from other states.

Seattle Police Detective Maurice Washington works in the department’s human



VIDEO STILL: COURTESY OF I. JORDAN



“I didn’t know what to do [about Seattle sex trafficking]. ... I just tried to figure out who’s working on this, and how can I be helpful and bring my Rotarian friends with me.”

trafficking vice unit and is a 16-year member of the local FBI office’s Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force. He says a de facto sex trafficking corridor runs through Washington state, Oregon, California, and Nevada, largely along Interstate 5, which replaced the old Pacific Highway and is just a few blocks east of Aurora Avenue North.

Washington says Aurora Avenue has earned a national reputation as a place where prostitution goes largely un-

Above: Virginia McKenzie is a founder and charter president of the Rotary Club of the Pacific Northwest Ending Sex Trafficking.

checked, in part because of Seattle’s historically lax enforcement policies. He also notes a cultural shift toward people being more accepting of some aspects of the sex trade. “The difference we’re seeing now is in the volumes of younger and younger persons involved,” Washington says. “And people doing the trafficking crimes know

it’s very difficult to investigate without cooperation from a victim.”

Alex Voorhees often works with detective Washington as the lead prosecutor for cases involving human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children, through the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office. She says trauma runs deep with trafficking victims, many of whom have been subjected to physical and psychological abuse for years. As a result, many are hesitant or scared to testify against their traffickers. “We’re often dealing with people with a considerable amount of trauma,” Voorhees says. “It’s important to understand that even when we deal with adult victims, they’ve often been exploited since they were 13, 14, or 15 years old.”

Washington and other experts stress that any child is at risk, especially from traffickers online who promise lavish gifts, money, and affection, but that the children most targeted are often from foster care and households with significant troubles.

Together, Black, Asian, and Hispanic girls make up more than half of underage victims in King County, with Black girls dramatically overrepresented, according to a report from prosecutors. Their data shows that from about 2013 to 2022, white men made up 73 percent of defendants accused of buying or attempting to buy minors for sex in King County, and over a similar period of time, 44 percent of the victims in all commercial sexual exploitation of children cases were Black. (In King County, Black residents make up 7 percent of the population.) Young men and boys are also trafficked, though most cases involve female victims.

“The buyer pool is pretty much the flip side of our victims. These are men of affluence, of means, and have the disposable income to buy a human being for their sexual gratification,” says Voorhees, who has over 20 years of experience as a prosecutor.

She notes that even most adult victims are young, nearly all between the ages of 18 and 25. “There’s a narrative in some communities that says there’s no harm in this, that the woman wants to be doing this. But if you look back into the history of where our survivors come from, this wasn’t a choice. Who at the age 13 says, ‘I want to drop out of high school, prostitute, and give all my money to a man who wants me to do this?’”

Debra Boyer is a cultural anthropology researcher whose work has focused

for decades on sexual exploitation and how to help victims in Washington state. She says the Seattle and King County data aligns with national trends and that sex trafficking is an issue in metropolitan areas across the U.S. “You don’t find anyone in this industry who wasn’t groomed or sexually abused in some way. People involved in prostitution are coerced and have been the victim of a lot of violence,” says Boyer, an affiliate faculty member at the University of Washington.

She says that Washington state has been at the forefront of anti-trafficking efforts. In 2003, the state became the first in the U.S. to criminalize human trafficking on the state level. State courts, including the Washington Supreme Court, were the first to rule against backpage.com in lawsuits filed in several states that took aim at the website, which the U.S. Department of Justice described as the internet’s leading forum for prostitution ads, including ones featuring minors, when it was finally shut down in 2018. And under a new state law, all school districts must offer students instruction in sex trafficking awareness and prevention by the 2025-26 school year.

Seattle had repealed its anti-loitering laws in 2020, after criticism that they had long been misused by police to target minorities and harass people experiencing homelessness. Police, however, said the prostitution loitering law was one of the few tools they had left to approach potential victims of sex trafficking after a shift away from charging women with prostitution starting around 2012.

In mid-2024, amid the spike in violence along Aurora Avenue North, business owners and residents successfully pushed the Seattle City Council to adopt a reworked anti-loitering ordinance that shifted enforcement efforts toward traffickers and buyers. The revised loitering law took effect in October, but its impact remains to be seen. And survivor-focused nonprofits and government agencies say funding is still needed for additional services to help women trying to exit the sex trade.

Ultimately, Boyer says, it comes down to deterring demand. “The pipeline is always full of victims because there are always customers. That’s why you have to go after sex buyers. They’re the cause,” Boyer says. “We protect the men here. Look how long it has taken to get rape taken seriously, or domestic violence. Prostitution is another form of this gender violence.”



A troubled corridor

A Ingraham High School

Seattle City Council member Cathy Moore, who represents the area, said in August that students at Ingraham High School and Robert Eagle Staff Middle School (**K**), some as young as 12, had been the targets of solicitation and recruitment near their schools.

B 117th–127th streets

Most of the trafficking has occurred along this 10-block span.

C Shuttered motels

Two motels were forced to close by the city in

summer 2023 after being accused of facilitating prostitution.

D UW Medical Center–Northwest

E Evergreen Washelli Funeral Home & Cemetery

The streets around the cemetery have been high-traffic areas for the sex trade.

F Viewlands Elementary School

G Aurora Avenue North and 101st Street

Scene of the July shootout between groups apparently competing for control of the corner

H 95th–109th streets

Violence shifted here after the two motels were shut down.

I Seattle Police Department North Precinct station

J Aurora Commons

This drop-in day center serves people experiencing poverty and homelessness. The organization is also well aware of the trafficking and can help people find resources.

K Robert Eagle Staff Middle School

L Cascadia Elementary School

The Rotary Club of the Pacific Northwest Ending Sex Trafficking has become a hub of information and action. The list of members is a who's who of experts and others personally and professionally connected to the issue — some with specialties I was shocked to learn even existed, like a doctor who removes branding tattoos that traffickers use to mark women.

And there are people like Jessie Tallent, a past president of the club, who is a crisis clinician working with marginalized people. She now works with families in acute crisis with behavioral concerns for their kids, particularly cases where sexual abuse or sexualized behaviors have occurred, including sex trafficking.

Tallent engages with youth at a clinic that provides behavioral health services through a state program, but she also visits youth centers, juvenile detention facilities, and even jails to be a consistent, trustworthy face in environments where she could encounter victims. She says traffickers can be relatives, or they can be strangers who target victims online or by infiltrating their family or social circle.

"These girls are singled out at parties, at the mall, walking home from school. Traffickers know what to look for: the wounded bird — the person who's either really trying to hide in a group or pushing themselves to the front for attention," Tallent says. "These are kids seeking validation. They're vulnerable, maybe in foster care or with a single parent who is never home, so they tend to double down on people who do pay attention to them."

That's when the grooming begins, she says. "Your new 'boyfriend,' who is much

older, is giving you praise. He's scary sometimes, but he tells you you're special and more mature than your friends. This will be interspersed with fun things — a party where there's alcohol, there's pot. Getting kids addicted to something early on is a big draw for traffickers."

She says the signs of grooming often come out as defensiveness among teens, especially about new friends or a new love interest. To a parent or guardian, it may just look like teenage rebelliousness but with an unclear source influencing the new behavior. "Traffickers want these kids to lead double lives — to go to school, to have dinner with their parents — so nothing seems out of the ordinary," Tallent says. "But to hide the new shoes, the expensive gifts, and their new phone."

Once that grooming takes hold, girls can quickly lose control. "Traffickers will, for example, ask for nude pictures early in the relationship," Tallent explains. "So these kids get trapped real quick, and that's the goal of traffickers."

She says a cultural shift needs to happen, where the girls aren't the ones bearing the shame and blame. "We need to stop saying it's the oldest profession," she says. "It's the oldest form of exploitation."

Prosecuting traffickers and obtaining justice for victims in criminal courts poses many challenges. Attorney Susanna Southworth is taking another approach. She files civil cases on behalf of survivors of online exploitation, child sexual abuse, child pornography, and sex trafficking. Working with other lawyers, she has sued online platforms and hotel franchisors and franchisees that, her cases argued, benefited financially from participating in a venture that they knew, or should have known, was engaged in sex trafficking. She, too, is a past president of the Pacific Northwest club.

She says after larger websites including backpage.com were shut down, some traffickers turned to the dark web to advertise services. Many still use dating or escort sites and social media to advertise, but with coded language or emojis to indicate expected payment for sex acts. Traffickers treat it as a business and the young women as a reusable commodity.

Her work has uncovered details of how the traffickers maintain systems of control. The girls have to meet quotas, say \$1,000 a night, requiring 10 or more customers over

a 12-hour period, Southworth says. The girls must make those numbers to receive food or shelter, for example. "Traffickers will also use drugs to keep the women awake and get them addicted. Then they withhold drugs or beat the girl if they don't meet the quota, and do it in front of the other girls to set the tone, a warning to everyone else that the trafficker is in charge."

During the grooming stage, a dynamic known as "trauma bonding" can develop in which a trafficker looks to fill the holes in a vulnerable victim's turbulent life: the need for a friend, a boyfriend, or a father-figure. "It's so strong that a survivor — despite having possibly been beaten to near death by their trafficker and enduring psychological abuse — will still go to great lengths not to testify against them," Southworth says.

The trauma that follows, especially from a long grooming period that can last months, can cause memory suppression and mental disorders that impact a person's ability to recall the abuse, she says.

Southworth co-founded the law firm Restore the Child PLLC to help trafficking survivors and victims of child sexual abuse material. Through the civil suits, survivors are awarded financial damages and achieve, she hopes, a measure of justice. She is district secretary for Rotary District 5030, which encompasses the Seattle metropolitan area, and serves on the boards of the Rotary Action Group Against Slavery and the nonprofit Child USA, a think tank devoted to ending child abuse with a focus on statute of limitations reform.

Those limits on the amount of time a person has to file a legal case are a major hurdle given that it can take years for survivors trafficked and exploited as children to come forward, if they ever do, Southworth says. Providing support for them to do so is about more than just building a case, says Washington, the Seattle police detective. "You're plucking them from a dysfunctional family structure, so to speak, where housing and food are often provided. If they're going to step forward and cooperate with law enforcement, they have to give all that up," he says.

"All of those structures have to be put back into place: housing, education, medical, therapists and counseling," he adds.

Opposite: An attorney who works with trafficking survivors, Susanna Southworth is a member and past president of the club that is trying to stop the forced sex trade.

51%
**Share of reported
U.S. sex trafficking
victims under age 18**



Traffickers “withhold drugs or beat the girl if they don’t meet the [nightly] quota, and do it in front of the other girls to set the tone, a warning to everyone else that the trafficker is in charge.”



One night about 20 years ago, Kristine Moreland and her fellow volunteers walked through a homeless encampment of about 15 tents in a wooded area under a Seattle bridge, offering food and wellness checks around 1 a.m. The night started off like most others. Then, from inside one of the tents, Moreland heard someone whispering: “Help. Help.” Moreland bent down and, peering through the opening, saw a naked woman. The woman asked Moreland to take her someplace safe. After getting her to a hotel room, Moreland saw that the woman was covered in bruises. She listened as the woman told of being repeatedly raped by multiple men over several days while being forced to stay in the tent. “It was then that I understood the vulnerability,” Moreland says.

In the two decades since, Moreland, a former mortgage broker, has volunteered to help sex trafficking survivors and people without homes, a population where service providers are likely to intercept trafficking, she says.

Moreland is also a survivor. She was trafficked when she was 8 years old by a neighbor who’d been entrusted to watch her as her mother worked long hours. Moreland shared the story for the first time publicly in 2024, speaking through tears to about 500 people gathered for the annual luncheon for the nonprofit StolenYouth.

Moreland, who joined the Pacific Northwest club not long after, recently took another leap: She let her mortgage license expire and devoted herself full time to the nonprofit she founded. The organization, called The More We Love, provides hotel stays and other immediate emergency services to vulnerable youth and adults, including those trying to exit the sex industry. She runs the organization with a fellow survivor, Sarah Ann Hamilton, who was trafficked along Aurora Avenue North starting at 12 years old.

Moreland’s mantra is to “be someone’s constant,” a regular source of support. She’s built connections with people she’s helped, including the survivor she discovered in that tent two decades ago: “We walked together for many, many years.”



Above left: A trafficking survivor, club member Kristine Moreland founded The More We Love, which helps sex industry survivors. **Below left:** Sarah Ann Hamilton, another survivor, is director of survivor services at The More We Love. **Opposite:** An inspiring new mural adorns Aurora Avenue.



Virginia McKenzie describes it as a bolt of lightning, a particular moment during a panel on human trafficking that her former Rotary club hosted in 2015. One of the presenters told about a local sting operation in which a fake advertisement was posted online offering sexual services, purportedly from a 15-year-old girl. Within two hours, the ad attracted 250 calls. Another presenter revealed that many of the people who bought sex from children in King County worked at local businesses and that the peak time when people solicit sex online is during the workday, at 2 p.m.

"I couldn't believe it. I just kept thinking, 'Do I sit next to someone who looked at this? Do I work with them?'" McKenzie remembers. "I didn't know what to do, so I started looking at all the service providers in Seattle. I went to their trainings, their galas, their talks — everything. And I just tried to figure out who's working on this, and how can I be helpful and bring my Rotarian friends with me."

She connected with the peacebuilders

committee in the Rotary Club of Seattle, where she helped organize a project to train over 1,000 firefighters, EMTs, and other health care workers how to recognize and respond to signs of trafficking.

That work led her to form the Pacific Northwest club. Its signature effort today is to provide similar education to students, teachers, and caregivers in partnership with 3Strands Global Foundation. Together, they recruit other Rotary clubs to apply for \$300 grants to help provide the training in their communities. "Education is sustainable, low-cost, and high impact," McKenzie says. "With education, these young people are less likely to grow up to be exploited, or to be exploiters, and they're watchdogs for their friends."

The club is also exploring the creation of a public awareness campaign to install anti-trafficking ads on billboards and city transit ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup games hosted by Seattle and more than a dozen other cities in North America.

The club works in collaboration with the larger, global Rotary Action Group

Against Slavery. Together, they provide a forum for discussing solutions to trafficking and the other social challenges — from homelessness to domestic violence — that make people vulnerable. Alongside those with deep knowledge and others, like me, who had little background beyond a desire to help, I've found a place and purpose here too, helping tell the story.

Amid last summer's gunbattles, the city closed off the entrance to 101st Street from Aurora Avenue North to vehicle traffic using concrete barriers, a move meant to disrupt the sex trade there and associated violence. Whether that and the revised loitering law have long-term effects remains unclear, though traffic has slowed and much of the gunfire has quieted since.

On a recent walk, I adjust my route to wander through the intersection. I notice something new: a mural of swirling color has appeared covering the corner building that had been scarred by bullet holes. On one side, keeping watch over Aurora Avenue, is the face of a girl blowing bright yellow stars from her hands. ■

If you are in the U.S. and suspect someone is being trafficked, please call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888. In Canada, call the Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-833-900-1010. To learn more about how to protect children and teens from traffickers and identify signs of grooming, visit 3Strands Global Foundation at **3sgf.org**. To find out more about the Rotary Club of the Pacific Northwest Ending Sex Trafficking, visit **rotarypnw.org**.



Things to know about Mário

Meet your
2025-26 Rotary
president,
**Mário César
Martins de
Camargo**

After a day of interviews with the committee vetting candidates for 2025-26 Rotary International president, Mário César Martins de Camargo returned to his hotel and waited. And waited. “It’s an elimination process,” he says. “The anxiety level reaches sky high.” When he got a call asking him to return to Rotary headquarters in Evanston, his first thought was that he’d made some sort of mistake. As he walked the few blocks to the building, he mentally reviewed everything he’d said. When he finally realized why he’d been called back, it was an emotional moment, he says. “The nominating committee stands up and applauds you, and you are invited to say your first words as president. Mine were, ‘Are you guys sure?’”

They were, of course. De Camargo’s Rotary résumé goes back decades. A member of the Rotary Club of Santo André, Brazil, since 1980, he served as his club’s Rotary Youth Exchange officer the following year at age 24 and as its president in 1992-93. He was governor of District 4420 (part of Brazil’s São Paulo state) in 1999-2000, Rotary Foundation trustee in 2015-19, and Rotary International director in 2019-21. He has also served Rotary as an RI learning facilitator, committee member and chair, and task force member. De Camargo and his wife, Denise da Silva de Camargo, also a Rotarian, are Major Donors and Benefactors of The Rotary Foundation.

Professionally, de Camargo was president of the printing company Gráfica Bandeirantes and has been a consultant to the print industry in Brazil. He has served as president and chair of several printing and graphics trade associations. He has been on the board of Casa da Esperança (House of Hope), a medical center in Santo André sponsored by his Rotary club that sees more than 200,000 patients a year.

That’s his official biography. But we wanted to know, *What’s de Camargo really like, what makes him tick?* Here’s what we found out.

His biggest regret is that he stopped playing piano.

From the ages of 8 to 21, de Camargo played piano. He even attended a music conservatory for nine of those years. While in Germany apprenticing at a press manufacturer, he attended German language classes at the Goethe Institute. The school had a Steinway piano that “to me, was the Rolls-Royce of pianos,” he recalls. The school’s dean allowed him to play it under one condition: he perform for the school when his training was finished. “It was the last time I played the piano,” he says, explaining that family and work obligations began to take more of his time. “I really regret not being able to continue because it is a self-rewarding experience.”

He believes printers have a noble cause.

Printing presses have their origins in China, where movable type was invented in the 11th century. When Johannes Gutenberg created the mechanized printing press in Germany 400 years later, it launched the mass production of books, newspapers, and more throughout Europe. “The press and the publication of books and ideas changed the world,” de Camargo says, allowing scientific findings to be shared more widely, decreasing censorship as it was harder to destroy a “dangerous idea,” and giving the general public access to educational materials.

De Camargo’s business used to print 25 million to 30 million items per year: coffee table books, romance novels, automotive industry manuals — “you name it,” he says. “We were replicators of ideas. Printers have a mission to reduce ignorance.”

Rotary is the best leadership training he’s ever had.

De Camargo has been on several boards in his industry, but it was through Rotary that he learned how to be a leader. “Rotary is the best school of leadership I’ve had,” he says. De Camargo says Rotary taught him to speak in public, one of people’s biggest fears, along with flying. (“If I was still afraid of flying and speaking in public, I wouldn’t be president of Rotary International, because all we do is public speaking and flying!” he says.) He also learned when to stop talking and listen. “You have to pay attention to what people are telling you,” he says. “It is an exercise of humility.” And he learned how to motivate people who aren’t getting paid to perform a task. “When

you're motivating volunteers, you don't have that tool of payment. The only tool you have is inspiration, motivation, and challenge to make them a better person."

▶ **This is the most memorable Rotary advice he's received: Never ask for anything, never refuse anything.**

As co-chair of the Host Organization Committee for the 2015 Rotary International Convention in São Paulo, de Camargo received these words of wisdom from John Kenny, a past Rotary president who was The Rotary Foundation trustee chair at the time. "That has oriented my Rotary journey," he says. "I never refused any job that was given to me by Rotary or The Rotary Foundation, but at the same time I offered myself for different positions without knowing what the result would be," he says. "I could never fathom that I would be here someday."

▶ **People call him Membership Mário.**

"It's not rocket science," he says. "If you look at our numbers, some people say we have stabilized at 1.2 million. I say we have stagnated at 1.2 million." The word "stabilize" makes people sit back and relax, he believes, whereas the word "stagnate" makes people want to sit up and do something.

The puzzle, he says, is figuring out why membership is increasing in some areas and decreasing in others. "Maybe it's demographics, maybe it's economics, maybe it's an age thing," he says. "The challenge motivates me so much because it's a mosaic of different regions and different performances that makes it very challenging and at the same time very attractive."

What works in Korea may not work in Germany, and what works in Germany may not work in Brazil or the U.S., he says. "We have to be humble and very attentive to the different scenarios."

▶ **The 2025-26 presidential message is *Unite for Good*.**

"I think 'unite' is a very powerful word," he says. "It's a very powerful word in a divided world."

It's easy to sow division, he says, but much harder to find common ground. "We are always looking for somebody's defects," he says. "We should be looking for somebody else's talents." That's where Rotary comes in, offering the opportunity for people to connect with others in their community and around the world.



RI President-elect Mário César Martins de Camargo and 2024-26 RI Directors (from left) Christine Etienne, Alain Van de Poel, and Daniel V. Tanase at One Rotary Center in Evanston, Illinois.

De Camargo has been on several boards in his industry, but it was through Rotary that he learned how to be a leader. "Rotary is the best school of leadership I've had," he says.

▶ **He believes a focus on the environment will draw younger members.**

Before de Camargo, the last RI president to come from Brazil was Paulo V.C. Costa in 1990-91. Costa is best known for the environmental program he started, Preserve Planet Earth, which launched shortly before the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Had Rotary kept the environment as a central focus then, de Camargo says, "we would be far ahead, bringing a visionary agenda to the world." As a Rotary director, de Camargo helped secure approval of the environment as the newest area of focus. "We still have a lot of room to grow," he says.

In 2025, the annual UN conference on climate change, COP30, will be held in the Brazilian Amazon, and de Camargo sees a place for Rotary to get involved. "Rotary should have its logo, its brand, associated with environmental protection in the Amazon," he says. "We have a unique opportunity to do that."

▶ **He gets to know a city by walking.**

"When I go to Chicago or New York or São Paulo or wherever, when I have the

chance, I just put on my tennis shoes and I start walking," he says, "just seeing the colors, the smells, the different foods, the people." It's the best way to feel like a local, he says. "You cannot do that by Uber or by driving a car. You're not part of the environment. But when you're walking, you feel like you are." But he doesn't stop at the city. De Camargo is a fan of hiking. "I love the outdoors, to be able to breathe fresh air," he says.

▶ **Yes, he once dressed as Super Mario.**

Step into de Camargo's office at One Rotary Center in Evanston and you'll notice a collection of figurines based on Super Mario, the Nintendo character. "That was the idea of Trustee Akira Miki, who was a director with me on the Board in 2019-20," he says. "He immediately called me Super Mario, and it started catching." At the 2024 Rotary institute in Toronto, de Camargo dressed up as the character and engaged in a mock battle with Past RI President Holger Knaack, part of a Rotary Foundation fundraiser that netted \$115,000. "I put the moustache upside down, but I'll get better," he says. "Whatever it takes to raise money for The Rotary Foundation." ■

GOODWILL

Secrets to successful fundraising

Tips from clubs that lead in Rotary Foundation giving

In places where winter brings snow and ice, a classic Rotary club fundraiser is the polar plunge. It's downright heroic to jump into an icy lake when the outdoor temperature is below freezing, so participants have little trouble getting their friends and families to pledge to donate. But what about when winter temperatures are far above freezing, as they usually are in Alpharetta, Georgia? Do people still get excited — and open their wallets — for a less-than-icy plunge?

You bet they do.

"It's a unique fundraiser here," says Jeff Davis, president of the Rotary Club of Alpharetta. "It's not something you really think about a lot in the state of Georgia, so we usually get a segment on the local news. In 2020 we actually had snow. We've gotten a ton of use out of the pictures of that year's snowy polar bear plunge."

This unconventional approach to fundraising has worked well for the Alpharetta club. Last year's plunge raised more than \$150,000 for Rotary and other local charities, and that wasn't the only benefit.

"It's a great advertisement for Rotary," Davis says. "Folks in the community get a better understanding of what Rotary does. It's more visibility, which helps bring in more members and ultimately more donations."

Fundraising is a year-round activity for many of the clubs that raise the most for The Rotary Foundation. One of them, the Rotary Club of Taipei Nankong, Taiwan, asks all members to donate at least \$100 each year.

"We have a baseline for basic fundraising every single year," says Johnny Hou, the club's vice president and membership chair. "We also encourage members to donate to special campaigns, like polio [eradication], and to specific projects."

One of the club's main projects in 2024 was establishing a free health clinic in Changbin, a rural township in southeast Taiwan. It also collaborated with clubs in Myanmar to open a similar clinic there and is working to launch another one in Thailand.

"We collected donations to fulfill those projects. Our members are motivated and very generous," Hou says. "This year we might double or triple our donations compared to last year."

Other clubs emphasize donating in November, which is Rotary Foundation Month. "During Foundation Month, we hold informational meetings about The Rotary Foundation," says Tomoaki Kurebayashi, a member of the Rotary Club of Toyohashi, Japan. "And we try to announce information about giving at all our meetings. We take care to properly explain the purpose of the donation so as not to overstep the bounds of the request and force the donation."

One of the Toyohashi club's signature projects dates back to 1998. The club works with the Rotary Club of Bangkok Benjasiri, Thailand, and members of Thailand's Indigenous hill tribes to develop housing and educational resources for tribe members. Tying donations to specific projects also has

been effective for the Rotary Club of Edmonton South, Alberta, which was one of the top fundraising clubs around Giving Tuesday 2023. One of its main projects is in Belize building playgrounds and supporting education for girls.

"A number of our members have traveled to Belize to build these playgrounds. Their enthusiasm rubs off on other members and creates financial support," says Brian Rothwell, who served as the club's Foundation chair from 2021 through 2024.

The key to successful fundraising, Rothwell says, is having a strong club with members who believe in Rotary's ideals. He notes that his club's members are diverse in age and gender.

"They're very willing to engage with the community and support international projects," he says. "Our meetings are lively, with many good speakers. Members want to attend, and financial support becomes a natural consideration of belonging to the club."

Rothwell has tried to get as many members as possible to contribute even a small amount to the Foundation every year and has found testimonials from contributing members to be useful. But he cautions against placing too much emphasis on fundraising. Instead, he says, club leaders should focus on building a strong, nurturing culture.

"Clubs should avoid a 'hard sell' when it comes to contributions. We use a gentler approach," he says. "If the club is strong and supportive of its members, the money will come."

— ETELKA LEHOCZKY

Make your contribution to The Rotary Foundation at rotary.org/donate.



TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

A glass half full

After joining Rotary, you never look at a glass of water the same way again.

Holding it, you are humbled by the privilege of access to drinkable water. Then, you recall how Rotary brings communities and water experts together to deliver safe drinking water to places in need of it, transforming lives.

According to the United Nations, 2 billion people lack access to safely managed drinking water, and 3.6 billion lack safely managed sanitation. During March, we focus on our commitment to addressing water, sanitation, and hygiene challenges through our clubs and The Rotary Foundation.

District and global grants, made possible by the Foundation, provide a direct way for members to engage in water and sanitation projects. My wife, Gay, and I have seen the transformative power of these grants. Our clubs, the Rotary Clubs of Decatur and Decatur Daybreak, Alabama, partnered with the Rotary Club of Ecatepec, Mexico, to sanitize cisterns and tanks for about 300 schools.

We are also launching a new global grant to provide rainwater collection systems for 50 Indigenous families in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Chihuahua, in partnership with five organizations.

Globally, Rotary employs comprehensive approaches to these initiatives. In Mexico, the global grant-funded program Niñas Sabias, or Wise Girls, empowers

girls by providing education on menstruation, building self-esteem, and purchasing reusable menstrual products.

Our partnership with USAID in Uganda has shown how small-scale piped water systems can deliver cost-effective, sustainable solutions. By investing in local governance and technical capacity, this initiative ensures long-term access to clean water for entire regions.

Rotary's Programs of Scale also demonstrate the power of interdisciplinary strategies. In India's water-scarce regions, Rotary promotes solutions such as rainwater harvesting and groundwater recharge, integrating water management with agricultural productivity to enhance sustainability and resilience.

Moving forward, we will continue improving how we deliver water and boost sanitation, focusing on regional planning, strengthening delivery systems, and fostering partnerships.

Be proud to be part of this meaningful work — and please consider supporting it.

When you give to The Rotary Foundation, you not only help us reach our 2024-25 fundraising goal of \$500 million, you also play a role in ensuring Rotary can make clean water, effective sanitation, and hygiene accessible for generations.

MARK DANIEL MALONEY

Foundation trustee chair

SERVICE ABOVE SELF

THE OBJECT OF ROTARY

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

First The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service;

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

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

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

THE FOUR-WAY TEST

Of the things we think, say or do:

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

ROTARIAN CODE OF CONDUCT

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

As a Rotarian, I will

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

GENEVA JOURNAL

THE NEXT GLOBAL LEADERS

YOUNG TRAILBLAZERS
FIND INSPIRATION
AT ROTARACT UN DAYS



The first Rotaract UN Days brought about 200 young people to the United Nations Office at Geneva for four days of inspiring discussions about human rights, health, economic development, peace, and science — and of course some fun (they're Rotaractors, after all). We asked three participants in the 30 October-2 November gathering to tell us about the experience, their takeaways, and what it was like to enter the halls of the historic Palais des Nations.

THE ROTARACTORS



ZAYNE SINCLAIR

- Entrepreneur, food security, sustainable development
- Rotaract Club of Bermuda
- Hamilton City, Bermuda

HANEKKAH RAHIL

- Law graduate, advocate for peace and climate justice
- Rotaract Club of Cinnamon Gardens
- Dehiwala, Sri Lanka



LAMECH OPIYO

- Climate activist
- Rotaract Club of Nairobi Central
- Nairobi, Kenya

DAY ONE

ARRIVAL AND WELCOME



That's me, Haneekah!

+ my Rotary friends

Shahid Elshazly & Noel Kutz

Landing in Geneva feels surreal. Over the past year, I've traveled to events in Dubai, Mexico, and Chicago. But Geneva's been on my bucket list for as long as I can remember. Even better, I quickly run into my friend Christina from my Rotary district. What are the odds? Even better still, it's her birthday. We head into the city center to do some sightseeing and sample Switzerland's legendary chocolate. Let me tell you, it did not disappoint. We head back for the welcome cocktail ceremony and after running into more old friends, we celebrate Christina's birthday at a rooftop bar with a gorgeous view of the city. — **ZAYNE SINCLAIR**

In 2020, I was deputy secretary general for the National Youth Model United Nations in Sri Lanka. I made a promise to myself: One day, I would walk through the halls of the United Nations Office in Geneva. But little did I know that Rotary would bring this dream to life. I'm so excited to see inside the iconic Palais des Nations. — **HANEKKAH RAHIL**

As an environmentalist, I'm very interested in working with the UN in Nairobi, where I'm from and the home to the United Nations Environment Programme, which partners with Rotary on clean water projects. So, I have dreamed of visiting the United Nations Office at Geneva for a long time.

— **LAMECH OPIYO**



DAY TWO

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT GENEVA

I stop to take a picture in front of the United Nations building. I'm not exactly sure why I feel compelled to do it, maybe as a silent promise to myself that one day I'll contribute to service on this scale, far beyond Bermuda's pink shores. The morning session begins with a welcome address by Tatiana Valovaya, the first woman to serve as director-general here. She shares that only 20 percent of global diplomatic roles are held by women, a sobering statistic. Another eye-opener: Even Grammy-winning singer Gaby Moreno has self-doubts at times. The Rotary celebrity ambassador is speaking about the migration crisis, particularly in Latin America, when she acknowledges once doubting whether her music could make a difference. But she realized that just bringing people joy and comfort matters. My takeaway: Even the smallest acts can create ripples of hope. Then, as if to make that point, Moreno closes out the session with a heartfelt performance of her music. — **ZAYNE SINCLAIR**

In her speech, Rotary President Stephanie Urchick puts an emphasis on youth as leaders of today — not just of tomorrow. That is incredibly powerful and resonates deeply with me. Later, I have the honor of sharing a panel discussion with her. During my own speech on youth in humanitarian action, I discuss the role young people play in driving solutions to global challenges. It is my vision to see Rotaract working toward peace and reconciliation in my home country of Sri Lanka after decades of civil war. — **HANEKAH RAHIL**

I don't just get to meet Gaby Moreno, I have the honor of sitting on the same panel as her for a discussion about human rights, immigrants, and refugees. I've interacted with so many artists, but what stands out with her is how she uses her songs to advocate for human rights and to create something positive, which I find inspiring. She is very approachable. She shares her insights and encourages me to do the work that I do. Apart from the serious side, we are having lots of fun. The first evening we attend a VIP dinner and awards ceremony with cocktails. There is a DJ, so of course we dance a lot. Sometimes you almost forget to sleep! — **LAMECH OPIYO**



Gaby Moreno performing!

[illegible]

DAY FOUR

An outing to the birthplace of the World Wide Web! The CERN international physics laboratory on the Swiss-French border is also home to the world's largest particle accelerator and more than 12,000 scientists from over 70 countries exploring the origins of the universe and more. Its legacy is not just in scientific discovery but in proving that collaboration can overcome division. As CERN's former Director-General Rolf-Dieter Heuer told us a day earlier: "Science has no agenda; it belongs to everyone." I am struck by the similarity with our Ro-taract values — collaboration, innovation, and the drive to create a better future. — **ZAYNE SINCLAIR**

— HANEEKAH RAHIL

ESSAY

Against the odds

An endurance athlete with ALS stirs hope — and memories of my dad

By Carol Frey



When I was in my 40s raising a lively sixth grader with my husband, I was getting ready to go to a Sunday school teachers meeting in 1997 when my mom called sobbing with news of Dad's diagnosis.

A onetime high school diving champ in Joplin, Missouri, and retired chemist, my dad had been slurring his speech. He learned at age 67 that he had Lou Gehrig's disease, with a grim prognosis from his doctor. There is no cure for the neurological disorder, also called amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, that takes your body's movement and eventually attacks the muscles that enable you to breathe.

I made it to that meeting at my church but dissolved in tears when someone innocently asked, "How are you?" Between bouts of crying, the best response our family had to ALS was to pull together and get to work. My husband, Ed Miller, hired a contractor to turn an unfinished downstairs space in our house outside Raleigh, North Carolina, into an apartment for Mom and Dad in about six weeks. Their suburban St. Louis split-level away from family was no place for Dad to go through ALS. Within a month after they moved in, Dad needed a ventilator to help him breathe, and Mom and I began a crash course in home health care.

When I first learned of Andrea Lytle Peet, I immediately thought of my family's experience helping my dad through his last months with this disease, which took his voice but not his daily laughter at *Judge Judy* no matter how bad he felt.

Peet's experience with ALS has similarities to my dad's, but also key differences that bring hope to me and so many others touched by the disease, which has an average survival time of two to five years. To start, she's defied the odds and lived more than a decade with ALS. Then there are the 50 marathons she's logged on a recumbent tricycle since her diagnosis.

Duke University neurologist Richard Bedlack has followed Peet's progress as a case of someone who has lived longer than others typically do with the disease, as did renowned physicist Stephen Hawking, who had ALS for more than 50 years.

The disease has a lower number of viable treatments compared with some types of cancer, for example. For most

people, doctors don't know what causes the disease, though a small portion of cases is due to mutations, or differences, in a person's genes. Since the ALS Association's popular ice bucket challenge in 2014 that inspired people worldwide to dump frigid water on their heads to encourage donations, the organization says that it has been able to invest in projects to speed the pipeline of treatments. One recent advance was the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's 2023 conditional approval of the first medicine for a rare form of the disease, targeting a gene mutation. "It's our first blockbuster drug," Bedlack says.

I wondered whether Peet's dedication to vigorous physical activity is what helps her beat back the disease, and, as a retired journalist, I wanted to find out. In her earlier days, Peet led a rowing team in college and ran the Washington, D.C., streets for exercise. She ran a marathon and completed nine triathlons, including a 70.3-mile half Ironman, before her doctor told her in 2014 that she had ALS. The physician advised her at age 33 to put her affairs in order.

"In less than a year, I went from intense activity to walking with a cane," Peet, now in her 40s, told me when we finally sat down for an interview in the cafe of the fitness center where she works out. Her doctor predicted that would happen and prepared her to expect the disease's attack on her breathing muscles. He told her about the abysmal survival rate for most people who have ALS.

"I'd cry when I'd see somebody running on the sidewalk," says Peet, who wore sparkling high-tops with her wed-

ding gown. So many things changed that had been important to her. At first.

She and her husband, David Peet, decided to put their energy into transforming their encounter with the disease into something positive. "Can I have hope again? I believe in hope. I do," she says.

She left an urban planning career, the couple moved to North Carolina where she grew up, and Peet started working out again to build strength for a goal she had in mind. A couple of members of my Rotary club first met Peet at the fitness center, and the rest of us learned of her story when she came to speak at one of our meetings. She showed us her low-riding three-wheeler that allows the seated rider to lean back and can be easier to operate for people who have limited mobility.

Blowing past her doctor's life expectancy estimate, Peet achieved her goal to complete a trike marathon in every state, finishing the 50th event in May 2022 in Alaska.

Her stamina, triumph, and longevity have inspired me and other Rotary members and many others to donate to research to find a cure or treatment that helps people with ALS live longer. Early on, she and her husband formed the nonprofit Team Drea Foundation to raise money for research on a disease that affects an estimated 30,000 Americans and 3,000 Canadians, to give two example countries. So far, by joining other families affected by ALS, the foundation reports raising \$1.4 million.

The foundation is funding a new leg of Bedlack's research through the Duke ALS Clinic on similarities among people who recover a significant amount of the movement they had lost, a rare group he calls "ALS reversals." Researchers can't explain why some people's health unexpectedly improves after initially meeting the criteria for a diagnosis of progressive ALS, but he worked with researchers from other institutions to identify genetic features in these people that may suggest a pathway to treatment with further study, which Peet's foundation supports.

In 2023 the five Rotary clubs in Cary, North Carolina, raised money for ALS research by screening a documentary about Peet, *Go On, Be Brave*. In 2024, members of my Rotary Club of Cary-Page celebrated with Peet when she received the Order of the Long Leaf

**Blowing past
her doctor's life
expectancy estimate,
Peet achieved her
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every state.**



Pine award, the highest award for service in North Carolina, granted by the governor. We also made her an honorary member of our club.

Margaret Sophie, of the Rotary Club of Cary MacGregor, is among those raising money, by competing in golf and cornhole events. And Sophie represents Team Drea when it's time for the real estate agency where she works to make decisions about its charitable giving in the community.

Peet "has no staff, nobody paid, no office. Every transaction I do in real estate includes a portion for Team Drea," Sophie says.

In turn, working with the Team Drea Foundation has been its own source of inspiration for Sophie and other Rotarians. "When I wake up tired and don't really want to get up to face that tough little world out there, then I think of Andrea with her smile, and I've just got to get up," she says.

Seeing Peet exercising in the fitness club pool pushes Julia Copley, a past president of the Cary-Page club, to keep working out herself and "to live each day with kindness and integrity and gratitude for the health we've been given."

Peet describes in a biography on her foundation's website how she should

already have lost that feeling of working her muscles and lungs hard while cycling outside. "These simple joys are denied to people with ALS as they are forced to watch themselves die, muscle by muscle."

My family relates to Peet's family. Her mother, Sandra Lytle, wore her own emotional pain on her face when she listened in as her daughter relived her grief in our interview. My dad wrote notes when he could no longer talk and eventually learned to communicate better with a computer. Our family, including my brother, who drove two hours every weekend to be with Dad, shared responsibilities through his hospitalizations and rehab stays, taking him for occasional excursions and even a beach vacation. In the days following the Fourth of July 1998, the three adults in our household kept vigil with Dad in a hospital where he took his final breaths, while our daughter went on an outing with a neighbor's family.

In less than two years after his diagnosis, Dad died peacefully without pain. Mom spent much of the first month grieving with lights turned off, before a visit to her Missouri hometown to reconnect with old friends helped spur her reentry into life. In her mid-90s, Mom said she was amazed to learn about the quality of Peet's life with ALS.

When Dr. Bedlack heard about Peet's attempt to complete 50 marathons, he said, "Give me some notice if you get to number 50. I'll come to see that." He hadn't counted on number 50 happening on remote Prince of Wales Island in Alaska, but he had become a witness to Peet's extraordinary determination and in 2022 booked flights, boats, and vans for the three-day trip.

"Andrea is an amazing human being who happens to have ALS. She could easily live past the 20-year mark," Bedlack says. "I tell patients there are so many things we can do now to slow this disease down. And you can fight to live a great life." Beyond mental health support and physical therapy, doctors are exploring gene and cellular-level therapies, potential medicines, and robotics and other technology to help with eating and communication.

Is Peet living a great life? Without hesitation, Bedlack says, "She's living one of the greatest lives I've ever seen." ■

Carol Frey, a member of the Rotary Club of Cary-Page in Raleigh, North Carolina, is a retired journalist who worked odd hours against deadlines for 35 years. Her dad encouraged her career, saying she could do anything with enough hard work.

2025 CONVENTION

Make Calgary the first of many



We hear it over and over from members:

Everyone needs to experience the Rotary International Convention at least once. (And grab a discount while you're at it! The last day to register before prices increase for the convention in Calgary is 31 March.)

Convention newbies, from Rotaractors to new club leaders, will reap the reward that results from thousands of members coming together: the feeling that you belong to something bigger than yourself. "You have to feel it. You have to be here in the moment. There's no other way," says Nadine Broghammer, of the Rotary E-Club of 2000, her district in Switzerland.

That feeling turns first-timers into convention regulars. A top takeaway for Broghammer and other new convention attendees last year in Singapore was the deep knowledge they gained about how to make measurable improvements for people in their communities.

Members kindle their fire for service listening to leading experts at general sessions. During the convention in Canada 21-25 June, you'll learn from Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist for the Nature Conservancy who analyzes data on climate change to help leaders and the public understand the effects. She is widely considered one of the most skilled communicators on the topic. One of her recent book titles sums up her optimistic approach: *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*.

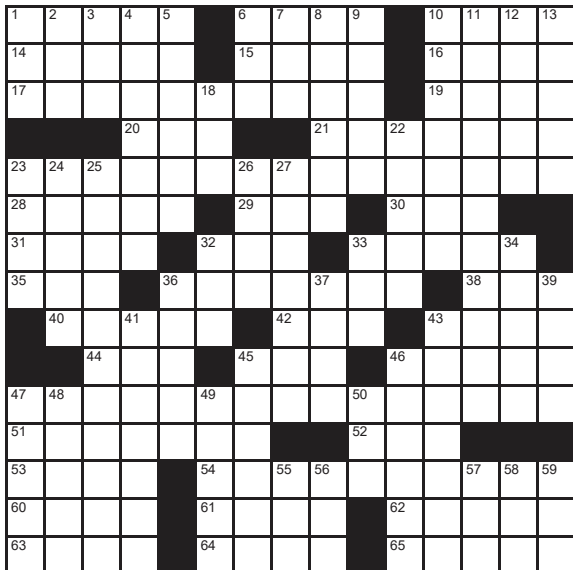
If you still feel unsure about trying the convention, Paula Santiago encourages every member to give it a shot. "Never in my life have I experienced making about 25 friendships in a span of six days," says Santiago, president of the Rotary Club of Champaign (West), Illinois, whose first convention was in Singapore. "The Rotary Convention is life-changing." ■

Learn more and register at convention.rotary.org.

CROSSWORD

Spring appeal

By Victor Fleming
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas



Solution on **page 23**

ACROSS

- 1 Bridge beams
- 6 Badly worn, as tires
- 10 Solvers' reactions
- 14 Salsa queen Cruz
- 15 Baby bang-up
- 16 Shower alternative
- 17 Start of an apt verse for this month
- 19 Foal's father
- 20 "All ___ day's work"
- 21 "That's not true!"
- 23 Part 2 of the verse
- 28 Adjoins
- 29 Smart den fixtures
- 30 Word after curtain or lightning
- 31 Caramel candy brand
- 32 Have regrets about
- 33 Chart anew
- 35 Ltr. enclosure
- 36 Part 3 of the verse
- 38 Word before dance or water
- 40 Municipalities
- 42 Certain baseball positions (abbr.)
- 43 Detest
- 44 Like a fiddle
- 45 Bum ___
- 46 Block, perhaps
- 47 Part 4 of the verse
- 51 Home of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival

- 52 "Good" cholesterol, for short
- 53 "I thought ___ never ask!"
- 54 End of the verse
- 60 "I've Got the Music ___" (1974 song by the Kiki Dee Band)
- 61 Descartes or Lacoste
- 62 Destroyed
- 63 Cornhusker's st.
- 64 *The Nanny* name
- 65 Poet William Butler ___

DOWN

- 1 "___ bin ein Berliner"
- 2 Busy one
- 3 "I'm ___ ears!"
- 4 Aggressively tear open
- 5 After-exercise refreshers
- 6 ___ choy
- 7 Amaze
- 8 Certain nonviolent protests
- 9 Company divs.
- 10 When doubled, a 1936 Faulkner novel
- 11 Eschewed Lyft and Uber
- 12 Skylit office spaces
- 13 Platoon star
- 18 Took a load off
- 22 Fallen rocks
- 23 Rows
- 24 Lusitania sinker
- 25 General principle regarded as roughly correct
- 26 "Shake ___" (1981 song by the Cars)
- 27 Seized control of
- 32 Parts of apts.
- 33 Airstream offerings
- 34 At-home outdoor dining locale
- 36 Mural opening?
- 37 Life ___
- 39 Scranton's st.
- 41 Ax ___ (one who's chopping down trees)
- 43 Crisis phone number
- 45 Original *Saturday Night Live* star Gilda
- 46 Villain
- 47 Entrance ramp, perhaps
- 48 All together
- 49 Eat up, with "down"
- 50 "Love ___ neighbor"
- 55 ___ lab
- 56 "The Little Red ___"
- 57 *The Conspiracy Against Childhood* author LeShan
- 58 Picker's lead?
- 59 Hollywood's Harris and Helms

THE SEARCH FOR **THE MOST OUTSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS** 2025-2026

Philippine
Rotary
Media Foundation



Objectives

Rotary International has adopted as its Area of Focus: **Protecting the Environment**. Clubs and districts are now encouraged to apply for global grants to support environment focused activities.

The Rotary Foundation supports activities that strengthen the conservation and protection of natural resources, advance environmental sustainability, and foster harmony between people and the environment. It encourages interventions that have a positive, measurable, and sustainable impact.

Project pathways are envisioned to fulfill the following objectives:

- 1. Conserve nature and biodiversity**, from species to landscape-scale protection.
- 2. Mitigate climate change** by reducing or avoiding greenhouse gas emissions or ensuring that they are absorbed or stored in natural carbon sinks.
- 3. Facilitate sustainable and adaptable livelihood** with smaller ecological footprints that maintain people's social well-being in harmony with flourishing natural systems.
- 4. Strengthen environmental equity** by addressing socio-environmental issues that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

Search

Rotary Clubs in each of the ten (10) Rotary districts in the Philippines are invited to present and nominate projects and programs that create and foster a sustainable environment through the foregoing pathways. These projects must involve partnership with communities, including public and private institutions, or local government units (LGUs), or national government agencies.

Such projects must be in consonance with Rotary's mission, goals, core values and principles. The projects must have been actively implemented for at least one year prior to the conferment of awards.

Criteria: I-M-P-A-C-T

Innovative (15%) The project should be characterized by an out-of-the-box approach both in terms of understanding the problem and in providing solutions.

Multiplicative (15%) The project should be replicable in other communities, while ensuring that the local context is sufficiently adapted in the project design.

Problem-Solution Fit (15%) Solutions should emanate from clearly-identified social-ecological needs. These should be demonstrably responsive to the problems identified and assessed needs.

Able To Be Sustained (20%) Interventions have a long-term view both in terms of continuity and impact.

Co-Production (15%) The project should be co-designed with the community that is engaged in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating it.

Transformative (20%) Verifiable and positive changes in social behavior and in the environment should be demonstrated. Project objectives are met satisfactorily. Safeguards are in place to deal with unintended consequences that could threaten project viability

Selection & Awards

Each District shall select the Most Outstanding Project from among those submitted by the Clubs. The Most Outstanding Project shall receive a cash prize of Fifty Thousand Pesos (₱50,000) and a Certificate of Recognition.

PRMFI shall form and constitute a Board of Judges that shall select the Top Three Most Outstanding Projects.

Cash prizes and appropriate tokens of recognition will be given as follows: Gold Prize, ₱300,000; Silver Prize, ₱200,000; Bronze Prize, ₱150,000.





Learn more and register at
convention.rotary.org



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