

# People of Action!

WINTER 2024

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**CHAMPAIGN ROTARY  
CHAMPIONS VOCATIONAL  
STUDENTS IN KENYA**  
page 8

**STARTING FROM  
SCRATCH IN PAXTON**  
page 2

**A LIGHT IN DANVILLE; DICTIONARIES  
IN PARIS; DIAPERS IN BLOOMINGTON**  
pages 9-12

**THE MAGIC OF  
ROTARY IN BRAZIL**  
page 3

**D6490 ROTARIANS SERVING IN THE  
COMMUNITY & MORE!**

**CHAMPAIGN WEST IMPACTS  
STUDENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES**  
page 5

**D6490 THANKSGIVING & HOLIDAY  
CHEER!**

**PADS TO UGANDA & SUPPORT  
NEEDED FOR PUMPS IN GHANA**  
page 7-8

**Rotary**   
District 6490

# STARTING FROM SCRATCH

New Rotary club on horizon in Paxton, as 16 attend meeting held to gauge interest

**By Will Brumleve**  
**Ford County Chronicle**

As Paxton Main Street Director Donna Pepper spoke in a recent “Chambana Proud” podcast about her community’s efforts to revitalize its historical downtown, Janet Ellis Nelson was listening with interest — and amazement. Ellis-Nelson, a Champaign Rotary Club member in her first year as membership chair for Rotary District 6490, said she was “blown away” upon hearing of the numerous downtown buildings that have been purchased, restored and put back to use by Paxton natives Jeff and John Grove, who now live in Florida, as well as the variety of new businesses that have opened on Market Street in the Ford County seat, which just so happens to also have a new \$1 million downtown streetscape. “I thought, ‘This vibrant community needs a Rotary club,’” Ellis Nelson said.



Soon after hearing Pepper interviewed on the weekly podcast — which is hosted by Carly McCrory-McKay, executive director of the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation, and Terri Reifsteck, executive director of Experience Champaign-Urbana — Ellis-Nelson contacted some former Paxton Rotarians, asking if there might be interest in relaunching a Rotary club in Paxton, which has not had one for about 10 years. “I did find a few people who had been members of (the disbanded Rotary club in) Paxton who moved away,” Ellis-Nelson said. “They gave me some names of people to contact (in Paxton), and they were really excited about the prospect of restarting it.”

Such prospects seem even brighter today for Ellis-Nelson, who hosted an informational meeting at the Prairie City Wine Room in downtown Paxton on Jan. 23 to gauge community interest.



Ellis-Nelson

Photos courtesy of Donna Pepper

“Surprisingly -- because I was worried nobody was going to come -- we had 16 movers and shakers there who were very interested, and only one had been a member of Rotary before,” Ellis-Nelson said. “I would say, maybe a little less than half of the people (who attended) are retired and looking to do something meaningful in their retirement.” Ellis-Nelson noted that several other community members have also expressed interest in joining the club, even though they were unable to attend Thursday’s meeting.

“So I’m hopeful about that, too,” Ellis-Nelson said.

Cont. pg 16

# THE MAGIC OF ROTARY

By Bill Lair | Charleston Rotary Club



The Magic of Rotary is everywhere.

In my 30-plus years of Rotary Youth Exchange, I have witnessed the Magic of Rotary many times. And if you have an hour or so, I would be more than happy to share some of those magical moments with you!

But The Magic of Rotary can strike anywhere. The magic can come from proudly wearing the Rotary pin or the ringing of the meeting bell. The magic can even save lives. That belief was reaffirmed recently on a Rotary Youth Exchange (what else?) visit to Brazil in November.

A Brazil elementary school PE teacher named Delma said Rotary magic came into her life at an early age.

"The year I was born, my dad became a Rotarian," she told a group of Rotary Youth Exchange volunteers.

## **MY FIRST WORD, AFTER 'MOM' AND 'DAD,' WAS 'ROTARY.'**

Her father, proud of his Rotary membership, would come home from a Rotary meeting, hold Delma on his lap, and point to the Rotary pin on his shirt or jacket.

"So my first word, after 'mom' and 'dad,' was 'Rotary,'" she recalled. "I was embarrassed for him to tell this story, but today I tell it with the greatest pride."

Her father brought Rotary into their family of eight children. He held family "Rotary meetings" at home and created a "flag parade" with the children carrying the flags. The family meetings began and ended with the traditional ringing of a bell.

"There was always some club project or charitable work that we participated in," Delma said. "I was raised in this Rotary environment and felt very comfortable and protected."



When Delma was 19 years old left Brazil for Scotland to work as an au pair. She also worked part-time at a restaurant there.

After a year, she wanted to see more of Europe so she went to Portugal, where she knew the language. She immediately began scouring the local newspaper for a job. She found an ad for a restaurant job that also offered housing.

"I thought, 'Wow, this job is perfect' because I won't have to spend money on food or housing." She applied and was offered the job.

But another woman told her the job wasn't restaurant work. The offer for restaurant hosting with free housing instead was for prostitution. The friend said if she showed up for work she probably would never see her Brazil family again.

"I didn't know any of that," Delma said. "And I had told the man who interviewed me my full name and gave him the address of the hotel where I was staying."

Delma was desperate, and her new 'boss' was "already coming for me to take me away."

"I was involved with the most dangerous kind of people. And if they managed to take me to their 'restaurant,' I would never be able to return to Brazil. I would never see my parents again."

Knowing her "boss" would soon pick her up, Delma called home.

"Dad, I need help in Portugal," she said to her father.

He told Delma to call him back in 10 minutes. When she called him back, he said: 'Call Governor Antonio of Rotary District 1960. He will help you.'

"The Rotary governor and his wife came for me," Delma said. "On a Wednesday, at lunch time, I walked into a meeting of the Rotary Club of Estoril, Portugal. When I heard the tap on the bell starting the meeting, it was the most comfortable sound of my life."

The bell's chime prompted memories of childhood "Rotary meetings" that her father had conducted in their home. Delma started to get tears in her eyes.

"I thought, 'Now I'm among good people. Now I'm saved.'"

She returned to Brazil, finished her education, began teaching, and joined a Rotary club.

Delma feels a "huge debt of gratitude" to Rotary.

"I know that Rotary literally saved my life," she explained.

"Right away I identified with the youth exchange program and thought this is where I want to stay," Delma said. "I want to take care of the students and not let anything bad happen to them. I want them to feel safe and protected."

And when students face obstacles on exchange, Delma wants to be "that Rotary savior, the one they can truly trust. And so I have dedicated my body and soul to this program."

And like many other Rotarians, Delma knows that The Magic of Rotary can come from any Rotarian, from a Rotary meeting, reach across borders and span generations.



# CHAMPAIGN WEST

## EXPANDS INTERNATIONAL IMPACT

In her opening address to the Champaign West Rotary Club as President for Rotary Year (RY) 2024-2025, Paula Santiago stated that one of her goals as president was to broaden the club's impact by supporting new projects, both locally and internationally. While attending the 2024 Rotary International Convention, she learned much about, and became deeply inspired by, the global impact Rotary has. That led her to consider how we, as Rotarians in central Illinois, could contribute to making a difference beyond our borders.

A very specific project came to mind as she stood in line for coffee at the Rotary International Convention in Singapore. President Paula overheard an intriguing and somewhat animated conversation discussing one club's upcoming presentation, as well as their ongoing projects. Most of us would have had no idea what that conversation was about, but because of a coincidence that might only happen at a Rotary International convention, President Paula knew exactly what was being discussed. The conversation was being held in Tagalog, the native language of the Philippines, the country where she was born and raised. Because she was fluent in that language, Paula introduced herself in Tagalog and was able to converse with the enthusiastic representatives from the Makati-McKinley Rotary Club, which is located in Paula's native country. From them, she learned about the Happy School Project and immediately felt this could be a wonderful opportunity for the club to expand its support globally.

The Happy School Project is an initiative designed to provide school shoes, bags, and supplies for hundreds of elementary students across seven of the most remote schools in the towns with the highest poverty incidence in the Northern Samar province. Northern Samar is officially recognized as among the 10 poorest provinces in the Philippines. This province holds deep personal significance for Paula, as it is where her grandparents were born and raised before they moved to metro Manila in search of a better life for their family.

"Supporting The Happy School Project not only allows us to make a meaningful impact on the lives of children in Northern Samar, but also brings a sense of personal fulfillment to me, knowing that we are helping a community in which I have deep roots," Paula stated. "It's possible that some of the children who benefit from our support may even be distant relatives of mine!"



In RY 2023-2024, Makati-McKinley Rotary Club's plan was to provide schools in Northern Samar with school supplies, uniforms, school shoes, and school bags. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, they were only able to provide school supplies and uniforms, so the Champaign West club elected to help out.

Supporting children and youth and setting them up for success was identified as one of Champaign West Rotary's priorities early in its existence, and the club believes that's where its heart still is. After approval from CWR's Board of Directors, the club applied for a District grant. While Champaign West's grant was not chosen to be funded, the club still felt it was an important project and provided financial support, allowing the club in the Philippines to expand the project to enhance the learning experience of these young students. Having the support of a club in the United States means a great deal to them, and the Champaign West club is making a tremendous difference in these children's lives, while also upholding Rotary's mission to serve communities in need around the world.

During the RY 2024-2025, with Champaign West's support, the Makati-McKinley Rotary Club was able to complete its project and provide the schoolchildren with school shoes and school bags in addition to school supplies and uniforms.

Champaign West Rotarians helped share the Magic of Rotary with this incredible club and these children in the Philippines.

Read more about the project in Makati-McKinley's Acacia Magazine, [https://heyzine.com/flip-book/6ae6545207.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawHk16lleHRuA2FibQIxMQABHaTHr-iAoeF11jxZ0vCmhEp8LUna0jPcJLK8zdNeuVqYyMwgyeEHrFvJJQ\\_aem\\_ikvjxyvJy9iwk9LKj\\_xlQ#page/8](https://heyzine.com/flip-book/6ae6545207.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawHk16lleHRuA2FibQIxMQABHaTHr-iAoeF11jxZ0vCmhEp8LUna0jPcJLK8zdNeuVqYyMwgyeEHrFvJJQ_aem_ikvjxyvJy9iwk9LKj_xlQ#page/8).



# B-N SUNRISE PAD PROJECT

The Bloomington-Normal Sunrise Rotary Club had a December push to cut and collate pads to send to Uganda, where they will be sewn together. The club hoped to send 200 pad sets but ended up with 479!

Rotarian Colleen Pogue took them with her as she and her family visited Uganda after Christmas. She said the women/girls there were very grateful for the sets. The club has more pad-making dates scheduled.

# CHAMPAIGN ROTARY SEEKS SUPPORT FOR PUMPS IN GHANA





Providing a \$400 five-horsepower pump allows a Ghana, Africa, community garden to pump water from a river or pond to flood irrigate their garden beds as they fight hunger.

The Champaign Rotary Club's contact in Ghana is requesting 10 pumps. Currently, seven pumps are funded: two from C-U Sunrise Rotary, two from Urbana Rotary, one from Paris Rotary, one from Arcola Rotary, and one from Champaign Rotary.

If you are willing to fund a pump, please make a check payable to Champaign Rotary Foundation and mail it to P.O. Box 83, Savoy, IL 61874.

Please let Bill Malone [bill.rotary6490@gmail.com](mailto:bill.rotary6490@gmail.com) or Carl Burkybile [cwburkybile@gmail.com](mailto:cwburkybile@gmail.com) know you have made a donation. Thank you!

# CHAMPAIGN ROTARY SUPPORTS VOCATIONAL STUDENTS IN THEIR CAREERS



By Carl Burkybile | Champaign Rotary Club

Champaign Rotary funded the building of the second classroom for the KETRACE Vocational School in Kenya. The block walls, the trusses, the metal roof, windows, the doors, and concrete floor have been completed.



Cosmetology graduate Darnaris shared these comments, "With immense gratitude, I recognize your support that has helped to turn my dreams into reality. This dryer is something that would have taken a long time for me to afford. Your guidance has lit the path to my success. As I graduate today, I offer my heartfelt thanks. Behind my graduation cap lies an invaluable team of supporters. Thank you making this possible. To those who stood by me, your contribution to my journey is priceless. My graduation is a shared accomplishment. Your faith and encouragement made it possible. I am stepping into the future armed with your wisdom and support. As I graduate, my deepest thanks go to you."





Layton



Volunteers unloading items



Stuffing the baskets

# DANVILLE NOON ROTARY HELPS LIGHT THE WAY



Rotary volunteers with Layton and finished baskets



Finished baskets

When Layton Spalding spoke to the Danville Noon Rotary on Sept. 30, 2024, people were moved by her sparkly personality and her passion for helping children who are coping with grief. On the evening of Feb. 11, many members of the Danville Noon Rotary volunteered their time and energy to help Layton continue to Light the Way. Using a \$2,000 grant that was gifted from Rotary last fall, they were able to purchase supplies and fill enough baskets for up to 50 children who are coping with loss.

Layton Spalding, a sixth-grader at Bismarck-Henning Elementary School, is the founder of Light the Way, which helps to comfort these children and brings awareness to childhood grief. At only 4 years old, Layton tragically lost her own father to brain cancer. Now she provides baskets to hospitals for children in these situations. Baskets include the things that provided her comfort during her own experience with loss. They are filled with games, crayons, stickers, stuffies, sparkles, and more. Each basket also includes a sunshine to remind them that brighter days are ahead. If you wish to support Layton's Light the Way and the impact she is making, her Amazon wish for basket items can be found at <https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/RVDE34SFUECV>.



In November, the Paris Rotary Club gave dictionaries to Crestwood School, Carolyn Wenz School, Chrisman School, and Shiloh School. The goal of the program is to assist all students in becoming good writers, active readers, creative thinkers, and resourceful learners by providing them with their own personal dictionary. The dictionaries are a gift to each student to use at school and at home for years to come. Educators see third grade as the dividing line between learning to read and reading to learn, so the club gives out dictionaries each year to children in third grade.



Rotarians pictured are Mike Step, Heather Williams, Kim Macke, and Chelsea Edmonds.

# PARIS ROTARY DONATES DICTIONARIES



# CHARLESTON ROTARY BENCH PROJECT



Melanie Mills (top left) shows off the plastic bottlecap bins she designed for collecting plastic for the Charleston Rotary Club Bench project.

Bill Lair (top right) thanks the club members for their efforts collecting plastic caps. Recently, the plastic caps were weighed at CCAR, and there were 278 pounds of plastic, enough for a second bench and to have extra toward a third bench.

Deborah Muller (center) pictured next to a bin in Charleston City Hall, one of five places that bins have been placed throughout the city.

Sarah Asano (left), a Rotary Youth Exchange student in Charleston for the school year, helped to check that the donated plastic caps were clean and to separate permitted caps from those that Greentree Plastics will not accept.

The club's goal is to collect enough caps for two benches in 2025.



At the Bloomington Pub Club's November "Friendsgiving" meeting, members donated diapers for Brightpoint's Stuff The Bus event to support the Bloomington Crisis Nursery. In addition to the diapers collected at the November meeting, Pub Clubbers helped to collect donations in front of Kroger to help Stuff the Bus for Brightpoint's Crisis Nursery.

**Above, from front right:** Hannah Lefler, Jason Higdon, Erin Pieczynski, Julie Porter, Annie Swanson, Jeannie Higdon, Kate Burcham, and Jen Bras.

# BLOOMINGTON PUB CLUB COLLECTS DIAPERS, SHOES



For the third year in a row, Pub Club of Bloomington Rotary held a shoe drive at its December meeting to benefit Promise Shoes. This year, there was a specific need for large-sized black work shoes for teens, so the club was able to supplement members' donations with some additional funds from a golf outing to provide those needed items. In total, the club was able to donate 107 pairs of shoes for kiddos in need in the community!

# EXCHANGE STUDENT



Landon Bell is a Rotary Youth Exchange student in Brazil for the school year, sponsored by the Charleston Rotary Club. Landon is currently participating in an optional Rotary-sponsored trip to the coast as it is summer vacation in Brazil. During this trip, Landon is learning to surf.

# CHAMPAIGN ROTARY WELCOMES LITHUANIAN GROUP

By Dave Hinton  
The News-Gazette



Six educators and advocates from Lithuania — from left, Artur Adam Markevic, Lina Garbenciute, Kristina Žaltauskiene, Vilmantas Balcikonis, Gitana Kruopiene and Agne Motiejune — arrived at Willard Airport in Savoy to kick off a weeklong stay in Champaign-Urbana that is part of Rotary Open World program. Included in the group's many stops was an Illini men's basketball game against UCLA, where the visitors cheered on the home team's star point guard, Lithuanian native Kasparas Jakucionis.

CHAMPAIGN — Six educators and advocates from Lithuania came to Champaign as part of a tour to help the European country change to a different system of teaching special-education students.

The visit included a stop at State Farm Center as the Illini and their star point guard — Lithuanian native Kasparas Jakucionis — took on UCLA.

Champaign Rotary President Doug Nelson and his wife, Janet Ellis-Nelson, accompanied the visitors on a whirlwind educational tour.

“They’re very excited to see that game,” Ellis-Nelson said. “We’re trying to figure out a time to meet him.”

The travel party brought a Lithuanian flag to wave.

The visit was part of a Rotary Open World program.

“Until 2024, Lithuania educated special-education students in separate schools,” Ellis-Nelson said. “Last year, legislation was passed mandating that special-education students be educated in public schools with non-disabled peers.”

The team’s area of focus will be accessibility and inclusion of special-ed students in public schools.

Nelson rented a large van to transport the visitors to their various events that include 34 hours of observation, meetings and tours in their area of study.

The Champaign and Tolono school districts, the University of Illinois’ Disability Resources and Education Services, and other organizations that serve people with disabilities have assisted Ellis-Nelson to prepare for the visits.

She said that while the new special-education system has been implemented in Lithuania, it’s a work in progress.

“They say they’re struggling to know exactly what to do,” she said. “They’re starting to implement the program,” adding they still have some special-education-only schools “because they don’t have enough understanding to do it all yet.”

The group included teachers and administrators, some of whom helped to get the new law passed. Accompanying them was a facilitator who is also a translator.

“Some of the people on the team are fluent in English,” Ellis-Nelson said. “They figured it’s such an intensive educational program, they wanted to make sure everybody understood everything.”

The first day alone included several stops, including the group serving as the program for the Champaign Rotary meeting, then a visit at the Experience Champaign-Urbana office, which has developed a map that shows which businesses accommodate people of different disabilities.

The group was then set to meet with state Sen. Paul Faraci, D-Champaign, at his office. Faraci has introduced legislation in Springfield that affects individuals with disabilities.

They were then set to meet with Champaign schools Superintendent Shelia Boozer, Special Education Director Suzanne Meislahn and other administrators for an overview of special education in the district. The group also visited several Champaign schools on Thursday and Friday.

Also on the day’s itinerary was a visit to Circle Academy at Cunningham Children’s Home in Urbana.

The visitors were set to make a couple of stops in Tolono, including Unity West Elementary, where Ellis-Nelson was principal prior to her retirement, and Unity Junior High.

Another visit was to The Crow at 110, a space operated by Developmental Services Center where adults with disabilities create earth-friendly, handmade goods.

A stop the next day included the UI's Disability Resources and Educational Service Center, whose mission is to ensure that qualified individuals with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the programs, services and activities at the university.

"Students, professors and coaches ... will talk to the team," Ellis-Nelson said, adding that while "K-12 students have to accept anybody who comes through the doors, at the U of I, the students have to meet the same criteria (as other students) to be accepted. ... Intellectually, they have to be as bright as everyone else."

The Lithuanian visitors also attended a UI wheelchair basketball game.

During their visit, they stayed in the homes of six Rotary families before leaving.

"I'm just really excited," Ellis-Nelson said. "I think it's just a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in a different country. These people will go back and train educators in Lithuania and help thousands of students there."

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# PUB CLUB HELPS WITH SPECIAL PROM EVENT



Tim Tebow's Feb. 7 Night to Shine was a great volunteer opportunity for Bloomington Pub Clubbers! A prom night experience for people with special needs, club members helped with food service, making sure all guests had a great evening!

Anyone can join any Rotary club, regardless of where they live, she noted. That means residents of Gibson City, for example, whose Rotary club disbanded in 2023, could join Paxton's club if one were to be formed. The same would be a possibility for Ford County natives who now live elsewhere, even in other states.

"With the new ways of Rotary, people can join from anywhere," Ellis-Nelson said.

In some cases, Rotary members can attend meetings from anywhere, too, via a smart phone or computer.

"One of the clubs (in District 6490) — the Sunset Rotary Club of Bloomington Normal — they have a member who used to live in Bloomington but moved to Washington, D.C., and she attends their meetings every week online," Ellis-Nelson said. "And some of (the) Champaign (Rotary Club)'s members are snowbirds, so they can attend online and still stay in touch with (the club). ... Almost anything is possible now."

With the evolution of technology, Rotary has evolved, as well, to "meet the needs of today's people," she said, noting that clubs have loosened their rules on such things as meeting attendance, which is no longer required.

"When my husband first joined, you had to have 80% attendance or you got dropped from the club," said Ellis-Nelson, whose husband of 30 years, Doug Nelson, joined Rotary in 1992 and currently serves as the Champaign Rotary Club's president. "Rotary understands that people are busy and they need to be flexible."

While not required, attendance at meetings is still strongly encouraged, said Ellis-Nelson, who joined Rotary in 2014 and served one-year terms as the Champaign Rotary Club's president and as governor of District 6490 before starting a three-year term as the district's membership chair last July.

"For our club, we tell people who are joining that we'd like them to have at least 50% attendance — because, if they don't come, they're not going to be involved in the service or other things," she said. "But most people who join want to be there (anyway) and come (to the meetings)."

There are now 43 Rotary clubs with a combined 1,711 members in District 6490, which comprises an area of Illinois spanning from Danville to the east to Decatur to the west to Vandalia to the south to Dwight, Metamora and Germantown Hills to the north. Of those 43 clubs, six are in Champaign-Urbana and eight in Champaign County, with the Champaign Rotary Club being the largest with 140 members.

As membership chair, Ellis-Nelson's goal for the next three years is to grow both the number of clubs and number of members in the district.

"Rotary has been a gift to me, and I like giving the gift of Rotary," she said. "That's why, after I finished my term as district governor (last year), I said I would serve as the district membership chair to help clubs grow and to start some new ones."

She has been successful so far, as she helped the Champaign Rotary Club start a satellite club — called "C-U at the Rotary" — last August, just a month into her current leadership role.

"You can form a satellite club with just eight people, so I had a similar informational meeting last (June) for people in Champaign-Urbana and then talked to them about the flexibility of Rotary," Ellis-Nelson said. "We now have 16 people who are in that club. In our district and club database, they're considered their own club, but as far as Rotary International is concerned, they're members of Champaign Rotary because they have to have 25 people to create their own club. But they're planning to do that."

Meanwhile, the Champaign Rotary Club is also working to charter a Rotaract club for young Rotarians ages 18 to 30 at the University of Illinois, which lost its Rotaract club during the COVID-19 pandemic.



“They’re actually considered a part of Rotary, too, so they’ll help with the growth,” Ellis-Nelson said.

Ellis-Nelson also continues to encourage existing Rotary clubs in the district to invite people to their meetings in an effort to add members.

“We add new members all the time to our club,” she noted.

The Champaign Rotary Club’s membership has been holding steady at about 140, Ellis-Nelson said.

“About half of those people actually come to the weekly meetings,” she said. “We still have a traditional club, where we meet weekly for lunch and have a program.”

Each club can decide for itself how often it meets, Ellis Nelson noted.

“The newest one that Champaign started, they only meet once a month in the evening at a different restaurant or bar in the area, but they do at least one service project a month,” she said.

“Service,” she noted, “is still paramount and the reason for Rotary.”

The next step in establishing a Rotary club in Paxton will involve Ellis-Nelson contacting prospective members to ask when they would be available to meet as a group — either in person or online — to discuss things further.

She said a smaller club like Paxton’s could still do amazing things.

“Some of the smaller clubs are very dynamic,” Ellis-Nelson said. “The Arthur Rotary (Club) got Small Club of the Year this year (in District 6490) for all the things they’re doing. I think they have only 16 members, but it’s pretty amazing, what they do.”

Ellis-Nelson noted that a Rotary club, once chartered, can have its membership fall below 25 without losing its charter.

Ellis-Nelson said some area Rotary clubs regularly honor local high school students with awards and scholarships, for example, and sponsor Rotary Interact service clubs at local schools. While working as a special education teacher in Champaign, Ellis-Nelson said she served for 10 years as the faculty sponsor of Centennial High School’s Interact club, sponsored by the Champaign Rotary Club.

“I couldn’t join the club until I retired,” she said, “because I didn’t have a lunch hour as a teacher and a principal. But I knew exactly what I wanted to do when I retired, because it had been so meaningful to me to be the (Interact) sponsor. It’s a way to get students involved in service.”

The Rotary youth exchange program is yet another opportunity for local youth.

“It’s something that would be possible for students at (Paxton-Buckley-Loda schools) if you had a Rotary club,” said Ellis-Nelson, who was a special education teacher for 30 years and elementary school principal for nine prior to her 2014 retirement.

“Josh Didier, who’s the principal at the junior high (in Paxton), used to be my assistant principal (at Unity West Elementary School in Tolono),” said Ellis-Nelson, who was the school’s principal. “We have maintained our friendship.”

Anyone interested in joining the Paxton Rotary club is asked to contact Ellis-Nelson via email at [janetnelson1994@gmail.com](mailto:janetnelson1994@gmail.com).

# MATTOON ROTARY HOLDS FOOD DRIVE

The Mattoon Rotary Club held its annual door-to-door feed drive on Dec. 7. Community members were asked to leave canned goods and other nonperishable food outside their front doors for Rotarians and fellow volunteers to collect that morning. Club member Billie Constant organized volunteers.

The collected food was given to the Mattoon Community Food Center and to the Salvation Army food pantry. Monetary donations were also accepted.

First Presbyterian Church and Pastor Matthew Froeschle welcomed the club to gather in the church to begin their day. The community groups who sponsored door-to-door teams included Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; City of Mattoon, Maranatha Christian Academy, Mattoon High School Student Council and Key Club, Mattoon Hit-Men 8U, Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center, SC3F Wealth Management, and Slumberland Furniture.

Additional photos from the day are available on the Club's website at [mattoonrotary.org](http://mattoonrotary.org).



## STARTING FROM SCRATCH

**New Rotary club on horizon in Paxton, as 16 attend meeting held to gauge interest**  
(from page 2)

For a new Rotary club to be chartered, it must have at least 25 members, Ellis Nelson said. With fewer than 25 members, a “satellite” club can still be established, though, while operating under the umbrella of a chartered club, Ellis-Nelson noted.

Ellis-Nelson said she hopes there is enough interest to charter a new Paxton club — maybe even before the end of this Rotary club year on June 30.

“It’ll take a little bit of time,” Ellis-Nelson said. “We need 25 people to charter a club, and we need people who are willing to serve in the officer roles — a president, a secretary, a treasurer — and just people who are interested in doing (community) service and have some ideas about what the community might need. ... But I think it’s possible. There was a club over in Bloomington that started as a satellite club, and they took off like wildfire. They started with eight people, and now they’ve got 79 members. ... It really has attracted a lot of people.”



# C-U SUNRISE THANKSGIVING PROJECT

Champaign-Urbana Sunrise Rotary Club members helped with Good Shepherd Lutheran Church's turkey sandwich project, which created and delivered 200 lunches to folks working on Thanksgiving. Pictured is Larry Johnson preparing a lunch.

# BLOOMINGTON PUB CLUB HELPS COMMUNITY CENTER



Bloomington Pub Club Rotary helped support The Western Avenue Community Center at this year's Putt Putt Fore Charity on Oct. 13. Over 40 of club members rallied together to help contribute to the record-setting \$26,000 raised!

# BLOOMINGTON PUB CLUB RAISES MONEY FOR THANKSGIVING PROJECT

As the culmination of their Turkeys, Birdies and Brews golf outing, Pub Clubbers packed 125 full Thanksgiving meal kits for families at The Boys & Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal. Carle BroMenn donated the turkeys this year, and Hy-Vee was the club's grocery partner.



Bloomington Pub Club Rotary had its third annual Turkeys Birdies and Brews golf outing on Nov. 1. The proceeds from this event go toward providing 125 full Thanksgiving meals for families in the community. Through the club's partnership with The Boys and Girls Club of Bloomington-Normal, members assembled 125 meal kits on Nov. 22 for families to enjoy, complete with all the fixings. Members and the community support the effort through donations, sponsorship, playing, or volunteering.

# LINCOLN, CHAMPAIGN HELP SALVATION ARMY



On Nov. 16, the Lincoln Rotary Club, with help from the Interact Club from Lincoln Junior High School, rang the bell for the Salvation Army.

Holly Thompson of the Champaign Rotary Club presented the December Cup contribution to Capt. Kenyon Sivels, who expressed gratitude to all the club members for their generous donations and service in bell ringing, which will contribute to the success of the Salvation Army in 2025.



# B-N SUNRISE ROTARY BELL RINGERS

In the heart of Bloomington-Normal, where the holiday spirit was in full swing, members of the Sunrise Rotary Club stood out for their commitment to community service. A dedicated B-N Sunrise Rotarian, Steve Schroeder, took to the streets in the brisk 25-degree weather to ring the bells for The Salvation Army's annual Red Kettle Campaign outside Hobby Lobby. Not to be outdone, Mellissa, Erin, and Bev were spotted standing by the red kettles at Sam's Club, also ringing bells for The Salvation Army.

With temperatures barely climbing above freezing, their dedication shone through, embodying the season's true spirit—giving back. Their presence at the kettle, armed with nothing but a bell and a warm smile, was a beacon of hope and kindness amidst the holiday rush. Bell ringing is not just about the funds raised; it's about the warmth of human connection, the inspiration to others, and the message of love and charity that transcends the physical cold.



# PUB CLUB HELPS AT KITCHEN

The Bloomington Pub Club completed its sixth and seventh bimonthly meal preps at The Salvation Army Safe Harbor Kitchen.

**Top:** From left, back row: Kelli Dehm, John Nafziger, Magnus Moeller. Front row: Shannon Walters, Jill Enchelmayer, Heather Clemens. **Right:** Jen Johnson, Christen Busick, Anna Billingsley, Kelly Dehm, Michelle Rush, Chad Hoffman, Mary Ann O'Donnell, Tera Arendell





# BLOOMINGTON PUB CLUB TAKES 'BEST TRUNK' HONORS



From left: Dan Miller, Kate Burcham, David Crow, Julie McDaniels, Jeannie Higdon, Kris Morris, Michelle Rush, Annie Swanson, Scott Swanson, Sherry Quinlan, and Heather Clemens.



For the second year in a row, Bloomington Pub Club Rotary took home "Best Trunk" honors at Eastland Suites' Trunk or Treat event on Oct. 16. The committee worked hard to put together an incredible experience for the huge crowd of kiddos and parents from the community.

# MAHOMET ROTARY DONATES BOOKS



Pictured is one of the seven third-grade classes that received books from the Rotary Club of Mahomet. The students got to select which books they received. And, as you can tell, they were thrilled!

## CHARLESTON

# BACKPACK PROJECT



Charleston Rotarian Kristen Bertrand gave out Rotary backpacks to new Eastern Illinois University international students on Jan. 9.



# BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL **FRIENDSGIVING**

On a crisp November evening, the Bloomington-Normal Sunrise Rotary Club convened for a special Friendsgiving celebration that warmed hearts and filled plates.

On Nov. 21, members gathered in the spirit of fellowship, service, and the holiday season, sharing a meal that would not soon be forgotten. The Friendsgiving event was more than just a meal; it celebrated community, friendship, and the Rotary motto, "Service Above Self."

As the evening drew to a close, members expressed gratitude for the food and each other, recognizing that the true essence of the holiday lies in the connections we make and the kindness we share. The Sunrise Rotarians left the gathering with full stomachs and hearts, ready to carry the warmth of Friendsgiving into their community service efforts.

It was a reminder that no matter the season, the spirit of thanksgiving should be a guiding light in all their endeavors.

# NORMAL CLUB HELPS COMMUNITY IN NUMEROUS WAYS

February is the cruelest time of winter. Lengthening days encourage a faint false hope for seasonal easing only to have a series of chill blasts slap one in the face. It's a hard time to be unhoused in Bloomington Normal. The two homeless shelters in the community, Salvation Army's Safe Harbor and Home Sweet Home Ministries, both in downtown Bloomington, are typically full. More than 100 homeless people live in the several tent encampments the community tolerates, tucked away in places most do not see. There is no room in the shelters for some. For others, substance use or other challenges bar them from that form of refuge. Normal Rotary tries to help the homeless and those on the edge.

A group from the Normal club often volunteers to serve meals at the Safe Harbor Shelter, wrangled by Ron Timmerman, Club Director for Social Service Events. Rotarian Matt Riehle is the CEO of the Westminster Village Retirement Community, and his food service operation prepares a hot meal our club hands out. Brisket, green beans, fruit, cookies, mac and cheese, all this can warm the people, some of whom then head back into the cold. Typically, more than 70 get respite and much needed nourishment.

Each month, Rotarian Dayna Brown coordinates a food distribution at Normal Community West High School. Typically, close to 200 people get a variety of food items each time. Rotarians are among the groups that support this service, unloading piles of food dropped in the middle of the NCWHS cafeteria by the Midwest Food Bank. Some Rotarians help hand out the food. Others help the aged or those juggling young children to move around the room, offering friendly words and a soft assist by carrying and boxing the food they collect. The Normal club makes it non-judgmental and as close to a normal shopping experience as possible.

Rotarian Becky Goeckner volunteers at the School Street Food Pantry housed at First United Methodist Church. Illinois State University students often use this food pantry. Becky puts her coat on a chair while she's there, and recently several students asked if they could have it. Some, particularly international students from warmer countries, do not have clothing fit for frigid conditions and no previous experience of a Midwestern winter. Becky took this to the club, and the next week members responded with a big pile of coats, scarves, hats, mittens, and gloves sized for young adults.

Becky's ask is an ornament to the club's much larger endeavor, the Coats for Kids Campaign that has for the last 20 year collected 700 coats annually, distributed to children who can't afford a new winter coat. The key people on this team are Connie Gentry, Ron Timmerman, Elleke Mesdag, and Iris Varner. This is an ongoing project with year-round tasks. The team searches the best deals at the end of season sales, works on inventory and storage and then makes certain they are ready for distribution.

Normal Rotary is also joining with other clubs in Bloomington Normal to build a Habitat for Humanity House. Construction will begin later in the spring.

From such small actions the community becomes a better place.

"...the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

– George Eliot  
"Middlemarch"



The Mattoon Rotary Club Christmas Party featured friends, music, food, and fun! Special guests, Kaye DeSelms and Tom Cortese provided Christmas music and singing. The staff at the Mattoon Golf and Country Club provided food and service, and the Banquets/Celebrations Committee planned the event.



# MATTOON ROTARY CHRISTMAS PARTY



Charleston Rotary Club held its Holiday Party at the Charleston Country Club. Food, music, fun, and fellowship were available for Rotarians and their families.

Maria Fichter-Wandling (top left), Rich Wandling, and District Governor Mike Martin select from food options in the buffet line.

The Power Chords a cappella choir from Charleston High School performed a selection of Christmas carols.

# CHARLESTON ROTARY HOLIDAY PARTY

# B-N SUNRISE CHRISTMAS PARTY



Julie and Bob Dobski hosted the annual Bloomington Normal Sunrise Rotary Christmas Party on Dec. 13. Club members enjoyed a night filled with food, music, festive pictures, and plenty of drinks and laughter as they celebrated the holiday season together.



The holiday season in Bloomington-Normal was lit up with joy and cheer as the Sunrise Rotary Club celebrated its annual Christmas Party. Hosted by the gracious Julie and Bob Dobski, the evening of Dec. 22 was nothing short of spectacular, offering a blend of warmth, camaraderie, and festive spirit. One of the most enchanting parts of the night was the festive picture session, capturing moments of joy and togetherness. These photos will surely be cherished memories, reflecting the bond that unites the club.

But the heart of the celebration wasn't just the food or the decorations; it was the people. The Bloomington Normal Sunrise Rotary is more than a club; it's a community of individuals united by a commitment to service and a love for their local area. The party was a testament to this spirit, as members shared stories of past service projects, discussed plans for the future, and celebrated each other's contributions to the community. Julie and Bob Dobski were the stars of the night, not just for their hosting but for their warm hospitality that made everyone feel like part of a large, loving family. Their home was not just a venue but a hub of holiday magic, where every guest was a friend. The Bloomington Normal Sunrise Rotary Christmas Party was a beautiful reminder of why we come together during the holidays—to share, celebrate, and look forward to the good we can do together. Here's to the magic of the season and the continued success of Sunrise Rotary's efforts in the community.



The Bloomington Pub Club held its holiday party Dec. 18 at Reality on Monroe.

# PUB CLUB PARTY



Sherry Quinlan won the Lucy Orme-Morgan Service Award for the second year in a row for always being willing to help with service events and participating on several committees throughout the year. Sara Larsen won the Spirit award this year, for her cheerful attitude and contagious love for Pub Club.



Part of the fun included stuffing stockings full of festive goodies and essentials that were then distributed to local seniors through Synergy Home Care. Member Chad Hoffman's grandma, Charlotte, handmade them all! New member Kam Pollett helped to get them to local seniors who need them.