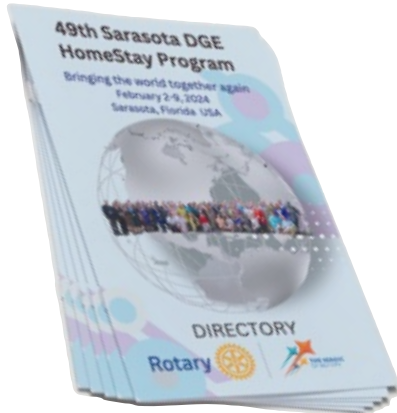


[Click to open the link to the Directory](#)



Explore the complete Directory of our esteemed visiting guests. Have you ventured into their counties? They shall grace us with their presence alongside their spouses from February 2nd, departing on the morning of February 9th, en route to Orlando, FL, to partake in the Rotary International Assembly, gathering with over five hundred fellow 2025-26 District Governors. The full Directory of our visiting guests is attached for your perusal. Have you had the opportunity to explore their counties? We know you will all enjoy the fellowship as we show them we are the "Friendliest club in the World"

Meeting Dates

February Sara Bay Country Club DGE	4th
February 100 Central	18th
March 100 Central	4th
March 100 Central	18th
April 100 Central	1st

MEET 16 OF THE 2025-26 DISTRICT GOVERNORS FROM 10 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AT OUR TUESDAY ROTARY MEETING AT SARA BAY COUNTRY CLUB.

2025 Sarasota DGE HomeStay District Governors 2025-26



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Words to live by from Dr. King, Lincoln, and Rotary

The recovery playbook

After historic storms, Rotary clubs look to Florida's hard-earned wisdom

Pam Akins and her husband, Barry Levinson, were on the final days of a trip visiting Rotary friends in Sicily when Hurricane Helene sent 14 inches of water through their home near Sarasota, Florida, destroying major appliances, furniture, and their cars. But before they even got home, their Rotary network had leaped in to help.

"Rotarians from Barry's club were already packing valuables from the house," Akins recalls. "Rotary friends did several loads of laundry for us, and another Rotary friend took serving dishes, pots, and pans, and ran them through her dishwasher."

The rapid response is part of a well-rehearsed script for Rotary clubs in Florida's hurricane hot spots. Rotary members there have spent several years refining a recovery template that includes an online volunteer hub, logistical support, and more — all of it ready to go when disaster strikes.

That system was especially put to the test when a second powerful hurricane, Milton, wreaked havoc less than two weeks later, forcing Akins and Levinson to abandon their recovery work and join thousands evacuating.

As bad as it was in Florida, hundreds of miles to the north Helene punched far inland and stalled over the Appalachian Mountain hamlets of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee — areas with little of Florida's hurricane wisdom and response networks.

There, the storm dumped nearly 2 feet of rain in areas, causing mudslides and flooding that sent homes floating downriver and killing more than 120 people (across all states, more than 250 people were killed in the two storms). The devastation left thousands homeless and isolated or wiped out entire towns.

Patrick Eakes, an RI director from North Carolina whose zones cover much of the eastern U.S. and parts of the Caribbean, knew just where to turn for expert advice. "My first call was to Kelsey Mitchell," he says. "I was like, 'Look, I'm the director, but you're the expert; tell me where we need to focus.'" Mitchell was a district governor-nominee in Florida when Hurricane Ian hit the state in 2022. In the aftermath of that storm, Mitchell helped bring Florida's eight districts together to create detailed statewide recovery plans.

Their playbook includes how to set up bank accounts and websites to accept donations, mobilize volunteers, coordinate with partner organizations, and track essential equipment like debris trailers and water purification rigs. "They know how many chain saws they have in each district and where they are. It's to that level," Eakes says.

Now this recovery playbook is becoming a model for clubs and districts throughout the Southeastern United States. "What they have developed has really become a template for the rest of the zone," says Eakes. "They have a lot of know-how and knowledge of what's important and what to tackle first."

Statewide planning in Florida

To learn more and get involved, visit rotary.org/disaster-response.



Hurricane Helene washed out roads like this one in Asheville, North Carolina, and caused mudslides and flooding that sent homes floating downriver.

began with monthly meetings between Mitchell's class of governor-nominees, who were motivated by the support that poured in after Hurricane Ian. They talked about lessons learned and how they could better support each other in the future. They pooled information and emergency contact lists into a single online file sharing site and agreed to meet daily when new storms approached.

The biggest leap forward came when a Rotarian from the district turned what had been a membership website into an online disaster relief hub. Visitors to the website, rotaryfl.org, can donate, request help, or volunteer all in one place. Volunteers can submit detailed information about what skills and resources they can offer, from physical labor and building materials to food delivery and organizing sup-

port. The data feeds into a master spreadsheet monitored by volunteers. Mitchell says the website will soon be able to automatically match volunteers with those requesting help and send the information to the appropriate district.

The Florida districts have also been working with Disaster Aid USA, an organization launched in 2010 by Rotarians to provide early disaster relief. Disaster Aid trains teams to "muck and gut," tarp roofs, operate chain saws, remove debris, and prep meals. In advance of each hurricane season, the organization works with Florida districts to prepare the team leads.

Mitchell and Eakes began texting right after Helene hit. They discussed specifics of the Florida plan, including how to set up a bank account and direct donations through their zones' website, a task

they completed in a matter of hours. "They had grant applications and a policy page that we've been able to borrow," Eakes says.

District governors from other hard-hit states joined Florida's daily video calls. Eakes was struck by how willing the Florida members were to help even as they grappled with the disaster in their own districts. "To me, it's the best of what Rotary's about," he says.

Alex "Alpo" Portelli, a district governor-elect from North Carolina, also began pumping Mitchell for details such as how to set up food kitchens to feed volunteers and which organizations could provide showers for emergency workers. A retired U.S. Army colonel with more than 30 years of experience in emergency operations, he managed the boots-on-the-ground response in western North Carolina.



BY THE NUMBERS

\$100 billion+

Likely cost of hurricanes Helene and Milton

95%

Share of uninsured losses from Helene

500 miles

Helene's path of destruction

Portelli put in 20-hour days connecting with responding agencies, putting together supply lists, and managing the deluge of donations. He directed Rotary volunteer teams dropping off supplies and stayed in contact with pilots airlifting materials by National Guard Black Hawk and civilian helicopters to mountaintop homes. And he coordinated with teams that hauled supplies up mountainsides by mule when there was no other way. "As a Rotarian, I couldn't be in a better position to do what we need to do to help others," Portelli says.

Several Rotarians donated warehouse space or secured space from business associates. In addition, district leaders worked with organizations like ShelterBox USA, an affiliate of ShelterBox Trust that allocated grant funding to support the Rotary districts' efforts.

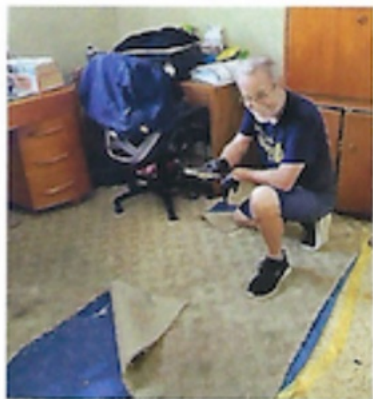
Meanwhile in Florida, Rotary members had launched their statewide plan only to be interrupted by the approach of Milton. "I talked to one volunteer who had

helped muck and gut somebody's house in the Englewood area," says Mitchell. When he returned after Milton, the homeowners told him, "Hurricane Helene took all of our belongings, but Hurricane Milton took our home."

Recognizing the trauma of such losses, the Florida districts have spread word of the need for mental health supports. In Florida, a compassion team of professional therapists pays follow-up visits to homes where volunteers have helped. In North Carolina, Portelli and other Rotary members also made mental health a focus.

"PTSD is real, especially for those totally unaccustomed to calamity and disaster," says Portelli. "People suddenly find themselves without communications, washers, dryers, water. They mentally start to break down. We're doing everything we can to bring normalcy back to families, and especially children."

Mitchell is proud of the example her district has set. "We started with just a couple people respond-



Top: Hurricane Helene left scenes of destruction in Pinellas Park, outside St. Petersburg, Florida. Left: Members of District 6950 assisted residents there who suffered property damage.

ing in one neighborhood," she says. "It moved up to an entire city, then to our whole district, then to the state of Florida. Now we are looking at all the Southeastern states."

Mitchell believes every district, no matter where in the world, should have a disaster plan. "Disaster relief has not always been a top priority for people until it hits home," she says. "But everybody needs to have a plan. It's not just hurricanes; there's all kinds of disasters."

— ARNOLD R. GRAHL

Short takes

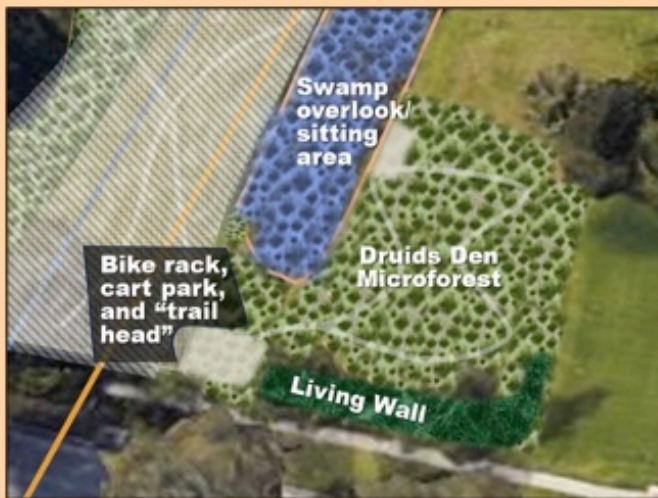
The 2023-24 Rotary Annual Report is now available to read at my.rotary.org/annualreport.

The new Rotary Impact Handbook gives members ideas on how to measure service projects' results. Download it at my.rotary.org/document/rotary-impact-handbook.



Jacaranda EcoPark

South Venice's Premier Environmental Amenity



Volunteers Day

Saturday, May 8th, 9 - noon



Please join Suncoast Urban ReForesters and our partners from the Pine View and Riverview Interact Clubs to assist with planting the Jacaranda Living Wall and Woodland River Forest. Bring garden gloves, if you have them...and plan to have fun!



Directions to the EcoPark & nearby parking:

- __Put "Jacaranda EcoPark" into your Google Maps; or:
- __Put "1005 Pine Forest Court, Venice FL" into your GPS. (Will take you to nearby street parking, see map to left)
- __Parking also available on the grassy area between Jacaranda Blvd and the EcoPark. (See map to left)

SURF would like to thank our Project Partners ...



... and also our Project Donors and Suppliers






PROJECTS RCSB FOUNDATION

2024 December Distributions

1 EDUCATION

Riverview IBE2 program: Continue a strategy that supports low income students with college scholarships **\$5,000**

OVER 5 MILLION IN SCHOLARSHIPS



2 DISASTER RELIEF

3 HURRICANES LAST YEAR ALONE


Support the restocking of supplies for our Rotary District 6960 Disaster Relief trailers **\$3,500**



3 ENVIRONMENT


SUPPORTING OUR 11TH MICROFOREST

Continued support working with Florida Veterans for Common Sense to build out Jacaranda Microforest **\$1,000**



4 VOCATIONAL SERVICE

Support a three-week Teen Radio Camp designed to introduce local teens to community radio, media production, and journalism skills. **\$3,000**



5 INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

Global Grant sponsored by Babcock Ranch Rotary Club to provide solar power for hospitals in Ukraine because of the ongoing war with Russia **\$3,500**

