

# 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.

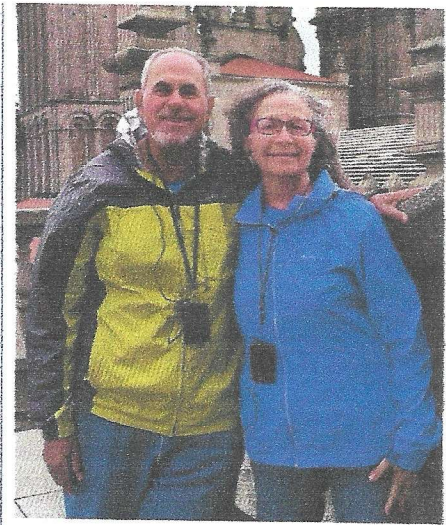
The club also sends a 14-member team to Belize every year to build playgrounds for government-run schools. Through the years, the project has expanded to include nutrition and wellness education. A couple of nurses from the club go along to conduct medical screenings.

"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