

# Rotary

OCTOBER 2024

MAGAZINE

NEARLY 300,000  
MINORS WERE  
MARRIED  
IN THE U.S.  
BETWEEN  
2000 AND 2018.  
FRADY REISS  
IS FIGHTING  
TO MAKE  
CHILD  
MARRIAGE  
A THING OF  
THE PAST.

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A ringmaster flies  
high for Rotary  
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The inspirational  
polio photos of  
Jean-Marc Giboux  
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Houston Rotarians  
tackle cancer with  
Lombardi Award  
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# Explore Egypt



With the world's most renowned archaeologists

Dr. Mostafa Waziri  
One of Egypt's Heads of Antiquities

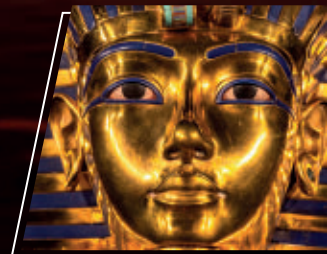
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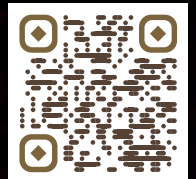
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Urchick dons a baseball jersey during a July fundraiser for PolioPlus at the home of the Pittsburgh Pirates.



## It takes a team

**W**ith World Polio Day on 24 October, I'm proudly rooting for Rotary as we team up around the world to End Polio Now.

I had the honor of attending a Strike Out Polio event in July at PNC Park, home of the Pittsburgh Pirates MLB team. The Rotary Club of Delmont-Salem hosted the event, which raised \$1.3 million for PolioPlus.

Later in the summer, I joined members of our Rotary family in supporting the Más Millas Menos Polio (More Miles Less Polio) bike ride. Felipe Meza Chávez and his team rode all the way from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to One Rotary Center in Evanston, Illinois, to raise money and awareness. The ride took 12 days, and Felipe and his team collected more than \$100,000 to support the fight against polio. It was a joy to greet them as they arrived in Evanston.

And I was thrilled to see Team End Polio raise global awareness around the 2024 Paris Olympics. This world-class roster of athletes, global leaders, and polio eradication supporters came together to advocate for a world where no child has to live in fear of being paralyzed by polio. Some of the athletes on Team End Polio are polio survivors themselves, adding weight to their advocacy.

These are just a few examples of the many ways Rotary has teamed up recently to End Polio Now. It is vital that we continue to seek out and recruit teammates in polio eradication, especially after the

challenges our eradication efforts have faced this year.

The Rotary world was heartbroken to learn about the tragic passing in August of Aidan O'Leary, director for polio eradication at the World Health Organization.

I knew Aidan and worked with him directly. He was a tireless advocate in the fight against polio and a kind, genuine man. We will remember him both for his advocacy and his warmth.

But where there is hardship, there is also hope. I feel hopeful whenever I consider the countless ways Rotary supports the fight every day to eradicate polio.

As people of action, we don't have the luxury of giving in to despair, even in the face of tragedy. The best way to honor Aidan's memory is by teaming up and reaching our goal to End Polio Now.

We made a promise to the children of the world and their families. It is incumbent upon us, together with our global partners, to end this threat once and for all.

There are so many ways we can team up to eradicate polio. You can donate to the End Polio Now campaign, join or initiate a PolioPlus Society in your club or district, or take inspiration from the fundraisers I mentioned above.

I encourage Rotary members around the world to continue to seek out new teammates, so that together, we end polio.

**STEPHANIE A. URCHICK**  
*President, Rotary International*

Join the team and help make polio history at [endpolio.org](https://endpolio.org).





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**YOU ARE HERE:** Fjadrárgljúfur canyon, Iceland

---

**GREETING:** Góðan daginn

---

**A "GRAND" CANYON:** Formed at the end of the last ice age, Fjadrárgljúfur seems otherworldly. The canyon's odd-shaped cliffs covered with soft grass and moss line the serpentine river like mythical animals. Sheer rock walls rise 330 feet above the Fjadrá River and stretch for more than a mile.

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**HOT SPOT:** If it looks straight out of *Game of Thrones* that's because it is. Fjadrárgljúfur became a hot tourist spot after it was featured in the TV show and in a 2015 music video by Justin Bieber. The site was declared a nature reserve this year to help protect it.

---

**WINTER VISTA:** Mike Liebman, of the Rotary Club of Denver Cherry Creek, Colorado, captured this image of the canyon disappearing into the fog in January 2023 while attending a photography workshop. "I used a long exposure to convey the motion of the water, contrasted with the canyon's seemingly immovable walls," he says.

---

**THE CLUBS:** The Rotary Club of Reykjavík was chartered in 1935. Today there are about 30 Rotary clubs in Iceland.

# Rotary

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October 2024

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EVERY  
YEAR

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Your donation to The Rotary Foundation supports members around the world as they work to prevent disease and strengthen communities by helping people access basic health care. Your gift means people have more resources to fight diseases such as polio, malaria, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes, and that keeps communities healthy.

**GIVE TODAY:** [rotary.org/donate](https://rotary.org/donate)



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How John Sever inspired the campaign to eradicate polio

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#### A bride too soon

The survivor of an abusive arranged marriage, Fraidy Reiss wants to ensure that other girls never suffer the same ordeal

By Elly Fishman

Photography by Sydney Walsh

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#### Goal line stand

Each year, the Rotary Club of Houston gives the Lombardi Award to college football's best lineman. Emulating those young athletes, the club also uses the award to tackle cancer.

By Bryan Smith

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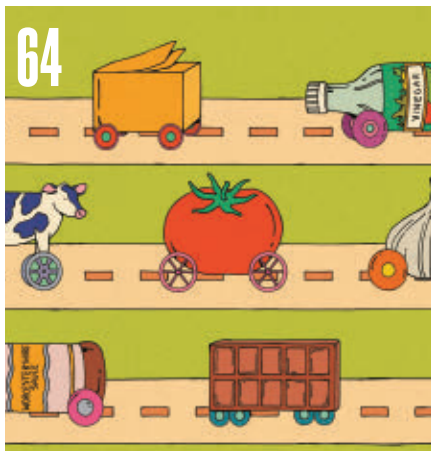
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**On the cover:** Child marriage is an overlooked U.S. problem, activist Fraidy Reiss told a Rotary Day with UNICEF crowd.  
Photograph by Sydney Walsh







## STAFF CORNER

# Beth Babbitt Borst

*Administrative assistant,  
Financial Services*



**I grew up in a family with many musical talents.** My father was a United Methodist minister who majored in music at college. His mother was a singer and his stepfather a violinist. My parents signed me up for piano lessons and had me practice every day, but I didn't enjoy practicing. My mother, who played the piano and had a wonderful voice, possessed a large collection of vocal sheet music from the 1930s and '40s. I would play and sing those songs instead. Noticing my passion for singing, my parents encouraged me to take voice lessons. A theater director approached me after a recital and invited me to audition for a musical. I got in and began performing in high school musicals. That was my entry to vocal performance.

**These experiences inspired me to pursue music in college.** I received a Bachelor of Music from DePauw University and a Master of Music from the University of Notre Dame. One summer, I attended the Fontainebleau School of Music in France. A scholarship from a French Rotary club enabled me to continue my studies and vocal performances in France for more than two years.

**As a mezzo-soprano, I performed in operas, oratorios, and recitals.** I was particularly known for solo work in Handel and Bach oratorios and cantatas, and recital work, particularly American songs and French *mélodie*. I love choral music and enjoy singing with ensembles whenever possible. For more than two decades, I performed with multiple orchestras and at various music festivals. In 1991, Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti and Kiri Te Kanawa, a soprano from New Zealand, came to sing with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, of which I was a member for 10 years. We performed a concert version of the opera

*Otello* in Chicago and then at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Singing with these two opera stars was a memorable experience. I also had the opportunity to serve as a soloist with that group.

**I would have chosen music as a full-time career, but I needed job-based health insurance.** Besides, the auditions produced a lot of anxiety for me. So I always had a day job while keeping music as a side gig. I first served as the director of statistics for the United Methodist Church and then as an executive coordinator/director of organizational support for Community Renewal Society, a faith-based community organizing and public policy organization.

**I came to Rotary in 2019** as an administrative assistant to the chief financial officer. The RI headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, is about three blocks from my church and a quick walk from where I live, and I really connect to the work that Rotary members are doing globally. I'm grateful for the Rotary scholarship I received in my post-graduate years.

**My grandmother, the singer, had polio** when she was young, and she walked with a cane through her 30s and later used a wheelchair. That family history makes me more appreciative of Rotary's polio eradication efforts.

**Faith has played an important part in my life.** I serve as the treasurer for the First Congregational Church of Evanston, where I was the alto soloist in the choir for years. I also enjoyed singing at the Temple Jeremiah in a nearby town during the Jewish High Holy Days. ■

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## Letters to the editor

### OFF TO A GOOD START

Wow! Diana Schoberg's writing in "The playmaker" [July], an introduction to Rotary President Stephanie Urchick, made me feel as if I were right there, another invited guest. So personable. I could imagine myself welcomed into every one of photographer Christine Armbruster's photos.

Irresistible it is, that feeling of being a part of President Stephanie's activities. This will be a year of very positive growth for Rotary.

**Raymond Plue**, Columbia, Missouri

### ENCOURAGING WORDS

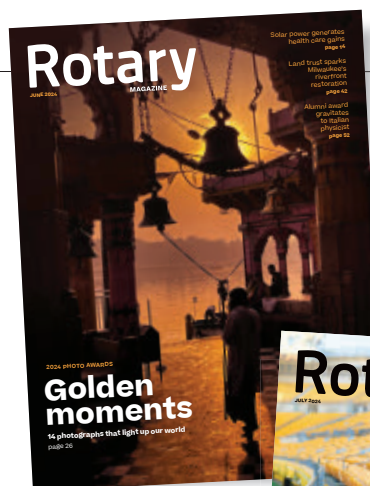
President Stephanie Urchick's July message ["Toward a greater vision"] was inspiring and highly motivating. Focusing on inclusivity, she told us to use the Action Plan to strengthen our clubs through analytical evaluation. In her closing lines, she invited us to join her in changing the world for the good of humanity through the application of *The Magic of Rotary*. I was so moved after reading that I decided to register for the Rotary Presidential Peace Conference in Turkey, 20-22 February.

**M. Saleem Chaudhry**, Lahore, Pakistan

### REDUCE THE RANCOR

As President Stephanie Urchick is promoting Positive Peace, we would like to offer a complementary tool. The article "Putting civility back into civil discourse" in the magazine's May 2019 issue showcased Braver Angels, a national grassroots organization whose mission is to bring Americans together to bridge the partisan divide and strengthen our democratic republic.

Braver Angels (referred to in the article by its former name, Better Angels) offers workshops and training that help you gain skills to talk to people you may disagree with. It has been likened by one of its co-founders to "implementing The Four-Way Test." The organization recently launched Braver Network, a network of organizations to bridge the partisan divide. The goal is to grow and spread a civic renewal movement.



District 5960 joined Braver Network and has been encouraging our clubs to be conveners for the Braver Angels workshops in their communities to help "reduce the rancor," so that discussions in school board meetings, city council meetings, and other gatherings can be accomplished in a civil and respectful manner.

For more information, you can contact us at [ed.marek5960@gmail.com](mailto:ed.marek5960@gmail.com) or visit [braverangels.org](http://braverangels.org).

**Ed Marek**, Apple Valley, Minnesota

**Bruce Morlan**, Northfield, Minnesota

### WHAT ABOUT HONORARY MEMBERS?

I found the discussion of innovative membership types ["Adaptation, innovation, and Rotary," July] lacking, as it did not address honorary members of Rotary clubs.

Rotary's constitutional documents are fairly vague about honorary members and do not make the distinction between those who have been active Rotary members and those who have not. This is a significant oversight that I have tried to rectify to no avail.

### OVERHEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In May, we wrote about the physical and mental benefits of *shinrin-yoku*, or forest bathing, the Japanese practice of mindfully immersing oneself in nature.

This must be the best stress reliever ever!  
**Vinodatt Lutchman**  
► via Facebook

This is an almost daily mindfulness practice of mine, and what I teach! It truly nourishes body, heart, mind, and spirit 🍀🙌  
**Dr. Manizeh Mirza-Gruber**  
► via Instagram

## CONNECT

What is outlined in the Rotary International Bylaws appears to apply to non-Rotarians, to show recognition of someone who helped a club out or did some significant community service. I propose that non-Rotarians who are voted by a majority of a club's board of directors to be honorary members have a time limit attached to their membership.

On the other hand, Rotarians who are unanimously approved by the club's board of directors would be honorary members for life. Rotarians who become honorary members typically have been members of the club for decades and are past presidents and Paul Harris Fellows, for starters. Because honorary Rotarians would not have to pay any club dues, perhaps Rotary could limit the number of honorary members of any club to 10 percent of the total membership.

**Steve Schwalbe**, Oak Harbor, Washington

## ENLARGE THE ENSEMBLE

Since Youth Exchange is my passion within Rotary, I read with particular interest "An investment in Rotary's future" in the June issue. I would like to add a suggestion for significantly expanding the "supporting cast": Establish a cadre of vetted volunteers in addition to host family members.

In Petaluma, California, our cadre consists of approximately 30 volunteers who are available as needed to provide transportation for our young ambassadors, including on day or overnight trips. They can also serve as short-term backup host parents if a host family needs to be away for a few days and can't take the young ambassador along.

This is a marvelous way of allowing so many more people in the community to feel they are part of the overall hosting effort, thus expanding the positive impact of Rotary Youth Exchange. Sometimes it even inspires folks to sign up as host families!

**Paulie Johns**, Petaluma, California

*Editor's note: All volunteers who interact with Rotary Youth Exchange students are required to undergo screening that includes an application and background and reference checks. District Youth Exchange chairs can help clubs ensure their programs conform with policies. Learn more at [my.rotary.org/youth-protection](http://my.rotary.org/youth-protection).*

## GOOD FOUNDATIONS

I read with interest, concern, and hope the excellent article ["Climate therapy"] by Elizabeth Hewitt in the May issue on the connection between a warming world and "eco-anxiety." I've found eco-anxiety is especially prevalent and severe within Gen Z, as Hewitt brings out in the story of Marinel Ubaldo.

I've taken the wise words of Rabbi Ora Nitkin-Kaner to heart. She counsels that in the face of the overwhelming threat of climate change, we need two foundational strengths: agency (knowing that we are doing something about it, even if turning the ship is a long, difficult process) and connection (working with others to take on the challenge).

Rotary is well-positioned to help. First, with our service projects — like planting pollinator-friendly gardens, helping the community understand the increasing dangers of wildfires, and planting trees in low-income communities — Rotary is taking on the challenge. Second, Rotary helps us to make the connections with others we need to get through this crisis together.

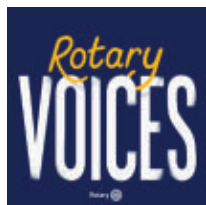
I highly recommend reading and listening to climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe, who proudly cites The Four-Way Test as she communicates with people with widely divergent views about climate change. Her book *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*, is a practical yet inspiring and compassionate guide to taking on this worldwide challenge with agency and connection.

**Merrill Glustrom**, Boulder, Colorado

**Take Us with you**

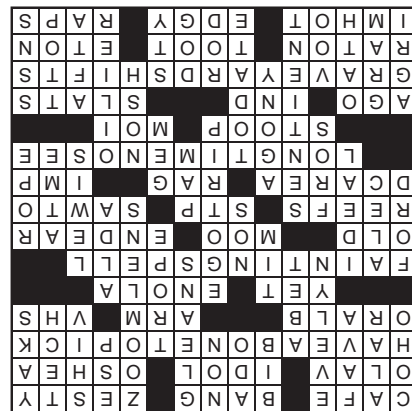
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## ON THE PODCAST

Public health expert and bestselling author Atul Gawande, the assistant administrator for global health at the U.S. Agency for International Development, speaks with RI General Secretary John Hewko on the Rotary Voices podcast. They discuss the Rotary-USAID partnership and Rotary's pivotal role in global health initiatives. Listen at [on.rotary.org/podcast](http://on.rotary.org/podcast).





## THE SPECIALIST

# Rotary's ringmaster

*Hoping to make beautiful music, the Lunar Lady ran away and joined the circus*

**I was born and raised in the D.C. area.** My father was a painter and a sculptor, and my mom was a dancer. They raised me in an artistic environment. I started playing piano at 4. I loved the Sherlock Holmes stories growing up, and he played the violin, so I became invested in the idea of playing the violin.

**I never expected to join the circus.** At George Washington University, I was involved with chamber ensembles and the orchestra. After graduation, I was playing locally and trying to figure out where to go with the music thing. I ended up playing for a couple of small circus shows. I just loved it.

**Funny thing about the circus,** you learn different skills. I was the right size and shape to be an aerialist, so I started training and loved that as well. I call myself an aerial violinist. Wearing an LED costume

I designed, I float in the sky and play music for the show. I'm suspended on a crescent moon, which I also designed. I call myself the Lunar Lady.

**My partner, Facundo Kramer,** is a sixth-generation circus artist from Argentina. We'd been in a million shows together and said, "I think we can do this ourselves." We went on a multiyear journey of forming our circus troupe, Menagerie Productions, from the ground up. We work pretty much exclusively with charities to raise money.

**I joined Rotary to spend more time with my dad.** He was working on all these cool projects, and last year he was president of our club. Rotary is kind of like the circus: You join and fall down this rabbit hole. Now I'm in the Rotary rabbit hole, in the best way. In May we did eight fundraising shows in the Bahamas for the Rotary Club of East Nassau. It came about through a connection with another Rotarian. That's one of my favorite things about Rotary: the connections.

**I'm working on the sequel to *Maggie and the Magnifying Glass*,** the children's book I illustrated for Melissa Campbell, an amazing author in Atlanta. And I'm almost finished recording my album of original music for the circus, *Center Ring*. It's hard to be a working artist. But if you love a craft and you're around good people and have the support of your family, you'll find your way, even if it's totally unexpected. It sounds so cliché, but just go for it. ■

**Montana DeBor**  
Rotary Club of  
Rosslyn-Fort  
Myer, Virginia

Aerial violinist

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From polio vaccinator to global health hero

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Peter Salk reflects on his father's legacy

## CLIMATE ADAPTATION

# After the floods

*Climate-smart communities bloom in Pakistan's agricultural heartland*

**T**he farmers of Pakistan's Indus River Valley contribute little to climate change, yet they are frighteningly vulnerable to it. In the summer of 2022, record-breaking monsoon rains supercharged by warming temperatures deluged the fertile plains where many of them cultivated cotton, rice, and wheat for large landowners. The floods submerged a third of the country, killing more than 1,700 people and displacing about 8 million.

"We were very badly affected. We lost so many animals — buffalo, cows, and sheep. We also lost crops," says Sughana Bheel, who was displaced along with her husband, three children, and other surviving residents of the submerged village of Nauabad in the country's south.

For months, the farmers of Sindh province, many of whom fled to nearby towns and cities, took refuge in tents, schools, or out in the open. Mindful of the role climate change played in the disaster, Pakistan's Rotary clubs decided to put climate adaptation at the center of their rebuilding efforts. They worked closely with rural communities to incorporate renewable energy and indigenous building techniques and materials.

Bheel and the other residents of Nauabad learned about the plans and approached a Rotary club in the area. "They came and surveyed the village, and the landlord gave the land to establish a new village," Bheel says through an interpreter.

"Now, in the current rainy season, our cattle and livestock are safe."

Known as the Smart Villages project, this reconstruction effort started with finding locations less susceptible to flooding. In addition to climate-resilient building plans and steps to ease flooding, the project follows low-emission construction practices and includes a broad array of new amenities such as internet connectivity. The program, supported by about 45 Rotary clubs throughout Pakistan and some in other countries, was the idea of architect and Past Rotary Director Muhammad Faiz Kidwai.

"I had always believed that when tragedies happen, we get very emotionally involved in the first stage — the relief stage. But life actually begins when that stage is over," Kidwai says. "Keeping in view the fact that the flooding was due to climate change, I started thinking, 'Let's do something which is sustainable, and where we can really contribute in terms of climate change as well.' And so, I started developing a model."

Since then, 12 Smart Villages have been built, and plans are in place to construct 13 more by the end of 2025. What makes these villages "smart"? They have encircling mud walls, wooded areas, and channel drainage to divert floodwaters. Clean water is supplied by solar-powered wells, rainwater harvesting, and check dams. Every two homes share an eco-toilet. Solar panels provide electricity to

To learn more and get involved, visit this site: [rotarypakistan.smartvillages.org](https://rotarypakistan.smartvillages.org).



Mindful of the role climate change played in the 2022 floods, Pakistan's Rotary clubs put climate adaptation at the center of rebuilding efforts, working with rural communities to incorporate renewable energy and indigenous building techniques.

common areas and water treatment facilities and allow internet connectivity. Rotary members have negotiated agreements with internet providers and a medical university to set up online health services. And the villages were constructed using climate-friendly materials and methods.

"I joined Rotary in 1984, and in my whole Rotary career, I have never seen the likes of this program," says Rais Ahmed Khan, a past governor of District 3271 and a member of the Rotary Club of Greater Mirpurkhas, who is a district chair for the Smart Villages project. "Rotary provided the opportunity, and the Rotarians did the whole thing with the villagers in the affected areas."

The Smart Villages also give female residents new ways to earn money — an important initiative in a country where women in rural areas participate in the workforce at higher rates than women in urban

areas. Each village has a workshop where women can embroider cloth and make other items to sell. Bheel's village got 25 sewing machines and six months' worth of fabric. "With all the other things Rotary did, they did some things to improve the economy also," Bheel says.

The project cost around \$325,000 and was funded through a mix of direct donations and grants, including disaster response grants from The Rotary Foundation's Pakistan Flood Response Fund. The Rotary members formed partnerships with several organizations and businesses, including the Saylani Welfare International Trust and the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan. Constructing the homes in the first village took about eight months, but with practice, the builders were soon able to complete this phase in three to four months. Still, there were many problems to solve along the way.

"One of the biggest challenges was securing permission and allocating ownership from the property owners," says Shakeel Kaim Khani, governor-elect of District 3271 and a member of the Rotary Club of Samaro. Kaim Khani was among several Rotary members who donated land to build on.

"The lack of proper access roads and damaged infrastructure made it difficult to transport materials and personnel to the locations, hindering our progress," Kaim Khani adds. "Also, the absence of pure water sources presented significant challenges. We implemented water treatment solutions to address water scarcity and quality issues."

The program has provided homes to around 1,200 people so far, but its overall impact is much broader. Smart Villages provide a paradigm for addressing two major concerns related to climate change: making building practices more

## OUR WORLD

eco-friendly and preventing mass migration from rural areas.

There's a growing movement of builders and city planners around the world calling for more sustainable building practices. Building construction and operations are responsible for more than a third of global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions each year, and the manufacture of cement and concrete alone generates up to 9 percent of all annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In contrast, rural building practices in the developing world are often climate friendly.

"True sustainable knowledge exists in rural areas," says Ming Hu, an associate professor at the University of Notre Dame's School of Architecture and author of *Green Building Costs: The Affordability of Sustainable Design*. "Once we start trying to be 'high tech,' we tend to put away practices that are actually very good in terms of sustainability."

Kidwai sought out indigenous materials and practices when designing the Smart Village buildings. They're constructed from locally available materials like mud, lime, and bamboo. In areas without bamboo, Rotarians planted it for later use.

The program also has a different kind of sustainability in mind: sustaining rural lifestyles. By improving rural people's standards of living, Kidwai argues, Smart Villages will allow them to remain on their land instead of moving to cities.

"The Smart Villages program will not just bring environmental sustainability in villages, but will also help in deurbanization," Kidwai says. "If we can provide a better quality of life in villages, there will be no reason for immigrants to leave their loved ones and come to urban centers in search of livelihood."

Such migration can put a strain on cities, increase greenhouse

The program has provided homes to around 1,200 people so far, but its overall impact is broader. Smart Villages provide a paradigm for addressing two major concerns related to climate change: making building practices more eco-friendly and preventing mass migration.



gas emissions, and result in worse hardships for those who leave their homes. To try to prevent this, experts around the world are putting their own spins on the idea of "smart villages." The Smart Villages Research Group, based in the United Kingdom, focuses on rural access to electricity.

"Studies have been carried out to discern whether young people would stay in their villages if better facilities became available," says Brian Heap, one of the UK initia-

tive's originators. "In nearly every case it turns out that they would, because that is their family base."

In the Rotary clubs' Smart Villages, even the building process was a family affair. Bheel was particularly happy that she and her relatives were able to construct their new homes themselves.

"No one borrowed any labor. We and our family members established and built these houses," she says. "Now our children and our families are safe." — ETELKA LEHOCZKY

### BY THE NUMBERS

# 8 million

Number of people displaced by the 2022 floods in Pakistan

# 1/3

Portion of Pakistan submerged during the floods

# 1,200

Number of people housed in Smart Villages to date

## Short takes

This month, district governors can nominate Rotarians and Rotaractors for the Service Above Self Award. Learn more at [rotary.org/awards](https://rotary.org/awards).

In 2023-24, The Rotary Foundation approved 1,285 global grants, 485 district grants, 105 disaster response grants (preliminary figures), and one Programs of Scale grant.







PROFILE

## Polio and beyond

*A Rotarian returns year after year to his homeland to help with vaccines and more*

**Ezra Teshome**  
Rotary Club  
of University  
District of  
Seattle

In 1997, Ezra Teshome traveled from his home in Seattle to a Rotary peace conference in Ethiopia, where he was born and raised. Rotarians there were organizing National Immunization Days. In one village, Teshome met a man and his 8-year-old daughter, who had polio. The man thought the visitors were there to cure her. He asked Teshome for help.

“For the whole day, it really bothered me that the child was crippled for the rest of her life, for the loss of two drops of vaccine,” Teshome says. “When I came back to the United States, I said, ‘I will come back every year to participate in National Immunization Days with my Rotarian friends.’”

The next year, about 24 people came with him. Almost every year since, he’s taken anywhere from 60 to 80 people at one time to administer vaccinations.

Ethiopia’s mountainous terrain and hot weather make transporting vaccines difficult. “When you walk three, four hours without any refrigeration system, the vaccine could start to spoil,” Teshome says. “We have built clinics and asked people to bring their kids there.” These clinics are also equipped to meet other public health needs in the communities.

The impact of Teshome’s trips has spread in other ways too. Rotarians attending his trips have helped install nearly 100 water projects throughout the country, provide 120 shelter homes, and donate ambulances.

*Time* magazine named Teshome a global health hero at the 2005 *Time* Global Health Summit. That year, Ethiopia’s national immunization campaign reached 16 million children. Looking ahead, Teshome wants to continue providing clean water access in Ethiopia, contribute to peace in the region — and see a worldwide end to polio. — JP SWENSON

Cedric Bichano, a former Rotaractor in Uganda who founded the World Refugee Film Academy, was named one of the Kofi Annan Foundation’s 2024 Changemakers.



Rotaractors can now, like Rotarians, use Rotary Club Central to plan and track their goals. Get started at [my.rotary.org](https://my.rotary.org).

The RI Board re-elected John Hewko to serve as Rotary’s general secretary through 2028.

# People of action around the globe

By Brad Webber

Rotary members and their partners in service come together each World Polio Day on 24 October to recognize progress in the fight to end the disease. Here is a sample of the ways members are taking action to make history and eradicate polio.

Register your club's participation at [endpolio.org/register-your-event](https://endpolio.org/register-your-event).

## Colombia

Sonia Uribe and her husband, Alberto Londoño, created a stuffed animal collection called El Zoo del Amor, or the Zoo of Love, to comfort seriously ill children and raise money for polio eradication. Sales of Anna the giraffe, Lucas the tiger, and other animals — each wearing a shirt with Rotary and End Polio Now logos — have raised about \$550,000 since their introduction in 2018. In addition to giving the animals to sick children, Rotarians carry them on their travels and snap photos of them at iconic landmarks. "All these animals have traveled, being ambassadors of the Rotary brand," says Uribe, a member of the Rotary Club of Nuevo Medellín and, like Londoño, a past governor of District 4271. Londoño is a member of the Rotary Club of Medellín Nutibara. The couple also manage the Fundación Monica Uribe Por Amor, which assists children with spina bifida.



# 22,000

Children who've received Zoo of Love toys



## United States

The Rotary Club of Scranton, Pennsylvania, is helping a new generation learn about polio. Students from Dunmore High School have created a documentary based on interviews conducted during a polio and health policy symposium that the club and District 7410 organized for World Polio Day 2023. The film features interviews with International PolioPlus Committee Chair Michael McGovern, other Rotarians, and symposium attendees, and is scheduled for broadcast during the club's World Polio Day events this month. "It is hard to get hands-on with history," says Alan Roche, a Dunmore teacher who enlisted about 40 students to produce the video, which includes interviews with three local polio survivors, one of whom taught at the high school. The project was an eye-opener for the young people, he says. "It's usually a page or two in the textbook, a blip in a slideshow," Roche says. "It's one thing to just learn about this and another to talk to someone who was affected by it and lives in your hometown."



# 1894

First U.S. polio epidemic

### France

More than a dozen Rotarians and friends in southeastern France donned inflatable dinosaur costumes and stumbled along a 100-meter course in a playful footrace that raised funds and awareness for Rotary's mission to end polio. Organized by District 1730, the T-Rex Race took place last October during the Fréjus International Air Festival, a kite fair that draws thousands of people. "The idea came to me to create an event to rejuvenate the image of Rotary in the fight against polio," says Dinh Hoan Tran, the district's immediate past governor and member of the Rotary Club of Nice. Spectators could place bets on the contestants. "We made people laugh and we informed people," says Tran. More than 40 of the district's 71 clubs participated in the event, as the district motivated clubs to "support PolioPlus to the tune of about \$45,000," he says.



# 24+

Years since Europe was declared polio-free



### South Africa

To draw attention to the need for vigilance and vaccinations, the Rotary Club of Newlands assembled Rotary members and others for a World Polio Day photo shoot with the landmark Table Mountain in the background. On the day of the shoot, however, a heavy mist enveloped the site. "We made the best of it, chatting and taking selfies, until eventually the sun came out," says Past President Janey Ball. She used RI's polio resources toolkit to create artwork for selfie frames and set up a Facebook event called Make Polio History to record the pictures and raise awareness. To encourage Rotary members, Ball suggested using the slogan "focus on the finish." "The selfie frames have been in continuous use since the event, moving from one club to another," she says.

# 80 million

Polio vaccine doses administered in southern Africa in 2022



### Japan

Yoichiro Miyazaki switched into high gear to raise money for the PolioPlus Society. Miyazaki, a member of the Rotary Club of Tokyo Mitaka, cycled the length of Japan last October, covering 2,500 kilometers (1,553 miles) in 24 days. "If you don't act, there's no point," he tells *Rotary Italia* magazine, using a slogan developed for his year as governor of District 2750 in 2023-24. Along the way, fellow district governors, other Rotarians, and well-wishers cheered for him as he traversed twisting roads, uphill climbs, and tunnels. RI General Secretary John Hewko, another avid cyclist, offered a video message of support. Prompted by news coverage of his ride, donors contributed \$140,000. Miyazaki continues to pedal strong: In late April, he finished the Osaka-to-Tokyo challenge just three hours shy of the 30-hour goal en route to more fundraising for polio.

# 7th

Japan's rank among nations in per capita bicycle ownership



GOODWILL

# Bring Rotary to work

How to adopt a service mindset in the office through “job purposing”

By Bea Boccalandro

If you showed up at Leroy’s studio apartment in Washington, D.C., on a particular Friday night a few years ago, you might have found the 24-year-old drinking beer and boasting to friends that a single mother had hugged him. The mom was thanking Leroy for potentially saving her toddler from injury or death. Had Leroy gone to a vaccination event? No. He had simply gone to work. Is Leroy a firefighter? A nurse? No and no. He’s a parking attendant. If you’re scratching your head, I don’t blame you. No one would expect a parking attendant to save lives and limbs. Yet, Leroy made it so.

One day, Leroy noticed that some vehicles on the lot had low tire tread. This alarmed him — his beloved uncle had once crashed and suffered serious injuries when driving through a thunderstorm on bald tires. As a result, Leroy made a point of routinely checking the tire tread of cars in the lot and alerting any customers driving unsafe vehicles.

By reshaping his workweek to make a meaningful contribution to others and a societal cause, a practice I’ve dubbed “job purposing,” Leroy has educated hundreds of drivers and almost certainly prevented crashes, injuries, and perhaps even deaths. Leroy isn’t alone. In my book *Do Good at Work: How Simple Acts of Social Purpose Drive Success and Well-being*, I document over 100 examples of job purposing, such as:

- A business in a city where many residents lack access to potable water sets up a free water station at its building and shares its filtered water with the public.

- A manager at a bank invites local nonprofits to use its parking lot on weekends, when the bank is closed, for car wash fundraisers, health fairs, or other activities.
- A pharmacy cashier stays informed about social service programs in the area, carries cards listing them, and shares these cards with customers who express that they’re experiencing difficulties.
- A marketing assistant at an apparel company persuades her superiors to honor World Day Against Trafficking in Persons by turning over the company’s social media accounts for the day to a nonprofit partner dedicated to that cause.
- A driver for a ride-booking service directs the topic of conversations with customers toward better understanding of people with disabilities.

You get the idea. Job purposing makes it possible for any of us to serve through the job we already do. We merely need to do our work differently.

**Apply job purposing to Rotary**

So, how will *you* job purpose?

Might you:

- Offer a free product or service? If you work at or own a salon, this might be a free haircut to mothers reentering the job market. If you’re a financial planner, this might be a free counseling session to individuals who are unemployed. If your business conducts trainings in leadership, marketing, or other areas, this might be an invitation to local nonprofit staff to attend.

- Loan a conference room for your Rotary club to hold meetings, wall space for artists to display their work, or a venue for another cause?
- Feature the nonprofits your club supports in your company’s social media posts?
- Direct small talk with business relations toward Rotary, including invitations to attend your club’s meetings?

The bottom line? Even if your busy work schedule does not allow you to participate in service events, with a little creative thinking, you can serve.

**Transforming work**

One day, I pulled into Leroy’s lot to witness him toast his co-worker with a sports drink and exclaim, “I’m so in, bro!” Leroy’s exuberance wasn’t about a date to play basketball, a night out, or anything typically considered fun. It was about agreeing to start work two hours early the next morning to cover for his colleague. Why would he be so animated about more work?

According to Leroy, it’s because of job purposing. Before he started caring for his customers’ safety, he spent much of his shift hunched over his phone, avoiding unnecessary effort, and resenting customers for the attention they required. “Helping others rewired me into the energetic and joyful worker I now am,” he says.

Rotary members — many of whom have experienced what psychologists refer to as the “helper’s high” — won’t be surprised that research suggests that job purposing can boost well-being. Scientists have established, for example, that it douses our brains with dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin, the same hormones that make intimacy and chocolate wonderful.

This could be the best part of bringing Rotary to work through job purposing. It just might make ordinary workdays as uplifting and fulfilling as your Rotary service has always been. ■

Bea Boccalandro is a corporate purpose adviser, author, and speaker. Her work has been featured in *Harvard Business Review*, *Forbes*, and on the TEDx Talks stage. She’s a member of the Rotary Club of San Clemente, California, and a self-proclaimed comically bad surfer.

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ESSAY

# The shot heard round the world

A son recalls his father's great medical achievement — and the moment he experienced that breakthrough firsthand

By Dr. Peter L. Salk



I have been president of the Jonas Salk Legacy Foundation since its founding in 2009. As you can imagine, focusing my attention in that role on the legacy of my father's many contributions to humanity — including his creation of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, just up the road in La Jolla on a bluff overlooking California's magnificent Pacific Coast — has a special significance for me.

My father, Dr. Jonas Salk, developer of the first polio vaccine, was born in New York City on 28 October 1914, exactly three months after the beginning of World War I. From his earliest days, he was someone who wanted to do something to be helpful to humanity. That impulse and drive may have come in part from an incident that was imprinted in his memory when he was a little boy. At the end of the war, on Armistice Day in 1918, he witnessed a parade filled with soldiers who had come home from battle. Some had been injured or maimed, walking with crutches or using a wheelchair. My father always had a sensitive side, and he was deeply affected by what he had seen.

As he grew older, my father considered going to law school and running for Congress. His mother, who had come over to this country from Russia, astutely advised him that this was not a good decision — especially since, as she put it, “you can't even win an argument with me.” I think she wanted him to become a rabbi, which I don't think was in my father's character.

As it turned out, my father decided to go to City College in New York, and there his studies took an unexpected turn. In his first year, a chemistry course was offered, and this appealed to him. The problem was that the class met on a Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. His parents were very observant in following Jewish traditions and customs, which meant that my father had a difficult decision to make. In the end, he took the chemistry class, which was the starting point for what turned out to be a long and productive career.

After college, having had such a positive experience training in the sciences, my father enrolled in the New York University College of Medicine. From the start, he knew that he wanted to go into research. During a first-year microbiology class, a professor spoke about vaccines. He explained that, though doctors could use chemically inactivated

toxins to vaccinate against bacterial diseases such as diphtheria and tetanus, they could not use inactivated viruses to immunize against viral diseases such as influenza or polio because protection against infection with viruses required that the body experience an actual infection with the living virus.

That didn't make any sense to my father, and when he asked his teacher why, the professor basically responded, “Well, just because.” That unsatisfactory answer set my father on a journey of discovery that would fulfill his dream to help humanity, in ways and to a degree that he could never have imagined. And it was a journey on which his family, including his three sons, would be carried along.

Following medical school, after a two-year clinical internship at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital, my father went to work with Dr. Thomas Francis Jr., then the head of the epidemiology department at the University of Michigan. My father had previously worked with Dr. Francis on influenza while still a student at NYU College of Medicine, and that had been a seminal experience for him. Working alongside his mentor at Michigan, my father made important contributions to the successful creation of an influenza vaccine, utilizing a chemically inactivated virus, that was introduced for use by the Army at the end of World War II.

In 1947, seeking to head a laboratory of his own, my father moved on to the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. There he took charge of creating the Virus Research Laboratory and, with his growing interest in polio, received a grant for polio research from the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis.

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**Pandemonium  
broke loose. The  
pall of fear that  
had pervaded this  
country for so many  
years was lifted.**

As all of this was going on, my father had married and started a family. He met my mother, Donna, while working one summer at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. They married on 9 June 1939, the day after he graduated from medical school with an M.D. degree. I was born five years later, the first of my parents' three sons. During my childhood, polio epidemics became an increasing global scourge. I can remember my parents not allowing us to visit a beloved amusement park when we were on vacation, out of fear of our becoming infected. On another occasion, our family accompanied my father to a polio meeting at the Greenbrier resort in West Virginia. There I saw a girl at a swimming pool who had been disabled by the disease. Because I was around the same age as the girl, that encounter had a lasting impact on me.

During all this time my father and his team were rigorously working to develop a vaccine that would be effective against all three immunologic types of polio. The first human studies with the experimental vaccine were conducted at the D.T. Watson Home for Crippled Children outside of Pittsburgh. These tests included children who had already experienced some form of paralysis due to polio. Because they had already been infected by at least one of the three types of poliovirus, there was no danger they could become paralyzed again if they were injected with the chemically inactivated virus of the same type. It turned out that when these children were injected with the inactivated virus, their antibodies against the virus were boosted. Since antibodies in the blood stream were all that was needed to prevent the virus from traveling to the brain and spinal cord and killing the nerve cells that control muscle movement, when that information was confirmed, my father knew that the vaccine he and his team had been working on should be a success.

At one point early on, my father had tested the experimental vaccine on himself and his lab workers. And one day it was our turn, me and my two brothers, ages 9, 6, and not quite 3 years old. As you can imagine, I was not very happy to be part of this joyful experience. Our father came home with the vaccine, and he proceeded to sterilize the daunting glass syringes and the metal needles by

boiling them on the kitchen stove. I was absolutely not a fan of needles — but what child is? I stood there, miserable and looking out the window, my arm held out and awaiting the injection. And then something miraculous happened: I didn't feel the needle. It didn't hurt, unlike every other shot I'd ever had. And for that reason, that day is burnt into my memory forever.

Two years later, on 12 April 1955, my father joined Dr. Francis at a press conference at the University of Michigan. Dr. Francis had been tasked with analyzing the results of the vast clinical trial of the experimental vaccine, and now he made an announcement that would change medical history: The vaccine had been demonstrated to be up to 90 percent effective in preventing polio. Pandemonium broke loose. Kids were let out of school, church bells rang, factory whistles blew. The pall of fear that had pervaded this country for so many years was lifted. I get goose bumps thinking about it even all these years later.

In 1955, more than 10 million children received one or more injections of the Salk vaccine. Within one year, polio cases and deaths in the United States had been nearly halved, a trend that continued and made a vision of polio eradication a possibility.

Today, that goal is getting ever closer to reality. Rotary International has been a champion in ensuring that one day — and, I hope, one day soon — that goal will be reached. Rotary helped found the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, and it continues to put a major emphasis on getting the job done, as does the Gates Foundation, with its generous donations, and the other organizations that are part of the GPEI. Everyone is working unbelievably hard, and practical work is being done on the ground where it's most essential. Efforts are underway to remove obstacles and deal with societal issues that have impeded progress in some remaining parts of the world.

The contributions Rotary has made toward eradicating polio have been indispensable, and its indomitable spirit has been a driving force in this effort. I've had the great pleasure on many occasions of speaking to and with members of Rotary, and each time it has been an uplifting experience. The desire shared



by Rotary members to help the world is inspiring and mirrors the driving force in my father's life.

My father was the author of several books. One of them, recently published in an updated version as *A New Reality: Human Evolution for a Sustainable Future*, he co-wrote with my brother Jonathan. Seeing that title, and the titles of the other books he wrote, provides insights into where my father's interests and hopes lay. They also suggest where we should turn our efforts and energies next.

As my father did with polio, we need to go beyond theorizing. We can have grand desires for the human species, but we need to create and utilize real and useful tools that can have a direct impact on societal interactions and environmental imbalances. Humanity seems to be

facing monumental problems, but they can be overcome. Just look at what my father accomplished. Seventy years ago, there was a vaccine in a bottle, and today we're almost at the point of achieving a once unimaginable outcome.

I feel a devotion to my father, and I feel a responsibility to ensure that his ways of thinking and his contributions are fully understood. He embraced the entire world in his scientific, humanistic, and philosophical vision for the future, and the elements of his legacy will continue to reach into everyone's lives. ■

*Dr. Peter L. Salk is president of the Jonas Salk Legacy Foundation in La Jolla, California, and a part-time professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health.*





# GIVE US YOUR BEST SHOT

The *Rotary* magazine Photo Awards return in the June 2025 issue. It's your chance to share your vision of the world, be it in glorious color or classic black and white. Members of Rotary and their families may submit photos until 31 December. But don't wait: Send us your images today. Submit your photos at [rotary.org/photoawards](https://rotary.org/photoawards).

PHOTOGRAPHS: (FROM TOP) ERIC STRAND; LEIGH ANN WILSON; KEITH MARSH

+

A photographer documents progress and promise on the road to stop polio for good

BY JEAN-MARC GIBOUX

# CHASING POLIO





**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA  
1997**

At the time I took this photo, there weren't too many places for kids who had polio to receive treatment. The Cheshire Home, part of a worldwide network, was giving them reconstructive surgery and a place to live. What I love about this photo is that kids are kids. The child's legs had to be reconstructed, but he's having a blast on the playground like any other kid.



## AS A FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER, I WAS LOOKING FOR A GREAT STORY FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

when I read an article in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1997 about the drive to eradicate polio. I noticed a local connection: Rotary. I called Rotary and the organization gave me a grant to cover the story. The Rotary team picked five places in the world for me to visit. Starting in 1997, I spent a year traveling to Turkey, India, Nepal, Ethiopia, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. At the end of my travels, *Life* magazine picked up the story and published it in the November 1998 issue.

I went on to cover the polio eradication effort for 18 years. I kept the subject fresh by trying to link polio eradication with major events happening in the world. For example, I decided to see the polio vaccinations in 2004 during the conflict in the Darfur region in Sudan. There were more than 200,000 refugees in Chad on the border with Sudan. Just getting there was very difficult. I had a contact with Doctors Without



Borders — the group was handling health care on the border. I stayed in tents with doctors and nurses in the camp for a week. I would follow them on their daily routine to do the vaccinations. It was interesting to get to see what was happening in people's private spaces. The polio program allowed me to get into those places.

I was impressed by the way the polio campaign was done from the bottom up. It reminds me of an ant colony working together. It's teachers, nurses, health workers, anybody. It's a pretty simple vaccination to give, and so everybody's involved. Hundreds of thousands of people are contributing. ■



JEAN-MARC GIBOUX SPEAKS MORE ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES AS A PHOTOGRAPHER COVERING POLIO ERADICATION ON THE ROTARY VOICES PODCAST. LISTEN AT [ON.ROTARY.ORG/PODCAST](https://ON.ROTARY.ORG/PODCAST).



**FREETOWN,  
SIERRA LEONE  
1998**

This is one of my favorite photos. I was on my first assignment with the World Health Organization. As in Ethiopia, the Cheshire Home was a place for kids with polio. There were no parents there. The children were in a big estate surrounded by walls, and outside those walls a civil war was raging. What always stayed with me about this is that it was such a haven of peace, of retreat, for them to be there. I had to be evacuated because the war was worsening. I don't know what happened to them afterward.





**DELHI, INDIA  
1998**

At the Amar Jyoti Research and Rehabilitation Centre there is an integrated school where children with polio study alongside children who don't have polio. This photo was striking because of the condition of their legs.

It was such an intense picture when you see how they got reconstructive surgery. Their legs are supported by metal rods; they get shoes, but they still need crutches. They are the lucky ones. They are getting an education.



**DELHI, INDIA  
2004**

This photo of insulated boxes captures a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the campaign — the importance of the cold chain in the drive to eradicate polio. The polio vaccine is cheap to produce, but it has to be kept cold all the way to

delivery. That is one of the biggest challenges of the campaign, because in some places there is no electricity. So everywhere I went there were always those ice boxes. From Africa to Asia to everywhere, always the same small boxes.





**HERAT PROVINCE,  
AFGHANISTAN  
2002**

I was following teams of vaccinators just after the fall of the Taliban, when there were a couple of years where it was easier to travel around Afghanistan. Over 100,000 people lived in the Maslakh settlement, where displaced people came to stay. There was

a food distribution center where they would line up for hours. That's where you'd find the children. You could see who was vaccinated in the camp and who wasn't by looking for the marking on their finger. That little girl in the center of the picture is getting a ticket to be in the food line.



**MATHURA DISTRICT, INDIA  
2015**

This photo of nurses and health workers at the Farah Community Health Centre is from the first anniversary of a polio-free India. When the end of polio was celebrated, of course it happened in New Delhi with the cabinet ministers. But the really hard work was being done by hundreds of thousands of workers going by foot door to door. The lines, the visuals, the composition make the picture beautiful.



**NEW DELHI, INDIA  
2004**

The Akshya Pratisthan school is another private education and rehabilitation in an integrated environment. When I go into places like this, I'm taking a lot of pictures. In this one, they're lining up to pray before school. It's a nice environment — it's early morning and there's beautiful light. The photo's composition is more geometric and drives you to the boy's face.







**“I kept the subject fresh  
by trying to link polio  
eradication with major events  
happening in the world.”**

# They called it impossible. He didn't listen.

How John Sever inspired the campaign to eradicate polio

By Peter Ross Range

*Perhaps more than any single person, John Sever convinced Rotary and the world to believe in polio eradication. The infectious disease specialist — and Rotarian — died in April at the age of 92. In tribute, we're reprinting this January 2014 Rotary magazine story examining his pivotal role in polio eradication. Celebrate his life with a gift to end polio at [rotary.org/donate](https://rotary.org/donate).*

**I**t was April 1979, and Clem Renouf, then RI president, was leafing through a copy of *Reader's Digest* on his flight from the Philippines. In the pages of the magazine, he read about how smallpox had been eradicated for a little more than the cost of the two Australian naval vessels he'd seen the day before. He had just been visiting Manila to formalize agreements to launch the first project under The Rotary Foundation's Health, Hunger, and Humanity Grants program, known as 3-H, and now Renouf was wondering whether these new grants could enable Rotary to tackle another disease with similar success.

He called his friend John Sever.

Sever was a Rotary district governor in the Washington, D.C., area and head of the infectious diseases branch of the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Diseases and Stroke at the National Institutes of Health. Renouf had met him six months prior, when Sever had arranged for him to speak with contacts in the U.S. State Department before his first major trip as Rotary president to West Africa. "I didn't expect a doctor to be so businesslike, but he changed that misconception," Renouf says. "So when I had this bright idea, it was natural I'd seek John's advice."

As a researcher, Sever was immersed in studies of infectious diseases that affect children, such as measles, and vaccine development. His professional goal was to identify new causes of disease and bring vaccines to the children of the world. He was keenly aware that smallpox — a scourge especially rampant in developing countries — had just been eradicated, the first disease to be halted through a concerted public health effort.

Sever also was friends with Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin, the men who had revolutionized public health with their develop-

ment of the polio vaccines in the 1950s and '60s. The vaccines already were stopping polio in the developed world; the United States would see its last case of endemic polio later in 1979. Sever recognized that Sabin's oral vaccine, available for only 4 cents per dose, had the potential to save more than 350,000 children per year all over the world from the debilitating disease, if only someone could organize the effort.

After Renouf's phone call about which diseases to target, Sever consulted with Sabin. A few weeks later, he mailed Renouf a letter with his recommendation: "If a single vaccine were to be selected for the 3-H program, I would recommend poliomyelitis."

The 3-H program was in its infancy. It was the first time Rotary had committed to new projects beyond the capacity of any one club or district. While the first project, which began in September 1979, focused on bringing polio vaccine to children in the Philippines, the program as a whole was intended to improve health, relieve hunger, and enhance human and social development. Rotary had never had a single corporate cause of this kind.

"The important thing was to get the polio vaccine from the manufacturers to the people who needed it," Sever recalls. "I knew that Rotarians were a big international army of volunteers. They could work with the governments of the world to assist with immunization and provide financial support and social mobilization."

Renouf credits Sever, a member of the Rotary Club of Potomac, Maryland, for convincing Rotary's leaders that the organization could succeed in tackling the disease. "Most would have dismissed it as an impossible dream, beyond our capacity financially or organizationally, as did many former leaders," Renouf says. "But here



PHOTOGRAPH: ROTARY FILE PHOTO



**POLIO MILESTONES:  
eradication by region**

**Americas: 1994**  
**Western Pacific: 2000**  
**Europe: 2002**  
**South-East Asia: 2014**  
**Africa: 2020**

was a Rotarian uniquely qualified — a senior scientist with an appreciation of Rotary’s potential, who by virtue of his reputation personally and professionally was able to persuade the 1979-80 Board to adopt the goal of a polio-free world as the major emphasis of the 3-H program.”

The son of a Chicago physician, Sever remembers his father caring for children with polio. At that time, he says, “you could buy polio insurance for your newborn.” He recalls Sundays in Chicago, when families would go to particular schools or other public facilities for vaccine clinics. “That was called Sabin on Sunday — SOS — the equivalent to what we now call National Immunization Days.”

Sever trained at Northwestern University as a pediatrician and earned a PhD in microbiology. At the NIH and later at the Children’s National Medical Center, he worked as a scientist who also saw patients, a vaccine expert who understood social outreach, and a medical administrator who knew the politics of public health.

These skills would come into play over the next three decades as Sever, along with many other Rotary members, inspired and led the global health community in its dogged struggle against a paralyzing disease. When 1984-85 RI President Carlos Canseco took office, he appointed a committee to create a long-term strategy to immunize all the children of the world against polio by Rotary’s 100th anniversary. Sever served as chair of this Polio 2005 Committee, which developed the plan for Rotary to provide polio vaccines and support to any country that needed assistance. (In 1995, he was appointed to that group’s present incarnation, the International PolioPlus Committee, on which he has served as vice chair of medical affairs since 2006.) Along with Canseco and

Above: John Sever was one of 12 Rotarians from across the United States honored for their volunteer work during Rotary Day at the White House in 2013.

Left: Sever (right) with Albert Sabin at a Polio 2005 Committee meeting in 1984.

Sever, Sabin and Herbert Pigman, then RI general secretary, served as members of the Polio 2005 Committee. “It was these four men, I believe, who were primarily responsible for translating a dream into reality,” Renouf has said.

In his role, Sever became Rotary’s point person on the polio project and spokesperson to the outside world. One of his first challenges was to create a partnership with the World Health Organization. Officials at the organization’s headquarters were skeptical, unsure that the Rotary members knew what they were up against, Sever says. “With Canseco, we had to hold a lot of cocktail hours with WHO members at the InterContinental Hotel in Geneva. They received us politely, but they didn’t think any nongovernmental organization could go the distance.”

With Sever’s help, Rotary received a special designation as a nongovernmental organization affiliated with WHO and forged an official partnership with the agency. That partnership, now known as the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, includes the spearheading partners WHO, Rotary International, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and UNICEF. Other important sources of support include the Gates Foundation and national governments.

Sever is a clear and direct spokesperson, as befits a dedicated scientist, but he’s also modest. When he receives praise for his vision and years of nonstop work on behalf of polio eradication, he waves it away like a village health worker swatting at flies. “It wasn’t just me,” he insists. “Many, many others were involved.” Sever’s dual role as a Rotarian and respected scientist has proved “invaluable” to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, says Hamid Jafari, the campaign’s director at WHO. “He’s a bridge between the world of science and the technical areas of public health that WHO and CDC scientists deal with, and the world of Rotary. Rotarians look up to him for validation of the science, of the technical strategies, of the research we have. So his word is important.”

“The polio eradication program is where it is today,” Renouf says, “because of the contribution of some remarkable people — none more so than John. At a crucial time, he had the knowledge and experience and ability to breathe life into a nebulous idea and provide the leadership needed to reach a historic goal. I just hope he is onstage when that announcement is made, to receive the recognition he deserves.” ■

The survivor of an abusive arranged marriage, Fraidy Reiss wants to ensure that other girls never suffer the same ordeal



A woman with short dark hair and red lipstick stands in a closet, looking slightly to her left. She is wearing a magenta lace top with puffed sleeves and a dark skirt. Her hands are on her hips. The background shows a wooden closet door and hanging clothes.

# A bride too soon

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BY ELLY FISHMAN

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Photography by  
Sydney Walsh

# Fraidy Reiss

has a tight 90 minutes between her morning meetings. She just got off a call with her staff, and she's soon due on another with a group of legislators who have taken up the cause to end forced and child marriage. It's an especially warm fall afternoon and Reiss considers whether to turn on the unit air conditioner that sits in a nearby window. Her New Jersey office is small and humble by design. As the founder of Unchained at Last, an activist group that works to end forced marriage and child marriage in the United States, Reiss does not want her offices to be found for fear of retaliation from the people and communities both she and her clients have worked hard to escape.

Reiss is clad in her typical uniform: a skirt that sits well above the knee and platform shoes that add no less than 3 inches to her petite frame. She's also wearing her signature bright red lipstick. "I'm having my teenage rebellion in my 40s," says Reiss with a laugh. "I finally get the opportunity to express myself through clothing, and I'm really enjoying that."

But even with minimal layers, Reiss feels the heat sinking in. She decides to turn on the air. As she crosses the room, Reiss passes a collection of photos hung on the wall. One features the human rights lawyer Amal Clooney, another U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren. Anita Hill, the lawyer and professor who accused Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment, holds a place, as does Christine Blasey Ford, who made even more serious allegations against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. A phrase above the photos proclaims "The Wall of Gutsy Women." They serve as an ad hoc council, arbiters of strength and courage who "oversee" the organization's daily business. Not that Reiss necessarily needs such guidance. She's used to forging her own path.

Seventeen years ago, Reiss made a change that few ultra-Orthodox Jews ever do. She left an abusive arranged marriage — and, as a result, she also left her family and community — and began her life anew. Forge is perhaps too tempered a word for what Reiss accomplished. Rather, she clawed her way out and willfully carved her own path. And while Reiss' office hardly advertises itself as a desired destination, every book, poster, and rip in the carpet represents the life she so fiercely fought for. And it's here in this stuffy room with a single air conditioning unit that Reiss, in her miniskirts and crimson lips, now fights for those same freedoms for thousands of women across the country.

**W**hen Reiss considers the beginning of her story, she pauses. "What people don't understand is in the Orthodox Jewish community, it begins as soon as you are verbal," reflects Reiss. "There was always an understanding that I was not going to have a choice about whether and when to marry."

Despite her early indoctrination, Reiss, who was born the second youngest of six, did not hold a particularly romantic perspective on marriage. When Reiss was only 4 years old, her mother fled their family home with Reiss and her siblings in the middle of the night. "My father was very, very violent and abusive," says Reiss, who explains that her parents were also brought together in an arranged marriage. In response to reports of extreme domestic violence, a rabbi made the rare decision to grant Reiss' mother permission to leave her husband. It would be another seven years before Reiss' father granted a divorce. (Under Orthodox Jewish law, only the husband has the power to divorce his wife.) Watching her mother live in that limbo between separation and divorce weighed heavily on Reiss. "She was considered an *agunah*, or a chained woman whose husband won't give her a divorce," says Reiss, who recalls hearing her mother cry herself to sleep at night. "It's a hellish experience. Instead of getting support from the community, you're shamed for your helplessness. My mother was doubly victimized."

The experience raised many questions for a young Reiss, queries she was told to temper. "I remember saying things like, 'Why can't a woman grant a divorce?'" says Reiss. "The misogyny of it never made sense to me. And because I asked those questions, I was considered someone to keep an eye on."

Neither Reiss' mother's saga nor the young girl's probing, however, altered Reiss' own fate to marry at 19. Like her mother and nearly every woman of their Haredi Jewish community, Reiss was paired with a husband through a matchmaker. Reiss had her first daughter at 20 and her second at 24. By 27, Reiss found herself trapped in a familiar script. Her husband, like her father, was violent and abusive. But when she approached her mother looking for safe haven, Reiss says, her mother turned her away. "I told her I was scared for my life," recalls Reiss. "I told her my husband made it clear that he was going to kill me." Rather than respond to Reiss' fears, her mother simply turned away. "She just walked out of the room. She didn't even answer me." That response broke Reiss' heart.

Looking back, Reiss believes that her mother's dismissal reflected the long-abused woman's own trauma. "That was the best she could do," reflects Reiss. The memory still brings tears to her eyes. "After all that she endured, and how little she had dealt with her own trauma, I think the only thing she could do was leave the room and pretend the conversation never happened." Her mother never brought up the topic with her daughter again, and the last time Reiss spoke to her mother was before Reiss decided to leave the Orthodox Jewish community for good.

Child and forced marriage practices, explains Reiss, rarely exist in a vacuum. "Forced marriages are almost always part of a cycle that's been going on for generations." And those cycles are spread far and wide

**Opening pages:** Against a backdrop of wedding dresses, Fraidy Reiss stands defiantly inside the Unchained at Last office. **Right:** A matchmaker paired Reiss with her future husband, whom she married at 19. **Below:** Reiss had the first of her two daughters when she was 20.



“It’s a hellish experience. ... Forced marriages are almost always part of a cycle that’s been going on for generations.”

across America. “This is a national issue. It impacts every community, religion, and socioeconomic level you can think of.”

According to data collected by Reiss and her colleagues at Unchained at Last, nearly 300,000 minors were legally married in the United States between 2000 and 2018. Up until 2018, child marriage remained legal in every state. While some states have a minimum age requirement of 18, most allow for minors to marry with parental or judicial consent. Because marriage is regulated by the states, there is no federal law that bans child marriage. That means in most states across the country, minors can be forced into a marriage without the ability to exit one.

Most wedded minors included in the research were 16 or 17 years old when they married, though the report suggests that children as young as 10 have been compelled into marriage. Among the minors married during that period, 86 percent were girls, and most were wed to adult men.

And they came from areas and groups across the United States. While arranged marriage is common in many cultures, including in some Orthodox Jewish

communities, other factors such as societal and family pressure call into question the issue of consent, blurring the lines between an arranged marriage and the abusive practice of a forced marriage. Studies have shown that child marriage is more common among religious and immigrant groups and in some Southern states with permissive laws, including Tennessee and West Virginia.

Over the last six years, Reiss and her Unchained at Last team have helped to get legislation passed prohibiting child marriage in 13 states. Delaware led the change in 2018, becoming the first state to set the minimum marriage age at 18 and effectively ban child marriage. It was soon followed by New Jersey. Other states that have since enacted similar laws include Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Rhode Island, New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, Michigan, Washington, Virginia, and most recently, New Hampshire, all setting the legal minimum age for marriage at 18.

But overturning the practice in every U.S. state appears an uphill battle when the Wyoming Republican Party, for example, has given voice to concerns that

Since 2015, Reiss (second from right) and Unchained at Last have staged protests, called “chain-ins,” at capitols across the country, including this one in Boston in 2021.



PHOTOGRAPH: MATILDE SIMAS/COURTESY OF UNCHAINED AT LAST





Rotary Peace Fellow Ana Cutter hosts a panel on child marriage at Rotary Day with UNICEF in 2022.

## Center stage at Rotary

The United Nations and other international agencies consider child marriage, which disproportionately affects girls, to be a human rights violation. And yet, says Ana Cutter, “1 in 5 girls experiences child marriage around the world.” A Rotary Peace Fellow (Chulalongkorn, 2016), Cutter offered up that startling statistic in 2022 as she hosted a panel devoted to ending child marriage at Rotary Day with UNICEF. At the time Cutter was the Rotary representative to UN Women; today she’s the Washington, D.C., liaison

for the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The office provides additional statistics that amplify Cutter’s pronouncement. Today more than 650 million women were married before they were 18 — and every year, another 12 million girls enter those ranks. That’s nearly 33,000 girls with each passing day.

In 2016, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund established the Global Programme to End Child Marriage. They focused their efforts on 12 countries in Africa and Asia where the practice of child marriage was widespread.

In one of those countries, India, the Rotary Club of Budge Budge, based in Kolkata, has been working in West Bengal state to reduce child marriage and improve educational and economic opportuni-

ties for girls. Toward that end, the club has partnered for years with Nishtha, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering women and children. Most recently, with help from a \$56,000 global grant from The Rotary Foundation, the club assisted the organization’s Girls to Girls program, which, according to the grant sponsors, placed “special emphasis ... upon stopping child marriage.”

“This is a problem and a challenge obviously that cannot just be addressed by women and girls,” Cutter told her global audience at the Rotary-UNICEF event two years ago. “We need men and boys as well to work with us to end and prevent child marriage” — a fact that members of Rotary, regardless of gender, have understood and acted upon for years.

restricting child marriage could prevent teen parents from raising their children together. Similarly, a Republican legislator in West Virginia opposed a ban on child marriage, contending that such restrictions would push young people to cross state lines to seek a marriage license. And lawmakers in several states argue that certain extenuating circumstances — religious and cultural customs or teen pregnancy, for example — are reasons to leave the laws unchanged.

But Reiss is not without conservative allies. Missouri state Senator Holly Thompson Rehder, a Republican, stands among those hoping to change more state laws. “Years ago, when our great-grandparents got married at 14 or 15, women didn’t have equality,” says Thompson Rehder, who went through a child marriage. And so Thompson Rehder, who is vocal in her opposition to abortion access and gun control, remains an advocate to end child marriage. “Now we have the same opportunity that men do to become educated, to become the breadwinners. Us getting married early cuts off our opportunity.”

A report published by the International Center for Research on Women notes that girls who marry before 19 have historically been more likely to drop out of school and complete fewer years of their education than their peers who marry later. According to the World Bank, child marriage is strongly linked to higher rates of economic dependency, lower earnings, and greater likelihood of living in poverty. And then there’s the social and psychological impact. Some research suggests that teenage brides have higher rates of psychological stress. “We want better for our girls,” insists Thompson Rehder.

While Thompson Rehder says that she’s found enthusiastic support among women in the Missouri Senate, legislation banning child marriage faces numerous hurdles. One reason for that, believes Reiss, is that most Americans don’t want to look at the alarming realities of forced and child marriages. “It can feel like shouting in a void,” she says. But that doesn’t stop Reiss. “I’ve always been a fighter.”

Around the time that Reiss’ mother ignored her daughter’s plea for help, Reiss filed a temporary restraining order against her husband. It didn’t last long: A rabbi sent a lawyer to take Reiss to the courthouse to withdraw it. That’s when the mother of two understood that if she wanted to break loose from her marriage, she’d have to do it on her own.

In the following weeks, Reiss made a five-year plan. First, she started hiding money in a cereal box. “Like a lot of abusers, my husband would buy me jewelry after he was really violent,” says Reiss, “but he had the worst taste.” The pieces may have been ugly, but they were also expensive. Reiss would return the jewelry and take the cash in its place, sometimes as much as \$1,500. “I didn’t want jewelry; I wanted my freedom.”

Reiss also started pocketing money her husband gave her for new wigs, which can cost upward of \$5,000. Normally, Reiss explains, Orthodox Jewish women may buy two new wigs a year because the hairpieces, often worn for modesty over their natural hair, oxidize over time. “I would blow dry and wash my old wigs,” explains Reiss. “It’s really hard to make them look new, but I figured it out.”

Reiss enrolled in the undergraduate program at Rutgers University, a decision that made her husband furious. “But I said, ‘How exactly are you going to stop me?’” says Reiss. “My whole family tried to stop me, but I insisted.” By the time Reiss graduated five years later at age 32, she’d stashed away \$40,000.

Over a decade into her marriage, Reiss changed the locks on her house and filed for divorce. She was finally in a stable enough situation to leave her husband for good. Her first job was working as a reporter at the *Asbury Park Press*. She later left that job for one as a private investigator. When she bought her own house at age 36, Reiss and her two daughters named it *palais de triomphe*. “The house meant that not only had I left a bad situation,” says Reiss, “but that I’d arrived at a better one.”

**Right:** Inspired by Reiss’ activism, women from across the U.S. have sent her their wedding dresses. Unchained now has an inventory of 115 donated bridal gowns.

“[Forced and child marriage] is a national issue. It impacts every community, religion, and socioeconomic level you can think of.”



Finally on steady ground, Reiss decided she wanted to find a way to help other people trapped in similar circumstances. In 2011, the same year Reiss bought her house, she founded Unchained at Last. “When I went through this, I was so alone,” says Reiss. “And I wanted to be there for others in a way that nobody was for me.” As a working single mother, Reiss figured she could help five people her first year; by the end of the year, she had helped 30. And the numbers grew. “I thought, oh my God, this is a big issue.”

In 2015, Reiss left her job as an investigator to work for Unchained at Last full time. Since then, she has grown the organization to eight employees with more than \$2 million in total assets. Reiss’ platform and visibility have grown too. She now stands among the country’s most vocal activists speaking out against child and forced marriage. She publishes op-eds in outlets around the country and works directly with legislators to craft bills that push to support domestic violence survivors and end the practice of child and forced marriage.

And when Rotary International was looking for someone to speak about ending child marriage at a Rotary Day with UNICEF convocation in 2022 devoted to empowering girls, it turned to Reiss. “A lot of people don’t realize child marriage is a real problem here in the United States,” said Reiss, addressing the live audience at UNICEF headquarters in New York City and Rotary members around the world who attended the webinar. The reason, she said, was the “dangerous, archaic, misogynistic laws that remain on the books.”

That’s despite the fact, she continued, that “the U.S. State Department considers marriage before 18 a human rights abuse, because the devastating, lifelong repercussions that it produces are just as egregious and serious here in the U.S. as they are overseas.” The “obvious and clear solution”? “Change the laws.” (The webinar, which introduced six People of Action: Champions of Girls’ Empowerment and addressed topics such as menstrual hygiene, mental health, remote learning, and breaking barriers for girls, is available at [on.rotary.org/UNICEF-day](https://on.rotary.org/UNICEF-day).)

As for those first five women Reiss hoped to help share their story and start a new life? That number now totals close to 1,000. One thousand women for whom Reiss and her Unchained team have helped craft escape plans, find emergency shelter, and connect with pro bono legal counsel and career and psychiatric counseling. What’s more, Unchained brings survivors together to share their experiences with one another, an invaluable therapeutic resource.

Jennifer Brown is one of those women. At 16, Brown was married to a 23-year-old man she’d only known for two months. The marriage, says Brown, was the idea of her stepmother, who, Brown says, wanted the teenager



out of the house. “For whatever reason, she didn’t like me,” recalls Brown. “And she found out that this guy wanted to marry me, and she convinced my dad to marry me off.”

Brown was a sophomore at her Mississippi high school when her father walked her down the aisle. She wore a wedding dress that her sister-in-law found at a dry cleaner where she had worked. Brown describes the following two years as miserable. She says her husband was abusive and would regularly fall into fits of rage, but Brown still clung to the relationship. “I didn’t know anything else,” she says. Brown reached a breaking point a year and a half into the marriage after a particularly brutal fight. “I took my husband’s truck one night and drove to a cousin’s house,” recalls Brown. “They say it takes seven times for a woman to leave an abusive partner, and that feels very true to me.”

Brown only started to consider what she had experienced when she began seeing a therapist years later. “It took me a very, very long time to process,” says Brown, who was diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

As she reflected on her early life, Brown decided to search for other child marriage survivors. In 2015, she did an internet search on child marriage and the website for Unchained popped up. Brown wrote “I was married at 16.” on the group’s Facebook page, and someone from Reiss’ team reached out to ask whether

**Above left:** Reiss holds a cup containing pens that were collected each time a state ended child marriage, some of which were used to sign the legislation. **Above right:** At the modest Unchained office, Reiss sits beneath photos of “gutsy women.”



“I was so alone.  
And I wanted  
to be there for  
others in a way  
that nobody  
was for me.”

Brown wanted to share her story. At first Brown was hesitant, but when she started to discuss her story, she found the process powerful. “It felt good to know that there was a tribe of women who had similar experiences and that my story wasn’t an isolated thing,” she says. “It felt good, but also horrifying.”

That’s one reason Brown shared her story in a three-minute fake reality show trailer called “Unseen Housewives.” Produced by Unchained, the video is edited to mimic the familiar rhythms of reality television while teasing the true stories of Brown and three other women who were pressured to marry as teenagers. Reiss presented the short film, which is both slick and jarring, at an event held in conjunction with the 2023 session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. She ended with the trailer’s tagline, which reads, “The show must not go on.”

**B**ack at the Unchained office, the air conditioner provides a humming soundtrack to Reiss’ stories. In a few minutes Reiss will hop on another of her frequent videoconference calls, this one with a team of Columbia University researchers who are partnering with Unchained to run a three-year study on forced marriage, forced marital sex, and forced parenthood in the United States. “It’s the first study of its kind,” says Reiss, excited. “Our goal is to come up with policy recommendations and push for those policies to be implemented.”

Research is one way Reiss and her team advocate

for change. Protest is another. In 2015, Reiss started hosting what she calls “chain-ins,” or gatherings of women donning bridal gowns and chains who come together to protest child and forced marriage. Reiss has held 20 across the country, including several on the steps of state Capitol buildings in Michigan, California, and Washington, among others. The visual — a group of women in wedding dresses with black tape covering their mouths — is a powerful one. And Reiss says that it has inspired women all over the country to send her their wedding dresses. Unchained now has an inventory of dozens of donated wedding dresses, all of which are organized and cataloged at the Unchained offices. “We’re constantly getting bridal gowns,” she says. “I just got three more today.”

As she continues her fight, Reiss travels all over the country promoting Unchained’s missions to hundreds of policymakers, advocates, and survivors. But while the big podiums matter, Reiss says quiet moments hold importance too. Like, the words of wisdom she shares with her daughters who are now young adults. The kind of advice Reiss wishes she might have received some 30 years ago. “The message I wish I had heard is, you deserve help,” she says, “and you can get it.”

Fraidy Reiss will make sure of that. ■

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*A Milwaukee journalist, Elly Fishman is the author of *Refugee High: Coming of Age in America* (2021), which won the Studs and Ida Terkel Award for a first book in the public interest.*

Each year, the Rotary Club of Houston gives the Lombardi Award to college football's best lineman. Emulating those young athletes, the club also uses the award to tackle cancer.

# GOAL LINE STAND



**BY BRYAN SMITH**

Photograph by Nathan Lindstrom



**LOMBARDI AWARD**  
OUTSTANDING COLLEGE FOOTBALL  
Presented by                                 

Janis Burke (holding football), CEO of the Harris County-Houston Sports Authority, poses with Houston-area Rotarians (from left) David Schwarz, Rhonda Walls Kerby, and Robert Eckels.

# THE FOUR YOUNG MEN

stride confidently into the hospital. They are used to people getting out of their way and happy to displace anyone inclined to do otherwise. Each of them is at least 6 feet tall, and collectively they tip the scales at about 1,000 pounds. That's half a ton of turf-tested brawn.

The four are football giants. Neither laser-armed quarterbacks nor fleet-footed runners, they work in the trenches and are among the best linemen in the 1994 college season that's just wrapping up. But now, at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, these gridiron goliaths are about to learn that true grit can also come in small packages.

The four players — Florida State linebacker Derrick Brooks, Arizona defensive end Tedy Bruschi, Miami defensive tackle Warren Sapp, and Nebraska offensive tackle Zach Wiegert — have come to Houston to learn which of them will receive the coveted Lombardi Award. Presented each year to college football's best lineman by the Rotary Club of Houston, the award is named after Vince Lombardi, the legendary NFL coach who died of colon cancer shortly before the beginning of the 1970 season. Lombardi was only 57, and in addition to honoring the coach's memory, the award raises money to battle cancer.

In the cancer ward, the four go from patient to patient, signing miniature footballs and sharing quiet words of encouragement with each of the ill children. Seeing a child who had lost an arm to cancer, Sapp kneels down and coaxes a smile from the little boy. "That's what this is all about," says Sapp. "I see more courage and determination in these hospital rooms than on any football field I ever played on."

On 1 December, in front of a sold-out audience of 1,100 people, Sapp receives the 25th annual Lombardi Award. Houston club member Rocky Yapp, general chairman of that year's event, presents a check for \$160,000 to the American Cancer Society, bringing the total amount of money raised by the club to fight cancer to about \$2 million (the equivalent of more than \$4 million in today's dollars). "We wanted my father's legacy to be preserved and, in time, enhanced," says



Vincent H. Lombardi, the coach's son and the keynote speaker for the award's 25th banquet. "The Rotary Lombardi Award is the perfect expression of that wish."

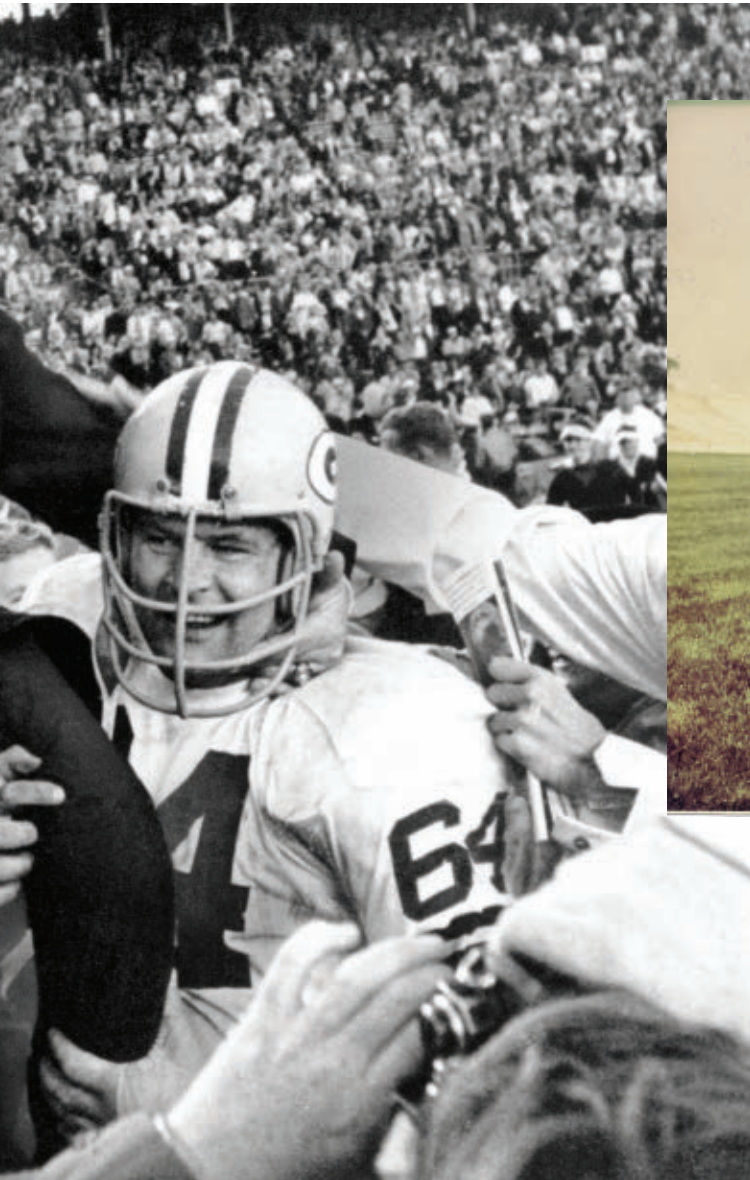
Shortly after Vince Lombardi's death in 1970, the Rotary Club of Houston approached his sister, Madeline Lombardi Werner, a Houston resident, about the idea of giving an award in Lombardi's name. Werner broached the topic with her brother's widow, Marie Lombardi, who loved the idea. She agreed to let the Houston club use her husband's name with the stipulation that money raised in conjunction with

the award be dedicated to cancer research.

Having secured that approval, the club went about the challenging task of creating the award and planning the dinner ceremony where members envisioned the award would be presented. Steve Werner, a member of the Rotary Club of Denver Southeast and the coach's nephew, remembers what happened next.

As a boy, Werner had spent a lot of time with his Uncle Vince, who had allowed his nephew to hang with his team: the storied Green Bay Packers, the overwhelming winners, under Coach Lombardi, of the first two Super Bowls. "Sometimes I got to ride with them on the bus from the stadium to the airport," Werner recalls. "My





Clockwise from left: Members of the Green Bay Packers carry their coach, Vince Lombardi, off the field after winning the second Super Bowl in January 1968; the Rotary Club of Houston's Lombardi Award annually honors the college lineman who "embodies the character and discipline that Vince Lombardi championed throughout his life" (he's shown here in 1959, on his first day as Packers coach); as a boy, Steve Werner, of the Rotary Club of Denver Southeast, saw those values up close when he hung out with his Uncle Vince and the Packers players.



parents would follow the bus and pick me up at the airport and take me home."

Following the coach's death, Werner's mother, Madeline, who played an integral part in the creation of the award, insisted that her son attend the planning meetings held by the Houston club. "She said, You need to learn about philanthropy and you need to learn about service. I didn't really have a choice," Werner says. "But I really enjoyed the meetings. I just listened and learned from these businessmen who were really some of the best-known businessmen in Houston at the time, who worked so hard to put the award on."

They not only worked hard, they worked quickly. Club members created a blue rib-

PHOTOGRAPHS: (SUPER BOWL) ASSOCIATED PRESS; (LOMBARDI) COURTESY OF STEVE WERNER; (WERNER) SEAN BOGGS

bon committee to choose the finalists and the winner of the award — and they created the actual award, which was designed by club member Mark Storm: a 40-pound block of Texas pink granite mounted on a wood and aluminum base inscribed with the word “discipline.” (Lombardi was one of the “Seven Blocks of Granite” on Fordham University’s fearsome line in the 1930s.) The Lombardi Award would honor the nation’s outstanding college football lineman, whether on offense or defense, who, as the award’s website states, “displays exceptional performance and ability and embodies the character and discipline that Vince Lombardi championed throughout his life.”

Four months after Lombardi’s death on 3 September 1970, the first Lombardi Award dinner was held at the Astroworld Hotel in Houston. Jim Stillwagon was the first player to receive the award, though the 21-year-old defensive guard from Ohio State may have felt overshadowed by the event’s featured speakers, Vice President Spiro Agnew and the sportscaster Howard Cosell.

In the years that followed, other celebrities and sports figures — from Bob Hope to Roger Staubach and from Bart Starr to Ronald Reagan — appeared as speakers at the Lombardi Award annual dinner. And to date, the Rotary Club of Houston, which continues to present the award, has donated more than \$5 million to the American Cancer Society and other organizations that support cancer research and patients.

“We often say it is the football event with a heart,” says Vicki Brentin, a member and past president of the club who chaired the 50th Lombardi Award last year. “The Lombardi Award puts both Houston and Rotary in the national spotlight, but more importantly, we are proud to be able to showcase our commitment to philanthropy and service having hosted this award from its creation.”

**W**hen Laiatu Latu jogged onto the field for practice for the University of Washington six days before the start of the 2020 season, the sophomore was regarded as one of the team’s breakout stars. Two years earlier, the All-California player had been hotly pursued not only by the Huskies but by other Division I football powerhouses.

Vicki Brentin, who chaired the 50th Lombardi Award, is a member of the Rotary Club of Houston, which created and has administered the award since its inception.



At 6-foot-4, 270 pounds, he had the ideal size and athleticism that teams were looking for. He also had versatility, with the ability to play on both sides of the ball. Indeed, he played linebacker and tight end at Jesuit High School in the Sacramento suburb of Carmichael, while also starring on his school’s rugby team.

During the practice that fall day, however, Latu suffered a neck injury from a tackle. The injury was severe enough that he sat out his sophomore year, when he met with five medical specialists and underwent surgery. In the end, doctors told Latu that it would be better to give up football than risk an injury that could

leave him paralyzed for life. In April 2021, Huskies coach Jimmy Lake told reporters that he had decided to retire the team’s star recruit. Latu’s football career at Washington — and mostly likely anywhere else — was over, Lake said.

Latu and his mother, who had supported his dreams, were heartbroken. In the days and weeks that followed, they tried to process the soul-crushing news. Finally, Latu’s mother asked the only question that really mattered: “What do you want to do?”

“I don’t want to give up football,” Latu replied. It just wasn’t in the young man to quit.

In the weeks and months that followed, Latu worked out incessantly.



**CHARACTER, DISCIPLINE, EXCELLENCE**

“It was absolutely the one [award] I wanted,” NFL Hall of Famer Warren Sapp told ESPN in 2009, 15 years after he’d won the Lombardi Award. “It just epitomized everything that I was about.” These other winners appear to have felt the same.

Warren Sapp (center) with (clockwise from top left) Tony Casillas (1985), Terrell Suggs (2002), Aaron Taylor (1993), Hugh Green (1980), Will Anderson Jr. (2022), and Chris Zorich (1990)

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF VICKI BRENTIN

Unable to play football, he returned to the other sport he loved: rugby. He even earned a tryout with a professional club in Seattle. Flattering, but no. He wasn't ready to turn his back on football.

In September 2021, his mom, Kerry Latu, found a doctor, a spine specialist in California named Robert Watkins. Dr. Watkins believed Latu could return to football, and he backed up that belief with a medical opinion. Latu was cleared to play football, and in December, he was scooped up by UCLA, one of the teams that had pursued him out of high school.

In 2023, his senior year, Latu started all 12 regular-season games for the Bruins,

leading the nation in tackles for loss and finishing fourth in the country in sacks. He'd be named Pac-12 Defensive Player of the Year and selected unanimously to that season's consensus All-America team.

And on 15 November, the Rotary Club of Houston announced that UCLA's Laiatu Latu was one of four finalists for that year's Lombardi Award.

**B**ucky Ribbeck was a teenager when he learned firsthand the deeper meaning behind the Lombardi Award. A star athlete in football and baseball at Strake Jesuit high school in Hous-

ton, he hoped to follow his athletic gifts as far as they would take them. He loved baseball so much that the soreness in his right arm that he started experiencing in 2009 near the end of his junior year didn't worry him much. At first.

“The pain was in my throwing arm, kind of up near the elbow,” Ribbeck recalls. “It was the very end of the season, and I just thought it was a throwing related injury.” In hopes their son could get some relief from the pain, his parents took him to have the arm examined. Things moved fast after that, he says. “I went from getting X-rays one day to getting an MRI that same week and then getting a

biopsy set up for a few weeks from then, and then got a diagnosis back.”

Doctors diagnosed a bony tumor in the radius bone of his right forearm. The good news was that the cancer had not spread, but he would need to immediately begin chemotherapy at Texas Children’s Hospital followed by surgery at MD Anderson. “It was a time frame of May 20 to basically June 1,” Ribbeck says. “That 10-day period was a big turnaround time, from getting the diagnosis to starting treatment.”

While undergoing treatment, Ribbeck learned about a “neat opportunity” from Vicki Brentin, the Houston Rotarian, and one of his doctors, ZoAnn Dreyer. “They knew I played football and baseball in high school,” he recalls, “and they said, Hey, we’ve got this event with the Rotary called the Lombardi Award, and we have this group called the Front Line Kids who are part of it every year. We’d like you to be part of it.”

The Front Line Kids, Ribbeck was told, are a group of young cancer patients from Texas Children’s Hospital and MD Anderson Cancer Center who attend the award dinner each year. “They bring you in and you get the VIP treatment,” says Ribbeck. The experience is a real boost for the kids, but for the college athletes and the guests attending the dinner, the uplift is reciprocal. “A lot of times it leaves the athletes pretty inspired,” Ribbeck says. “They see what we go through day to day as a cancer survivor, and I think it gives them an extra little spark to carry with them.”

That spark stayed with Ribbeck, who is now known as Dr. Bucky. Not only has he returned to speak at the award ceremony as an unofficial ambassador, but he channeled his love of sports and his experience with medicine into a career as a pediatrician and sports medicine specialist at Baylor College of Medicine/Texas Children’s Hospital and has volunteered with Rotary and other organizations dedicated to people affected by cancer.

Dreyer, one of the doctors who saw Ribbeck through his ordeal, has worked with hundreds of other children who were Front Line Kids, having volunteered with the Lombardi Award since 1988. Back then, she was a senior fellow at the children’s hospital, when out of the blue, Dreyer says, “my boss came up to me and said, ZoAnn, we’ve got these football players coming and I need you to take over. They would come

A cancer survivor, Dr. Bucky Ribbeck (right) knows how powerfully visits from the athletes can affect the kids with cancer. Adds Dr. ZoAnn Dreyer (above), “it empowers them and they feel stronger.”

to the clinic and meet and greet with the patients, take pictures with them. Then we would go over to the [cancer] floor. We’d go room to room and see the patients, which of course was a huge thrill for these kids.”

In those early years, when the Front Line Kids program was still in its infancy, Dreyer would drive some of the kids to the award banquet. “Their parents came with them to the first few dinners that we held,

then it slowly morphed into just being the patients,” Dreyer recalls. “For a number of years — probably almost until COVID hit — they would wear tuxes that were rented for them, and the girls would wear gowns.”

“A lot of the kids that we would take to the dinner would be kids that were really struggling with their disease — maybe not in the best shape, maybe having had some rough complications. They meet the play-





In 2023, a triumphant Laiatu Latu hoists the Lombardi Award as he becomes the coveted trophy's 50th recipient.

The 51st Lombardi Award ceremony will be livestreamed on 11 December. For more information, visit [lombardiaward.org](http://lombardiaward.org).

ers and get pictures and autographs and all that kind of stuff." The names of those players are instantly recognizable to people who follow football: Orlando Pace, Julius Peppers, Cornelius Bennett, Aaron Taylor. Taylor, who played for the Green Bay Packers when they won the Super Bowl in 1997, later returned to speak at the award dinner and let the kids try on his Super Bowl ring.

"It's an emotional event for these kids, and it empowers them and they feel stronger," says Dreyer. "Really, the award is secondary to the experience that not only the players have, but that the kids have."

"Meeting these kids inspires the athletes, and it inspires those of us who witness these huge players being touched by the kids," says Lindsey Kroll, a co-chair of this year's award committee and a member of the Rotary Club of Memorial-Spring Branch (Houston). "These up close and personal meetings bring real focus to the job at hand: creating a cure for cancer."

The choice of Kroll and Rhonda Walls Kerby, of the Rotary Club of Katy, as co-chairs, marks the first time that the annual Lombardi Award duties have not been chaired by a member of the Rotary Club of Houston (which was also the prime mover in the creation of a hospital-adjacent hotel that caters to the families of cancer patients). That decision to encourage involvement from outside the Houston club was intentional, says Brentin. "Although the Rotary Club of Houston 'owns' the event, we wanted to expand and broaden participation across District 5890," she says. "And both Lindsey and Rhonda have

been involved as volunteers on the committee for several years, so they are not new to the Lombardi Award."

"Everyone's life has been affected by cancer in one way or another," says Walls Kerby, "and every dollar that the Lombardi Award raises goes to eliminating this deadly and dreadful disease. Rotarians all over the world should take pride in the fact that their fellow members have utilized the principles of Vince Lombardi to raise money to eliminate cancer through this prestigious award — and every Rotarian can and should get involved in this noble endeavor."

**T**he four 2023 finalists — Notre Dame offensive tackle Joe Alt, Georgia tight end Brock Bowers, Utah defensive lineman Jonah Elliss, and UCLA lineman Laiatu Latu — waited nervously in the shimmering grand ballroom of the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Houston. The dinner celebrating the Lombardi Award had crescendoed to its climactic moment: naming the 50th college lineman to hoist the 40-pound block of granite. Among the expectant audience members were several past winners, including Warren Sapp.

The 2022 winner, Will Anderson Jr., the third overall pick in the 2023 NFL draft, made his way down the long dais, a 10-foot-tall "50" glimmering behind him. Anderson listed the numerous qualities that define the award, including the refusal to give up, to quit. "With that being said," Anderson announced as he opened an envelope, "the 50th Lombardi Award winner is ..."

When he heard his name, Laiatu Latu, dressed in a black tux with gold vest and matching gold bow tie, rose and edged past the celebrities and sports stars sharing the dais on his way to the microphone. He held back tears as the packed audience, including the Front Line Kids, leaped to their feet in a standing ovation. He held his hand up to his mouth and shook his head as the applause roared for several seconds.

"This is all so crazy to me," Latu said, looking out into the crowd. "Being told I wouldn't be able to play football again ..." Latu thanked the UCLA program "for really believing in me" and praised God and his family for helping him persevere. In addition, he said, he wanted "to give [his] appreciation to everyone that's in cancer research, along with Rotary and the Front Line Kids." He called the experience of getting to know them "super life-changing."

His remarks ended, Latu hoisted the heavy block of granite to another standing ovation. And on 25 April 2024, he fully realized his dream: Surrounded by his friends and family, Latu beamed as the Indianapolis Colts announced he would be their first-round draft pick, the 15th overall. In doing so, the Colts praised Latu's talent, his work ethic, his discipline, and his refusal to quit in the face of those who told him he must, almost as if reading those qualities off the Lombardi Award. ■

*A regular contributor to Rotary magazine, Bryan Smith wrote about Milwaukee Rotarian Chris Kolenda's Fallen Hero Honor Ride for our March 2023 issue.*

# OUR CLUBS

## VIRTUAL VISIT

### Camino camaraderie

Rotary Club of  
Seminole Lake, Florida

**Chuck Oldanie was hiking** the Camino de Santiago, the storied pilgrimage route through the olive groves and ancient towns of northern Spain, when his knee gave out on a steep incline. “The pain was horrific,” recalls the 83-year-old.

A fellow Rotarian and one of his hiking companions, Ed Hallock, steadied him and helped Oldanie sidestep slowly down the steep path and continue onward. “I don’t know what I would have done if Ed hadn’t been there,” he says. “Things like that will bond you big time.”

Bonding was a key facet of the journey. The two men were part of a group — five members of the Rotary Club of Seminole Lake, Florida, one spouse, and two friends — walking most of a 70-mile section of the Camino de Santiago. The Camino is a network of routes used by pilgrims since the Middle Ages to reach the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral in northwest Spain. Today, it’s popular with modern day pilgrims and backpackers alike.

The Rotarians’ journey, over a week in April, raised about \$7,000 in pledges

from the club and other Rotary members for an organization helping Ukrainian refugee mothers and children in the Tampa Bay area. It also brought the entire club closer together.

“They were all behind us, watching our progress closely through social media,” David Buzza says of the club members back home. “Every single day we would post updates. All the club members would be rooting for us and raising funds. We had a tremendous groundswell of support.”

Uniting in friendship and camaraderie around service projects and fundraisers is a signature feature of the 50-member club. In addition to international service efforts, members support 26 local charities and organizations.

“It’s the culture we’ve built,” says Buzza, adding that prospective members are informed from the start that the club is hands-on and doesn’t stop at just check writing. “We won’t jump into a relationship with another organization unless there is a volunteer opportunity we can be a part of. That’s our mantra.”

Sandra Lilo, a military dentist and U.S. Air Force veteran, is a believer in that mantra. In the late 1990s, Lilo launched a medical mission to repair cleft lips in Peru. She has led teams of dentists many times since, all through club funds.

“Once you have been involved internationally, you are not just doing a service project — you become an ambassador and a friend through Rotary. To the Rotary Club of Chiclayo, we are like family,” says Lilo, referring to the Rotary club in one of the mission destinations. “These

are the relationships you develop through Rotary, and that’s one of the great things we as a club have learned.”

Glenn Stamm, a member of the Seminole Lake club since 1990, has been a driving force behind yearly trips to Puerto Rico to rebuild or repair homes damaged by Hurricane Maria.

The club also sends a 14-member team to Belize every year to build playgrounds for government-run schools. Through the years, the project has expanded to include nutrition and wellness education. A couple of nurses from the club go along to conduct medical screenings.

“This year was special. The principal of the school was retiring,” says Hallock. “She always dreamed of having a playground for her students. She had her students make a personal card for each one of us. When a kid handed me one, I lost it, I just broke down.”

The club is just as active in its own community. Among the 26 organizations it supports is the Florida Dream Center, which operates a food pantry, where members pack food for up to 400 families each month.

Members also help Horses for Handicapped Foundation of Pinellas County, which promotes and teaches recreational horseback riding and care to people with disabilities. Club volunteers pull weeds, mend fences, repair stables, and hold an annual picnic for staff and patrons.

Even before the walk in Spain, club members helped Ukrainian refugees in the Tampa Bay area. Through a nonprofit, Crisis Connect, launched by Terry Collier, a member of another Rotary club in



Clockwise from left: The Rotarians and their companions pose at the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral; Ed and Carol Hallock; David Buzza; and Karen Sherrets with Chuck Oldanie.



## SERVE TOGETHER, STAY TOGETHER

Participating in service and having fun with fellow members are the primary reasons people join and stay involved in Rotary. It's a formula that members of the Rotary Club of Seminole Lake, Florida, have followed to create a culture of camaraderie.

Follow their lead with this tip sheet:

- Hold regular get-togethers, in addition to club meetings, for socializing and networking.
- Encourage members to bring friends and family to meetings, events, and service projects.
- Consult community members to determine needs before choosing a project.
- Visit My Rotary discussion groups, attend project fairs, or consult The Rotary Foundation Cadre of Technical Advisers to research ideas and potential partners before starting a project.
- Establish direct communication with partner organizations, friends, and Rotary alumni.
- Encourage all club members to share their thoughts on service and social activities.
- Choose service projects that match with Rotary's areas of focus.
- Invite members of the Rotary family (such as Interactors, Rotary Youth Exchange students, and Rotary Peace Fellows) to participate in meetings and events.

Adapted from Rotary's club health check, which is available at [on.rotary.org/club-health-check](https://on.rotary.org/club-health-check).

Seminole, they have supported emergency housing, transportation, food, jobs, clothing, and school assistance for about two dozen refugee women and their children.

The idea for the Camino de Santiago trip came to Oldanie one morning last fall as he paddled his yellow kayak off the coast of Tampa Bay. He thought back to a previous peace effort he was involved in that brought together young people from different backgrounds to build homes for Habitat for Humanity in India.

Now, he was looking for a new initiative that would promote peace, and Buzza, who had walked the Camino previously in a trip that turned into a fundraiser for a food pantry, had just been talking up the

experience. "Knowing the history of the Camino, I felt we could put something together that would help Ukrainian refugees and promote peace," Oldanie says.

He is hoping the April walk is not the club's last. He is talking with district and regional Rotary leaders to organize an even bigger Camino walk that would include other partners like Seeds of Peace, a nonprofit that develops new generations of leaders inspired by peace.

Hallock was equally inspired by the camaraderie and spirit of peace on the Camino. "Everybody encourages everybody else," he says. "If someone has a problem, people stop to help. It's like the spirit of Rotary." — ARNOLD R. GRAHL

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

## A future transformed

After her life was changed by an Ambassadorial Scholarship, a future Rotary director resolved to change the lives of others



For Eve Conway-Ghazi, an Ambassadorial Scholarship that funded her master's in broadcast journalism was just her "first gift from Rotary."

In 1980, Eve Conway-Ghazi arrived in Evanston, Illinois, to study at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. A graduate of Queen Mary University with a degree in English, she'd recently been a reporter for a newspaper in East London. It was there that her editor, a Rotarian, had told Conway-Ghazi about Rotary's Ambassadorial Scholarships program. She secured one of the scholarships and found herself in this new country and a new city. Little did she know the changes that lay ahead, or the reason she'd find herself returning to that city in the years to come.

"The scholarship was my first gift from Rotary," says Conway-Ghazi, who today is serving as a director of Rotary International, one of several prominent leadership roles she's held at the organization. "It transformed my life, and it left me wanting to transform the lives of other people around the world."

But first those changes. While at Northwestern and working toward a master's in broadcast journalism, Conway-Ghazi was assigned to serve as the Washington correspondent for KOTV, a CBS affiliate in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The news director may have admired the rookie reporter for some unexpected reasons — "Everything you say sounds so intelligent with your British accent" — but the skills Conway-Ghazi acquired at KOTV and Northwestern allowed her to transition from newspapers to radio and television when she returned home to England. After working for a number of broadcast outlets, she spent 20 years at BBC News as a reporter and producer.

While all of this was going on, Conway-Ghazi slowly found her way back to Rotary. Or perhaps it's more accurate to say that Rotary — which did not admit women as members until the late 1980s — found its way back to Conway-Ghazi. While suffering from the flu, she consulted a doctor, who, as with her early editor, was a Rotarian. He invited her to speak at his club, and after speaking at several other Rotary clubs, Conway-Ghazi joined



the Rotary Club of Redbridge, based in Greater London, in 2000. (The club recently merged with another to become the Rotary Club of Barkingside and Redbridge, and Conway-Ghazi remains a member.)

Conway-Ghazi quickly rose through the ranks of Rotary, serving as club president and, in 2012-13, as the first female district governor for Rotary in London. She'd follow that, in 2016-17, with a term as president of Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland.

By then, Conway-Ghazi had been married for a decade. The fact that she and her husband, Robert Hossein Ghazi, met had, in a way, been another gift from Rotary. The two first ran into each other in April 2003 while hurrying to a Rotary district assembly in London's Covent Garden. Ghazi gave her his business card and invited her to join him on a boat ride. As it happened, Conway-Ghazi was about to depart to the United States for a month and was unable to join him. In the months that followed, Ghazi extended other invitations, which she continued to decline. "He was very persistent," she'd later remember, "and I was very busy."

After a year, the two finally had dinner at a Russian restaurant in London. And in April 2006, three years after Rotary had first brought them together — and three days

after Conway-Ghazi had returned from filming a BBC documentary about women battling breast cancer in Pakistan with Cherie Blair, the spouse of Prime Minister Tony Blair — the couple were married. It's another reason, says Conway-Ghazi, that "joining Rotary was the best decision I made in my life."

At each step of her Rotary journey, Conway-Ghazi followed through on her desire to transform the lives of others. In 2007, wanting to promote inspiring stories about young people, she founded the Rotary Young Citizen Awards in association with BBC News. Five years later, working with Rotary members in London and Mumbai, she organized a vocational training team of medical professionals from London who traveled to India to train doctors, nurses, and health workers in rural Jawhar — a project that helped improve childbirth outcomes there.

One of Conway-Ghazi's great passions remains fighting polio, and in 2016 she launched the Purple4Polio campaign in Great Britain and Ireland. That passion stems from what Conway-Ghazi describes as her Rotary moment. At her first National Immunization Day in India, she administered two drops of the polio vaccine to a child as his mother looked on. "She couldn't speak English, but I could

see it in her eyes," Conway-Ghazi recalls. "Her child had been immunized against polio, and it had been transformative for them. It touched my heart."

Rotary's investment in that young journalist has paid off in other ways. Using skills she acquired during her career, Conway-Ghazi produced video interviews for Rotary GB&I's marketing and membership campaign. "We have to tell the story that what Rotary is all about is projects with impact that save lives," she says.

Sadly, Robert Ghazi died last December. "The Rotary family is helping me get through," Conway-Ghazi explains when back in Evanston for a Board meeting. "And I continue to be very busy working as an RI director, which is such a privilege."

"Rotary transformed my life," she continues, repeating something she'd said earlier, only this time talking about much more than her Ambassadorial Scholarship. "In a remarkable way, through a network of people, it allowed one person to change the world. Helping to eradicate polio and making history: I never would have done any of that without Rotary. And Rotary continues to offer me so many wonderful opportunities to help others." The transformed has become the transformer.

— GEOFFREY JOHNSON

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF EVE CONWAY-GHAZI



### Eve Conway-Ghazi

- Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar, 1980-81
- President, Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland, 2016-17
- Director, Rotary International, 2023-present

From left: Conway-Ghazi participating in a National Immunization Day in India in 2017, and conducting an interview earlier this year for Rotary GB&I's marketing and membership campaign.

DISPATCHES FROM  
OUR SISTER MAGAZINES  
ROTARY BRASIL

## Female-owned businesses boom in Brazil



↑ The Remarkable Day project, which promotes female entrepreneurship, was born from the Remarkable Women project, created by Rotaractor Roberta Schneider Cecyn (speaking) and a friend.

**Over the past decade**, the number of female business owners in Brazil has grown significantly, representing a cultural shift in which women are increasingly recognized for their contributions to economic growth and societal well-being. In 2014, Brazil had about 7.9 million female entrepreneurs, most of them running small businesses, according to Sebrae, a Brazilian small business support service. By 2022 that number had surged to more than 10.3 million, with women accounting for more than 34 percent of business owners in the country, according to a women's entrepreneurship survey by Sebrae.

To capitalize on that growth, Rotary clubs in Brazil have promoted women's empowerment through

entrepreneurship. The eMe Project, founded by District 4751 (northern Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo) during the 2020-21 Rotary year, aims to instill a culture of entrepreneurship and provide women with skills to succeed in business.

The project operates a School of Women Entrepreneurs that offers courses to foster innovation, business acumen, and strategic planning. Created during the COVID-19 pandemic, classes take place online. Award and certificate ceremonies are held in person, hosted by a Rotary club. In addition, lesson videos remain available to everyone at [youtube.com/@projetoeme](https://youtube.com/@projetoeme).

The programs for teens and adults have helped numerous people. "It was incredible," says Julia

André, one of the winners from the second round of training. "The project helped me develop skills as an entrepreneur, in addition to the encouragement of the whole team, all the mentoring and lectures. Because I won, I had an incentive to help my business grow, and that makes all the difference." Dalila Lanchin, another winner, adds, "It was more than a financial mentorship; it helped me to look to the future."

Every year, about 140 women enroll. Winners receive financial aid and ongoing mentoring to help scale their ventures, ensuring that the impact of the eMe Project extends beyond the classroom. So far, 39 women have won awards, and 420 people have benefited from the project.

The effort involves more than 30 volunteers connected to Rotary and 70 speakers, mentors, and jury members who rank the participants' achievements and give feedback throughout the process.

Initially, the district's Rotary members promoted the learning opportunity through word of mouth in communities, schools, and universities. As partners came on board, they publicized registration through social networks. The project also has its own store with mugs, shirts, keychains, and pens with the eMe logo. The profits go toward maintenance of the project and its awards.

The initiative has led to an unexpected benefit. Some participants, impressed by their experience, have been interested in joining Rotary, says Thamyres Andrade, coordinator of eMe and former Rotaract representative of District 4751.

### Remarkable Day: celebrating women entrepreneurs in Santos

Further south in Santos, another Rotary initiative put women's entrepreneurship in the spotlight.

→ The Remarkable Day project supports women who are entrepreneurs with a products and services fair, workshops, and lectures.



The first Notáveis Day (Remarkable Day), organized by District 4420 Rotaract clubs in partnership with public relations students, celebrated female entrepreneurs by showcasing their products, services, and achievements. It included workshops, panels, and lectures for the public.

Roberta Schneider Cecyn, 2023-24 president of the Rotaract Club of Santos-Porto, emphasizes the importance of recognizing and supporting women in business through efforts like Remarkable Day. The event is an offshoot of the project Notáveis Mulheres (Remarkable Women), created by Cecyn and a friend because they felt women in their city did not receive enough recognition. The two created a workshop to instruct women and girls on issues such as physical and mental health and basic rights. According to Cecyn, the initiative promotes a social environment where women are valued and recognized.

### Vocational training for women

Starting your own business requires a solid vocational education. The Rotary Club of Ipatinga is offering vocational training to 70 women in vulnerable situations through its initiative Aprender para Empreender

(Learning for Entrepreneurship). The nine-month program provides free courses in manicure and pedicure, hairstyling, care for older people, and electrical installation. The courses are offered in partnership with an educational institute.

The initiative provides psychological support, and at the end of the program the Ipatinga club supplies the women with a kit of materials to help them start working. The project partners with a school and received funding through a global grant from The Rotary Foundation. "The main function of our club is to support these women for the next six months either in finding employment or to help with their professional development," says Maria Cândida Corrêa, coordinator of the project. "Our goal is to have at least 90 percent employed by the end of the program."

The impact of these varied initiatives in Brazil goes beyond economic outcomes. In empowering women to become entrepreneurs, these programs contribute to broader societal goals of gender equity and social inclusion. By showcasing success stories and providing platforms for women to thrive, Rotary and its partners are paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable future. ■



The Rotary Club of Ipatinga provides vocational training to 70 women in vulnerable situations through its initiative Aprender para Empreender (Learning for Entrepreneurship). Fields include manicure and pedicure, hairstyling, care for older people, and electrical installation.

HANDBOOK

# A matter of consequence

Polio eradication focuses on “consequential geographies”

**The good news is polio continues to be beaten back** to an ever-smaller number of countries. The bad news is that as long as it exists anywhere, it’s a threat everywhere. So how do Rotary and its partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative prioritize where to direct resources to fight the disease?

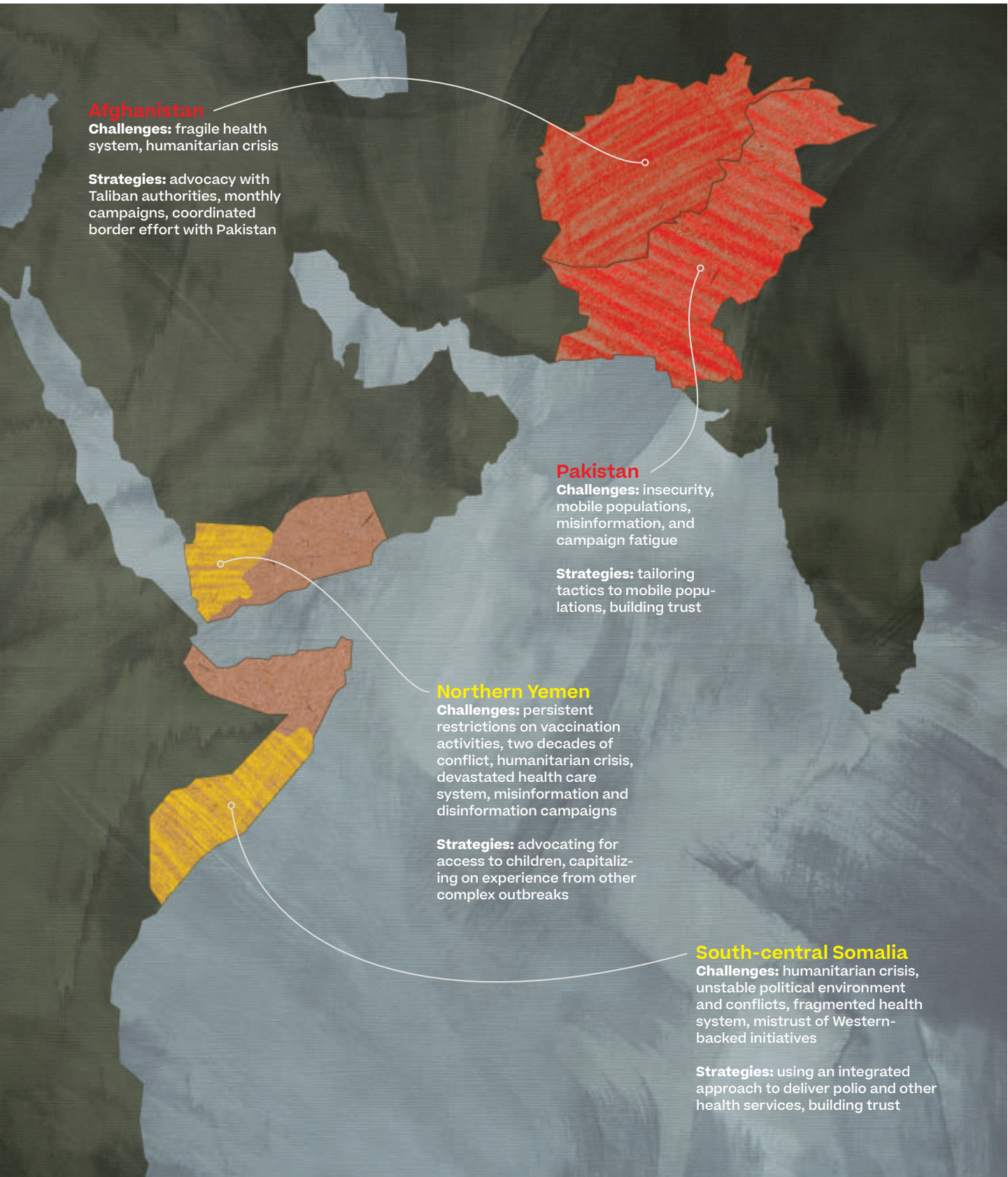
High on the list are the two remaining endemic countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since 1988, the GPEI has reduced cases of wild poliovirus around the world by 99.9 percent, and these two nations are the virus’s last reservoirs.

Outside of the endemic countries, the GPEI has identified four “most consequential geographies” — places where poliovirus variants (also known as vaccine-derived poliovirus) continue to circulate. With complex humanitarian or political environments, they’re prone to repeated outbreaks. These emerge when not enough children are vaccinated against polio, allowing the weakened virus contained in the oral vaccine to circulate. While the number of cases continues to fall, these outbreaks can spread to neighboring countries, and sometimes farther. “It’s been a bit of a revelation,” says Carol Pandak, Rotary’s director of PolioPlus. “Now we have better information about how the virus behaves.”

By prioritizing resources to these four most consequential geographies, the GPEI hopes to turn off the tap to prevent further spread. “The thinking is, if we stop transmission here, we have a better chance of being successful,” Pandak says.

Each of the most consequential geographies has its own challenges — and tailored plans to tackle them. — DIANA SCHOBERG





**Afghanistan**

**Challenges:** fragile health system, humanitarian crisis

**Strategies:** advocacy with Taliban authorities, monthly campaigns, coordinated border effort with Pakistan

**Pakistan**

**Challenges:** insecurity, mobile populations, misinformation, and campaign fatigue

**Strategies:** tailoring tactics to mobile populations, building trust

**Northern Yemen**

**Challenges:** persistent restrictions on vaccination activities, two decades of conflict, humanitarian crisis, devastated health care system, misinformation and disinformation campaigns

**Strategies:** advocating for access to children, capitalizing on experience from other complex outbreaks

**South-central Somalia**

**Challenges:** humanitarian crisis, unstable political environment and conflicts, fragmented health system, mistrust of Western-backed initiatives

**Strategies:** using an integrated approach to deliver polio and other health services, building trust



Mark Maloney (far left) presents John Sever's wife, Gerane, (center) with the International Service Award for a Polio-Free World.

TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

# Remembering a hero of polio eradication

**World Polio Day, on 24 October**, is a time to celebrate progress and rededicate ourselves to finishing the job of eradicating the disease. Let's also honor the countless Rotarians and Rotaractors who have championed the cause. One such hero was John Sever.

Sever, who died in April at age 92, was a member of the Rotary Club of Potomac, Maryland. An infectious disease specialist at the U.S. National Institutes of Health, Sever recommended in 1979 that Rotary make polio eradication a global goal, expanding what began as a national vaccine campaign in the Philippines.

It is hard to imagine where we would stand today without Sever's decades of leadership, expertise, and advocacy. In August, I was honored to present his family with the International Service Award for a Polio-Free World and a crystal recognition piece in Sever's name.

What he helped initiate, PolioPlus, became an example of implementing an action plan in Rotary. Thanks to him — and the volunteerism and generosity of countless others — polio cases have decreased by more than 99 percent since 1988.

The path to our goal could not have been predicted and may take longer than expected. There are sometimes setbacks, as we experienced with increased cases in Pakistan and Afghanistan this year.

But we get back on our feet. This year, we ended an outbreak of wild poliovirus in Malawi and Mozambique that was caused by an importation from Pakistan in 2021, and we decreased variant poliovirus cases. Rotary and our partners stay flexible, developing new tactics while staying focused on the long-term goal, with optimism.

Delivering a polio-free world with stronger health systems and communities is not only right for humanity but also a smart investment in future generations. It will be Rotary's greatest gift to the world.

Countless heroes have followed Sever's lead — from the club president who organized her first End Polio Now fundraiser to the advocates, donors, and volunteers. We are all part of this story.

With your support, this year's World Polio Day will be the greatest ever. Donate to End Polio Now at [rotary.org/donate](https://rotary.org/donate). Your gift will be tripled, thanks to the 2-to-1 match by the Gates Foundation. Join or initiate a PolioPlus Society in your club or district. Raise awareness in your community about how we will eradicate a human disease for only the second time in history.

Whatever you do, do it for future generations who will live without this debilitating disease. Let us deliver on our promise to the world's children and end polio forever.

**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.

## CALENDAR

# October events

### MAKE A RUN FOR IT

**Event:** Thornbury Turkey Trot  
**Host:** Rotary Club of Thornbury & Clarksburg, Ontario  
**What it benefits:** Local projects  
**Date:** 12 October

The fall foliage of Ontario's Beaver Valley is a highlight of this race, held annually on the weekend before Thanksgiving in Canada. Participants can run a half-marathon or walk a 5K or 10K. There is also a free 1K fun run for kids. Winners are awarded gift certificates to a running store, and all finishers receive a medal.

### ROISTER WITH OYSTERS

**Event:** Oysters in October  
**Host:** Rotary Club of Wilmington West, North Carolina  
**What it benefits:** Local nonprofits  
**Date:** 19 October

Hundreds of people are expected to turn out for the annual Halloween-themed oyster roast at the gardens of the Burgwin-Wright House, a colonial-era residence operated as a museum. Attendees enjoy steamed oysters and shrimp, homemade sides, and local beer and wine. Prizes are awarded for the scariest, zaniest, and least traditional costumes.

### BURGER BATTLE

**Event:** Burgerfest in Paradise  
**Host:** Rotary Club of Englewood Sunset Impact, Florida  
**What it benefits:** Local nonprofits  
**Date:** 19 October

At this food festival, restaurants and home chefs alike compete to make a burger that will earn a trophy and the title of "burgermaster." Those who attend can sample the food, all of which must be grilled over charcoal but can be made from a variety of ingredients.



### NOT JUST HOT AIR

**Event:** Hot Air Balloon Cash Drop  
**Host:** Rotary Club of Dinuba Sunrise, California  
**What it benefits:** Local scholarships  
**Date:** 18 October

For this fundraiser, the club teams with other local organizations to sell tickets that are dropped from a hot air balloon during halftime of a football game at Dinuba High School. The buyers of the three tickets that fall closest to the center of a Rotary logo on the field share up to \$6,500 in prize money. Proceeds go toward scholarships for students at the high school.

Meat- and plant-based recipes are eligible. Judges determine the winners through a blind taste test.

### EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY

**Event:** El Paso Wine & Food Festival  
**Host:** Rotary Club of El Paso, Texas  
**What it benefits:** Local projects  
**Dates:** 19-20 October

In its 11th year, this two-day festival kicks off on Saturday with the Grand Tasting, featuring more than 400 wines from around the world and food from 25 of El Paso's finest restaurants. On Sunday, chefs from Michelin-starred restaurants lead 12 teams of culinary school students competing to "create the perfect dish." Attendees get to try the dishes and vote for their favorite.

### READY TO RUN

**Event:** Regatta 5K Run/Walk  
**Host:** Rotary Club of Tualatin, Oregon  
**What it benefits:** Local scholarships and youth programs  
**Date:** 20 October

With a route through parks and along scenic trails, the 5K offers a flat and easy course for runners, walkers, stroller riders, and four-legged friends. Kids can compete in a quarter-mile dash before the race and stay for trick or treating afterward. All participants are welcome to wear costumes. The event is held immediately before the West Coast Giant Pumpkin Regatta, a local tradition in which people carve enormous gourds into racing vessels and paddle them across a lake.

**Tell us about your event.** Write to [magazine@rotary.org](mailto:magazine@rotary.org) and put "calendar" in the subject line. Submissions must be received at least five months before the event to be considered for inclusion.

2025 CONVENTION

# A global peace gathering



**Attending the Rotary International Convention** in Calgary is a way to support peace. When you walk the House of Friendship, meeting fellow members and learning about clubs' concerns, you add to international understanding. Members spread peace when they write their hopes on paper cranes that they suspend from the peace tree in the Peace Park exhibit. Rotary has promoted peace since its early days: At the fifth convention, in Houston in 1914 a month before World War I, members voted to back an international peace movement.

In Singapore in May, RI marked 25 years since it announced the Rotary Peace Centers program. "To believe in peace is to have hope, and to do so, one must be both stubborn and optimistic and be eager to persist and make a difference," Rotary Peace Fellow María Antonia Pérez said.

Conventions inspire action with prominent speakers that have included United Nations peace messenger and conservationist Jane Goodall in 2009. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for opposing apartheid, spoke that year at a preconvention peace symposium.

While Rotary has its convention as a peacebuilding symbol, Calgary has its Peace Bridge of red metal where thousands of Canadians and visitors walk, bike, and stop for selfies each day. Its name memorializes fallen military members' sacrifices.

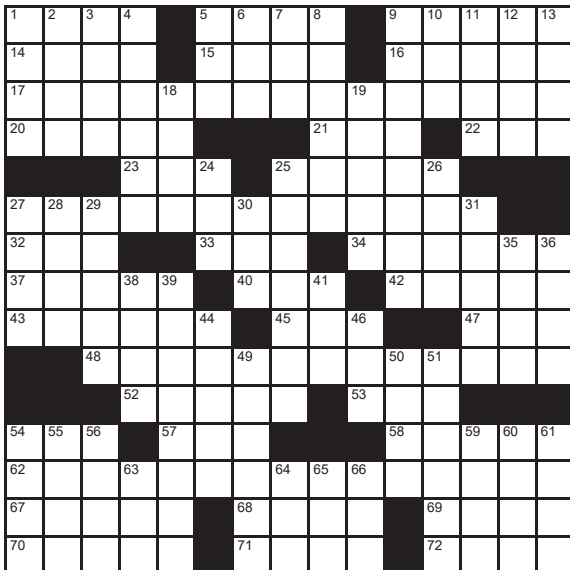
Inside the convention, the Peace Park by the Rotary Action Group for Peace has provided an oasis of contemplation. Plus, in Singapore it had a top snapshot spot among a garden of peace poles and paper flowers. Choose Calgary 21-25 June to contribute to a more peaceful world. ■

Learn more and register at [convention.rotary.org](http://convention.rotary.org).

CROSSWORD

# Halloween humor

By Victor Fleming  
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas



**ACROSS**

- 1 Hard Rock \_\_\_
- 5 Cap pistol sound
- 9 Appealingly piquant
- 14 Patron saint of Norway
- 15 Adored sort
- 16 Milo of drama
- 17 Said one skeleton to another: "I \_\_\_ with you"
- 20 Big name in toothbrushes
- 21 Sleeve contents
- 22 DVD ancestor
- 23 Despite that
- 25 \_\_\_ Gay
- 27 *The witch went to the doctor because she had a \_\_\_*
- 32 Like the hills?
- 33 "Got milk?" comeback, perhaps
- 34 Make beloved
- 37 Coral Sea formations
- 40 Auto lubricants brand
- 42 Dealt with
- 43 Region that includes Fairfax and Potomac
- 45 Bit of old cloth
- 47 Fiend or urchin
- 48 Said one invisible person to another: "\_\_\_"
- 52 Lower oneself

- 53 Miss Piggy's cry
- 54 "One Year \_\_\_ — jots what?": E. Dickinson
- 57 Neither Rep. nor Dem.
- 58 Bed frame boards
- 62 *The ghost hated his job because he had to work \_\_\_*
- 67 Boca \_\_\_
- 68 Bender
- 69 007 alma mater
- 70 Opposite of "Brr!"
- 71 Easily angered
- 72 Criticisms

**DOWN**

- 1 Kind of salmon
- 2 Banned chemical
- 3 Bean variety
- 4 Author Waugh
- 5 Tot's mealtime neckwear
- 6 Big flap
- 7 Start to profit?
- 8 Gathers bit by bit
- 9 Camera accessory
- 10 *Ghost Whisperer* skill
- 11 Baddie's blade
- 12 "Ramblin' Wreck from Georgia \_\_\_"
- 13 Asian bovines
- 18 Help out, as a perp
- 19 Figure of speech
- 24 A Christmas Carol type
- 25 Bit of self-indulgence
- 26 M\*A\*S\*H star Alan
- 27 T-Bird maker
- 28 Guinness or McCowen
- 29 Absolutely perfect
- 30 Uniform features (abbr.)
- 31 Clark's partner
- 35 "Look \_\_\_" ("Misty" directive)
- 36 Cowhand's cord
- 38 Coifs of tight curls, often
- 39 Conscious
- 41 Anti-stick product for pans
- 44 Awful feeling
- 46 Emerald or diamond
- 49 As yet
- 50 Bag of chips, maybe
- 51 More greasy
- 54 Cultural leader?
- 55 About 1/28 of an ounce
- 56 "I swear" may start it
- 59 Aqua Velva rival
- 60 'Vette roof option
- 61 Figs. with two hyphens
- 63 "Hinky Dinky Parlay \_\_\_"
- 64 Angler's need
- 65 Follow closely
- 66 Squalid digs

Solution on **page 10**



**Together,  
we end polio**



**WORLD  
POLIO DAY  
24 OCTOBER**



**Register your  
World Polio Day event**





## Feelin' saucy

Whichever way you choose, Cincinnati chili brings the spice

**When Bob McElroy returned from military service** in Vietnam in 1968, his first stop — before his house, before seeing his family — was a chili parlor for a bowl of Cincinnati's most famous dish. There he was, with a pile of spaghetti topped with chili and cheese (a “three-way,” in local parlance), when his dad picked him up. For many, McElroy included, Cincinnati chili is the taste of home. “We all grew up eating this kind of chili so it’s ingrained in our taste buds,” he says.

Chili connoisseurs from elsewhere might not recognize the stuff from Cincinnati. Rather than having chunks of beef, “the chili consistency tends to be like a thick sauce,” McElroy explains, and it’s flavored with cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon, along with chili powder and other spices.

**WHICH WAY?** Patrons order their chili using the “way” system. Start with a bowl of chili or chili spaghetti. The three-way piles on shredded cheese, a four-way layers in onions or beans, and a five-way includes both. “I usually have a glass of chocolate milk after eating a four-way,” McElroy says. “It soothes the pipes.” The chili comes with hot sauce on the side and a packet of oyster crackers; crush them into the leftover sauce when you’re done, he advises. You can also skip the spaghetti and get your chili over a hot dog in a bun.

**WHERE CAN I GET IT?** Chili parlors dot the Cincinnati area; the largest chains are Skyline and Gold Star. You can find cans of the chili at the grocery store or, for out-of-towners, online.

— DIANA SCHOBURG

**Bob McElroy**  
Rotary Club  
of Cincinnati

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



# *Healing in a Divided World* 2025 PRESIDENTIAL PEACE CONFERENCE

Come celebrate the new Rotary Peace Center, and connect with others committed to peacebuilding at this special, one-time event led by Rotary International President Stephanie Urchick in Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 February.

Attend the conference to build on Rotary's contributions to promoting peace by exploring:

- Peace in a polarized world
- Making peace last
- Technology, media, and peacebuilding
- Environmental issues in peacebuilding



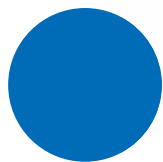
Register today at [rotary.org/istanbul25](https://rotary.org/istanbul25)





Register and pay by 15 December 2024  
before prices increase

[convention.rotary.org](http://convention.rotary.org)



**BUILDING  
CONNECTIONS**



**UNLEASHING  
POSSIBILITY**



**AWAKENING  
INSPIRATION**



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