

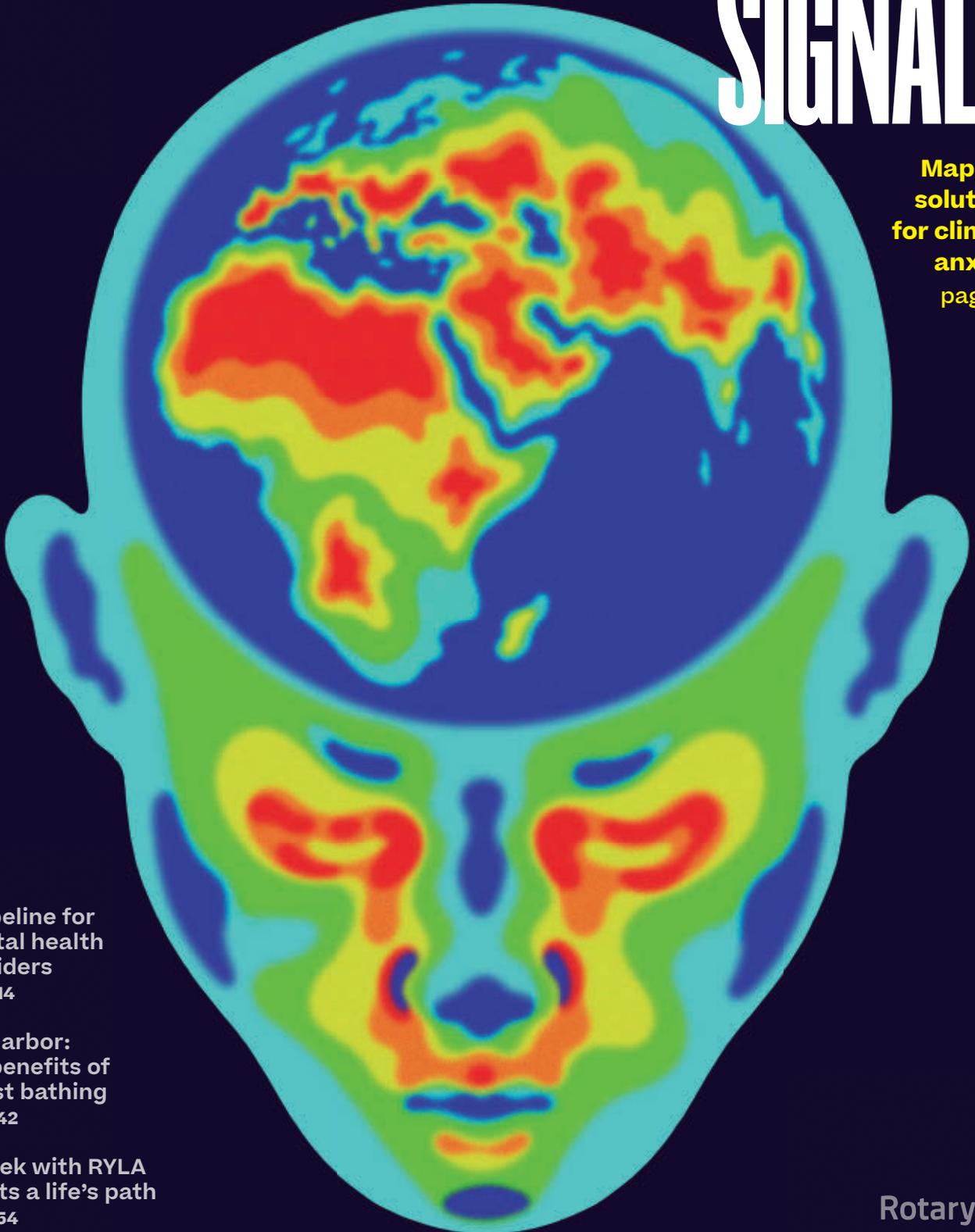
Rotary

MAY 2024

MAGAZINE

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The first glimmers of a lasting change

I am deeply gratified by *Rotary* magazine's focus on mental health in this edition — and I'm ecstatic about the enthusiasm shown across the world in the past year to better support the mental health needs of each other and the people we serve.

In January 2023 when I first spoke about the need for Rotary to become more engaged on this crisis, I noted that the global mental health system couldn't be described as broken only because it didn't exist. But I also offered a highly aspirational wish that Rotary could help build that system.

The first glimmers of this vision have been brought to light by you in dozens of mental health projects. But just as important is the invitation many of you have given to fellow Rotary members to share their stories.

I am impressed by the leadership young Rotarians and Rotaractors have shown, and some of their brave, inspiring stories are highlighted in these pages. Former Rotaractor Freddie Almazan has an especially powerful personal narrative that you can learn about here — and hear firsthand at this month's Rotary International Convention in Singapore.

You can read in this issue about a great example of a project with the kind of sustainable impact that creates lasting change: Rotary clubs in Colorado endowing a pediatric mental health fellowship at Children's Hospital Colorado.

At the convention, you can also hear from 2024 People of Action honorees lauded for the impact they and their clubs have made through mental health

initiatives. Bindi Rajasegaran will talk about a Rotary-led project in Malaysia helping children develop skills to cope with mental health challenges and building capacity for support throughout the country.

In addition, Rita Aggarwal, an officer of the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives, will be recognized for her success in applying the Wellness in a Box framework, a mental health literacy approach for adolescents, in her hometown of Nagpur, India. Read about the project in the "Stand by me" feature. This highly scalable and clinically backed framework can be adapted for use just about anywhere — reach out to the action group if your club would like to support or implement it.

As we look ahead, the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives will play a critical leadership role in promoting proven, measurable projects. In doing so, it will empower clubs to focus on initiatives that drive scalable, sustainable impact.

After you've read through the magazine, I invite you to go to the Learning Center on My Rotary and check out the Increase Your Impact series, which includes a wonderful short video explaining impact. When we focus on impact, we bring Rotary's vision statement to life, creating lasting change across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves.

R. GORDON R. MCINALLY
President, Rotary International



WELCOME



PHOTOGRAPH: SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD

YOU ARE HERE: Singapore Changi Airport

GREETING: Ni hao (Mandarin), apa kabar (Malay), and alo (Tamil)

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Rotary

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May 2024

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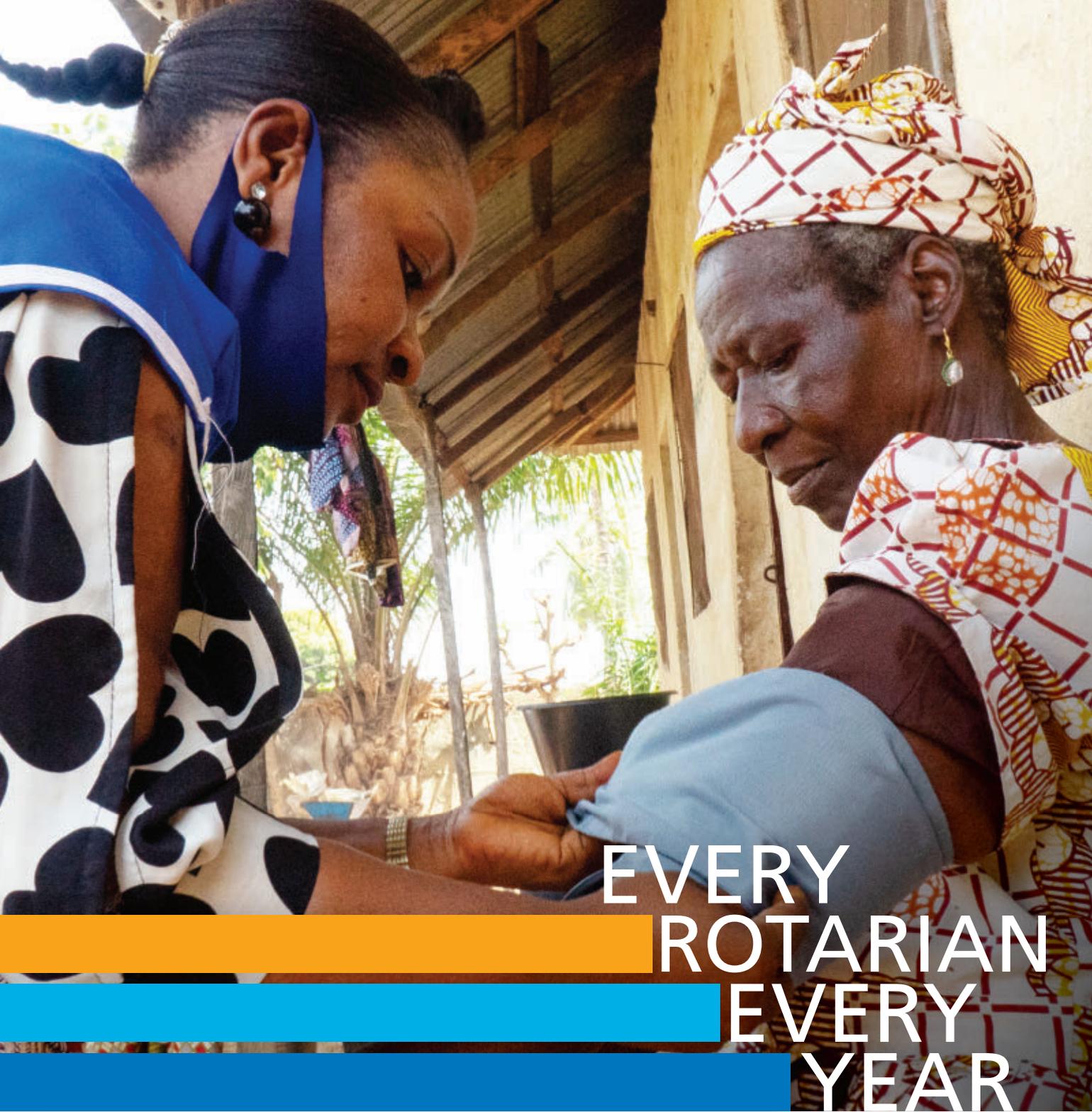
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Illustration by Miguel Porlan



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The editors welcome comments on items published in the magazine but reserve the right to edit for style and length. Published letters do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or Rotary International leadership, nor do the editors take responsibility for errors of fact that may be expressed by the writers.

STAFF CORNER

Rick Vittenson

*Contract administrator,
Meetings and Events*

I've always loved music. I got my first guitar when I was 10. I taught myself to play guitar and keyboard. I grew up during the folk music boom and was a huge fan of musicians like Bob Dylan and the Kingston Trio.

I interviewed and photographed Jimi Hendrix. At the University of Oklahoma, I took a photography class and began photographing rock stars for the school newspaper when they came to town. I started with the British band the Jeff Beck Group and went bigger. One time, I drove to Dallas, where I saw Hendrix.

While writing for *Crawdaddy*, an American rock magazine, I had the chance to interview and photograph just about every rock star who came through Chicago in the 1970s, from Ray Davies of the Kinks to Marc Bolan of T. Rex. I donated my Hendrix negatives and slides to his family. Some have been used in documentaries and in CD liner notes.

Hearing the Beatles for the first time in the early 1960s inspired me to pursue music as a career. I cannot read music. I pick up a guitar or sit down at a piano and just play. I have the tune first and the lyrics come later. I joined several bands in the '70s. We recorded songs and tried to make it in the business. It didn't go far. So, eventually, I put my toys away.

I went to the Chicago-Kent College of Law and worked for the American Bar Association for about 14 years, where I served as director of copyrights and contracts and later headed the continued legal education department. I played with

the house band called Malpractice, and we performed at office holiday parties.

My music dream took a dramatic turn in 2013, when a record label in England included one of my band Athanor's songs in a compilation without our knowledge. That same year a music magazine in France named the song as its favorite song of the year. Then, we started to get messages from record labels asking who we were and if we had more recordings. So yes, we had enough songs for two albums. We ended up signing with a record label in Spain. When our first album was sold out, the company released an album of our old demos.

The success prompted me and a former bandmate to regroup and start writing and playing again. Our new album began to get airplay all over the world. It was gratifying to live my teenage dream. In 2019 after playing at the International Pop Overthrow festival in Chicago, we were invited to perform at Liverpool's Cavern Club, where the Beatles were a signature act. But COVID hit and the gig never materialized.

I joined Rotary about 10 years ago, drafting and negotiating contracts for the International Assembly, the Rotary Convention, and the Council on Legislation. That was one of the best decisions I've made. Our staff and our Rotary members live their values.

My music is still getting attention. A record label in Florida plans to release the entire output of one of my early bands, Brevity, in August. By year's end, all of my music from the '70s will see the light of day. — AS TOLD TO WEN HUANG



PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF RICK VITTEINSON

Letters to the editor

STICK TO SCIENCE

I greatly enjoy your magazine and reading about the wonderful work Rotarians are doing worldwide. I was disappointed that you published the letter from Robert Chatfield ["Climate reactions," February], who blatantly furthered information that is now debunked. His letter did more than imply that today's rapid climate change is natural and not human-caused. With just about the entire world working to solve this catastrophic problem and nearly every scientist opposed to that view, it was irresponsible to give that kind of publicity to his letter. Rotary, to its great credit, has been actively working on issues of climate change, and this letter only undermines that work.

Amy Miller, South Berwick, Maine

I submit that the Letters section of the February issue did not pass The Four-Way Test, which begins with the question "Is it the truth?" You published a thoughtful letter that seeks to fit climate work into the framework of Rotary. The next letter, unfortunately, began with the nonsensical sentence "We can't solve climate change any more than we can 'solve' gravity."

As Rotarians, we are nonpartisan, and we can disagree on which proposed solutions to climate change are the best. But it seems odd for an organization that endorses modern science in the form of polio vaccinations to print a letter that expressly rejects the modern science of climatology. We can do better.

Chris Wiegard, Chester, Virginia

Thank you for publishing my letter concerning climate change. However, I am very disappointed that you saw fit to print a companion letter that denies the human contribution to climate change and further states that we can do nothing about climate change. The science is very clear that we are causing the current changes to the climate, and therefore we have it within our power to do something about it.

By trying to be balanced, you give voice to the view that we should give



up. I prefer to work for solutions so my grandchildren can inherit a livable world.

Larry Kramer, San Juan Capistrano, California

POWER WHEELS

I was sorry to hear of [Past RI President] Richard King's passing ["The business of serving others," February]. Because of the alliance Mr. King established with the Wheelchair Foundation, the Rotary Club of Greenport, New York, was able to send over 500 wheelchairs to Sierra Leone in 2003-04 for people affected by polio. My wife, Susan (a past club president), and I headed up the project and were able to witness some of the happy recipients.

Richard Brewster, Cutchogue, New York

BEANTOWN BITES

I enjoyed the article on Boston-area food ["A decadent history," February]. I had the pleasure of dining at the Toll House some years ago, and I have in my collection Ruth Wakefield's Toll House cookbook with the original recipe for her cookies.

Nancy Patrick, Pompano Beach, Florida

OVERHEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In February, we wrote about the new Rotary Peace Center at Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul and spotlighted a few Rotary Peace Fellow alumni who are working in the Middle East or North Africa.

Yesss! More peacebuilders to spread Positive Peace and skillfully lead by doing the work that makes a difference. Great work to those already engaged in peacebuilding in the region. Thank you!
Erica Brouillette
► [via LinkedIn](#)

As a Turkish Rotarian, I'm happy to see this initiative.
Özgün KPM
► [via X](#)



The January issue featured an article by Nick Krayacich, spouse of 2022-23 RI President Jennifer Jones, about his experience as Rotary's first first gentleman. Krayacich shared more of his memorable stories on a recent episode of the magazine's podcast. Listen at on.rotary.org/podcast.

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

I am writing to express my immense delight in the December issue of *Rotary*, which focused on food. Thank you for dedicating an entire issue to this subject. Food holds a great importance, especially to Rotary members, as it ties in with the organization's commitment to serving communities and fostering global understanding. I was captivated by the diverse range of content, from articles that explored the impact of community gardens and sustainable farming practices to features on Rotarian-led culinary initiatives.

The inclusion of recipes from different cultures and regions ["A global palette"] was a delightful surprise. It not only showcased the multicultural aspect of Rotary but also allowed readers to try their hand at cooking something new. I personally found joy in experimenting with these recipes and sharing the delicious results with friends and family.

Overall, the issue left a lasting impression on me. I commend the editorial team for its thoughtful curation of content that effectively highlighted the importance of food in our world. It was refreshing to see such a creative exploration of how food can be a powerful tool for positive change.

Marguerite (Maggie) Padovani,
Los Gatos, California

PROUD OF POLIO EFFORTS

I was fortunate to be in the first generation of New York kids who received the original Salk vaccine against polio in the 1950s. (I have met others, only three months older than I, who contracted the frightful disease.) Then, as an artist in high school, I was given the opportunity to design the banner for the Rotary club in my hometown of Eastchester, New York. I joined Rotary to honor my grandfather, who was a Rotarian 100 years ago, and I am proud that Rotary continues the fight to eradicate polio.

Nathan M. Wise,
Old Saybrook, Connecticut

Why, whenever I see a news article about the fight to end polio, is Rotary almost never mentioned? If people with no Rotary connection are asked about ending polio, their first words are "Bill Gates." Try looking for yourselves. (And kudos to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for its support.)

Does this seeming reluctance to let the world know that Rotary is a driving force in this fight pass The Four-Way Test? No! It does not. We can and we must do better.

Wade Garrison, Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

Correction: The February article "The path to a Rotary Peace Fellowship" misstated the driving distance between Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The drive generally takes less than 30 minutes.

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magazine**

Magazine highlights

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PHOTOGRAPH: BRITTANY ANNE SCOTT



THE SPECIALIST

His next role

A tenor steps back from performing to give back to Rotary

My parents immigrated to Melbourne, Australia, from the Philippines to make a better life for me and my siblings. Growing up, I had a passion for singing but did not consider it as a future career. Then my elder sister got into the school choir and auditioned for musicals, which sparked my competitiveness. I followed in her footsteps. Since I was one of the few boys who auditioned, I always got the lead roles.

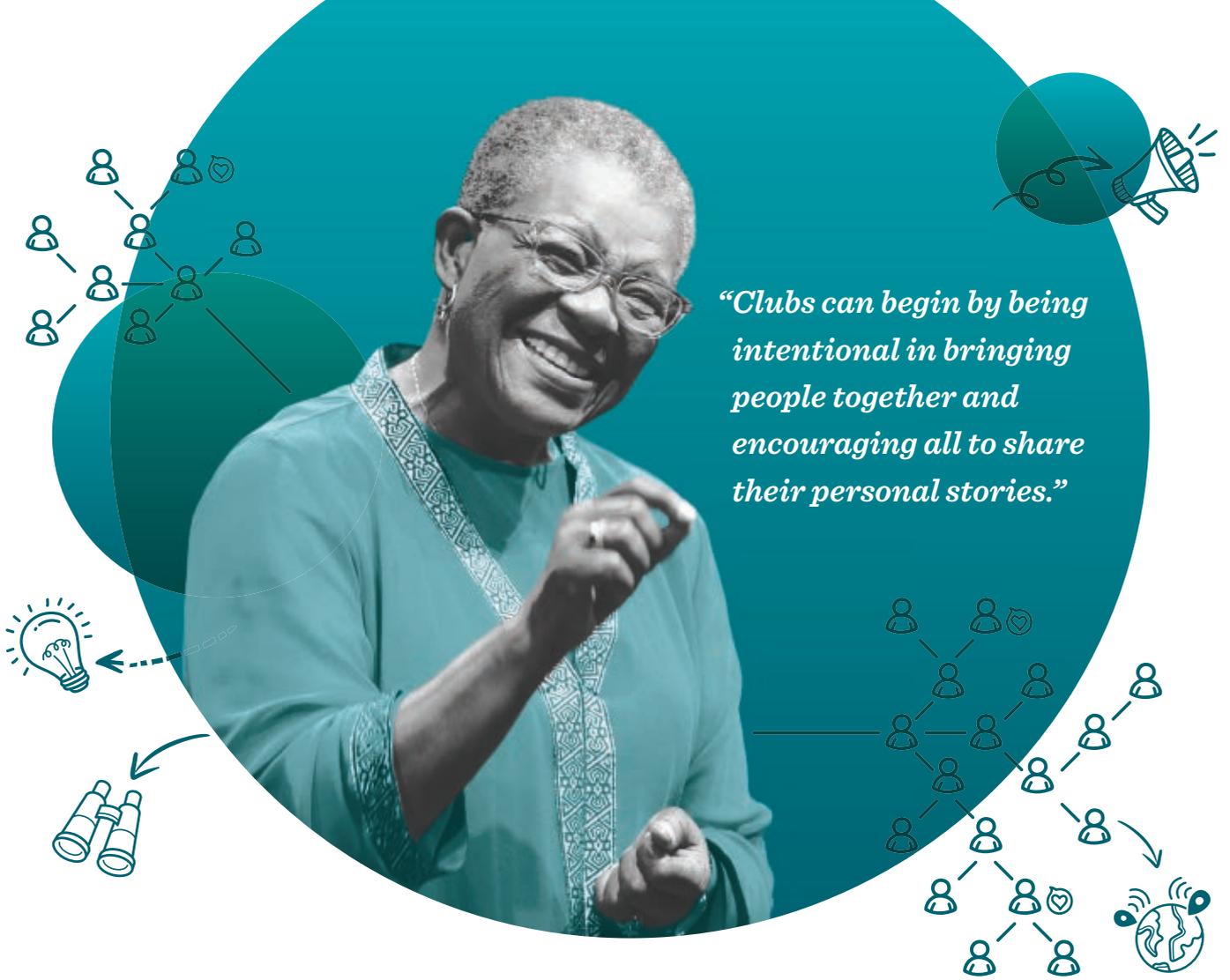
I studied voice performance at Victorian College of the Arts. In college, all I wanted to do was perform in musicals. I became a commercial dancer for Disney and got into musicals like *Miss Saigon*, *Oklahoma!* and *Beauty and the Beast*. At the same time, I rose the backstage ranks to become a Disney tour manager and joined the Victorian State Opera as a young artist. So, I was doing three jobs simultaneously.

Michael Lapiña
Rotary Club
of Wyndham,
Australia
Opera tenor

In 1998 when I met my girlfriend, now my wife, I decided to take a break from touring and got a job at the National Australia Bank. Then in 2006, two leading opera houses, Opera Australia and Victorian Opera, invited me back to the opera world. I left the bank and performed coveted tenor roles in classics such as *Turandot*, *La Traviata*, and *Rigoletto*. But these operas did not pay enough to support my family. I returned to my day job at the bank while performing at night.

My most memorable moment was performing “Nessun Dorma” from Puccini’s *Turandot* in southern China. The audience gave me a standing ovation. I couldn’t hear myself or the 100-piece orchestra because of the applause. To this day, “Nessun Dorma” is still one of my favorite pieces to sing.

I have left my corporate job and have become a voice teacher. I still perform at chamber concerts and corporate events, and I direct and sing at fundraisers for Rotary and the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Due to my busy Rotary schedule, I have temporarily given up performances at opera houses, which require rigorous rehearsal and planning. Eventually, I would love to get back into performing. My dream role would be the phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera*. For now, I’m focusing on giving back to the Rotary community as a district governor, starting 1 July. — AS TOLD TO AMY LANLAN WANG



“Clubs can begin by being intentional in bringing people together and encouraging all to share their personal stories.”

The **ROTARY ACTION PLAN**
**EXPANDING
OUR REACH**

WITH ANDRÉ HADLEY MARRIA

André Hadley Marria is governor of District 6900 and a member of the Rotary Club of Thomasville, Georgia, USA. She's a founding mentor of Spark Thomasville, a program for local entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities.

Q: How do you think about expanding Rotary's reach both globally and locally?

ANDRÉ: Expanding our reach and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) mean that we need to embrace all the talents and skills that we have, and we need to acknowledge that we've not always done that in Rotary.

When I was asked in 2020 to work with Rotary's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative, I had a keen awareness that until I and others were ready to take a personal inventory of our own internal biases, we could not implement change. I started working with individuals in a small group of clubs and said we need to look at ourselves and see whether we're really inclusive in the work that we're doing. We used a variety of methods to measure our attitudes and beliefs and took training to build our skills to engage with and facilitate difficult conversations.

Q: What can clubs do to begin expanding their reach? Where do they start?

ANDRÉ: Clubs can begin by being intentional in bringing people together and encouraging all to share their personal stories. And by being progressive in our thinking as we look at the talents of individuals that we want to be a part of our club. If a club has difficulty making change, that hinders growth and our appeal to new, younger people, especially if we don't adapt to how our members and participants want to engage with Rotary. If they are service oriented and outcome driven, we should broaden our reach to include those individuals who want to get work done. Clubs also need to address the needs of the community, ensuring that the members and leaders reflect the community they serve.

Q: How did the partnership between Spark Thomasville and your Rotary club help expand your club's reach?

ANDRÉ: We expanded our reach through collaboration with the local chamber of commerce, which supported our mentorship initiative with Spark. Our members were asked

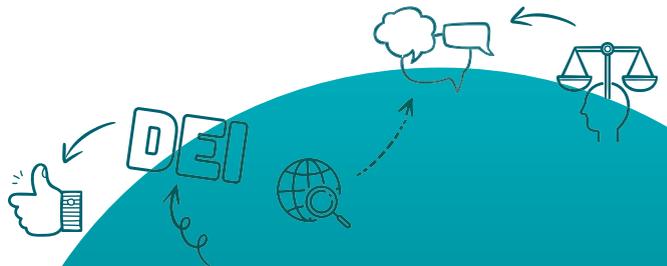
to serve as mentors, and it strengthened our partnership with the chamber as both organizations provided mentors to Spark. Participating in Spark allowed our Rotary club to meet other community leaders who could learn what we do.

Q: How can this approach be applied to other Rotary clubs?

ANDRÉ: Become a part of the community at large, know where to find businesses to connect with and other organizations, and find the real voices of the community. It's up to Rotary members to get these leaders involved, by being authentic, intentional, and willing to share their own stories, inspiring others to do likewise. In Thomasville, one real voice was the Thomas County Family Connection, made up of social service, grassroots, health care, civic, and judicial agencies that serve families and children. Find those organizations, and any Rotary or Rotaract club can expand its reach.

Q: If there's one thing you could tell Rotary members about expanding our reach, what would it be?

ANDRÉ: We have to expand beyond our traditional way of partnering. We're going to have to look at our relationships and continue to do our work a different kind of way. You make sure that you do something differently so you can give people an opportunity to have a voice.



Learn what your club can do at rotary.org/actionplan



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The privacy of patient zero

MENTAL HEALTH

The provider pipeline

When a hospital system declared an emergency on youth mental health, Rotary members stepped up

The chief medical officer at Children’s Hospital Colorado had never seen anything like it. Suicide had become the leading cause of death for the state’s adolescents ages 10-18, and there were periods in 2021 when the number one reason children turned up at emergency departments was for an attempt to take their own life. Straining to meet the demand for care, the hospital’s CEO did something that had never happened at the 113-year-old institution: She declared a state of emergency.

Similar scenes were playing out around the country as the COVID-19 pandemic turbocharged the mental health crisis among America’s youth and revealed in stark terms the results of a shortage of providers. One in 6 U.S. children over the age of 6 have a diagnosed mental health disorder. Yet, only around half of them receive adequate treatment.

Among those who took notice when the Colorado hospital system sounded the alarm were three members of the Rotary Club of Highlands Ranch, a Denver suburb. Within a year they began raising funds to confront the issue head-on. Debby Doig, Shrin Murthy, and Tamara Fennell spent more than a year crisscrossing the state to talk about youth mental health at Rotary clubs. After almost every presentation, Doig says, someone would approach them with a story.

“They didn’t raise their hand and say this out loud, but they would come up to one of us and whisper in our ear their own personal trag-

edy,” Doig says. “Many times, it was suicide. Their child, their sister, their brother. I had one woman at a Rotary meeting come up and say, ‘Two weeks ago, I tried to kill myself. And if it wasn’t for Rotary, I wouldn’t be here.’”

Testaments like that shored up the trio’s commitment to an audacious goal: raising half a million dollars to fund the education of pediatric mental health specialists.

That number wasn’t even on the table in early 2021, when Murthy heard about the crisis from a speaker at the Highlands Ranch club. Among the most chilling developments, hospitals were seeing younger and younger patients come into their emergency rooms after attempting suicide.

“We’re seeing rising rates in the 5- to 9-year-old population, if you can believe it,” says Dr. K. Ron-Li Liaw, Children’s Hospital Colorado’s first-ever mental health in-chief. “Elementary school-age kids are making suicide attempts.”

A few months after the hospital declared its state of emergency, three pediatric organizations declared one at the national level. Experts aren’t entirely sure what’s driving the crisis but point to a range of causes. The pandemic isolated kids and subjected many to the trauma of losing loved ones. More than 140,000 children in the United States lost a primary or secondary caregiver or both in the first 15 full months of the pandemic.

But the number of kids attempting suicide has been on the rise for years. Between 2016 and 2022, chil-

To learn more and get involved, visit the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives at [ragonmentalhealth.org](https://www.rotary.org/ragonmentalhealth.org).



Dressed in honorary white coats, Rotary Club of Highlands Ranch members (from left) Tamara Fennell, Shrin Murthy, and Debby Doig pose outside of Children's Hospital Colorado. They raised \$500,000 to establish the Rotary Clubs of Colorado Endowed Fellowship for Pediatric Mental Health.

dren's hospitals saw a 166 percent increase in emergency department visits for suicide attempts and self-injury among children ages 5-18. That's partly because there simply aren't enough doctors to treat troubled youths before their mental health problems become severe, says Dr. Cassie Littler, president of the Colorado chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The U.S. has only 14 child and adolescent psychiatrists per 100,000 youths, and 70 percent of counties have no such professionals at all.

"It would make a big difference if we had behavioral health providers in pediatricians' offices," Littler says. "Changing how we fund prevention would go a long way, because then we could intervene and help children and families gain those coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills."

When Murthy first heard about the issue through his club, it didn't occur to him that he could help with the provider shortage. He just knew he wanted to take action in some way. "I said, we've got to do something in order to address this crisis," he says.

Murthy and Doig formed a mental health committee within the Highlands Ranch club and began researching options. Murthy served on the volunteer board at Children's Hospital Colorado, so he reached out to Martine Hyland, a philanthropy director at the hospital's foundation, for advice about possible gifts. Hyland suggested different giving opportunities with a range of dollar amounts but was stunned by the one Murthy and Doig chose. They sought to fund a \$500,000 fellowship to train new doctors on mental health.

"They said, 'We want to go big. We want to endow a fellowship,'" Hyland says. "And I've got to tell you, I thought they were nuts. We've been the grateful recipients of lots of Rotary gifts from different clubs but nothing at that magnitude. I thought, 'How are they going to do this?'"

First, Doig and Murthy recruited Fennell, a fellow club member who'd spent years working with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. They told her about the benefits of endowing a fellowship. With a \$500,000 endowment, the investment income would be enough to fund education, a cost-of-living stipend, and research opportunities for a new fellow every one to two years. They'd be actively addressing the doctor shortage. And with a presence throughout Colorado, the hospital system would ensure a statewide reach.

A personal connection to the issue cemented Fennell's support. "My mother lived with severe mental illness, bipolar disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder," Fennell says. "And I've done a lot of mental health advocacy work, so I was especially excited about working on this project."

There was just the small matter of raising \$500,000. But Fennell was galvanized, not intimidated, by that number. "When Shrin came to me and said, 'Hey, I want to do this. What do you think about it?' I was overjoyed," she says. "We were actually going to make a positive impact for a countless number of kids and families in perpetuity. That's the thing that's so special about it — it's not a one-off. It is a lasting legacy program."

Fennell, Murthy, and Doig prepared a presentation and began contacting Colorado's Rotary clubs. The Highlands Ranch club had a foundation of its own, which donated \$50,000 to get them started. Then came the grinding work of visiting more than 40 clubs all over the state.

"We went from club to club to club, and we would do our presentation. We must have driven hundreds and hundreds of miles," Murthy says. "It was a very humbling experience to go and talk to these clubs. But then the money started coming in."

Ultimately it took about a year and a half to raise the funds. That was three and a half years less than the hospital's foundation usually sees when groups try to raise that much money. But Murthy was determined to act fast.

"I said to Debby and Tamie, 'We



Fennell, Murthy, and Doig pose with Martine Hyland (far right), a philanthropy director at the hospital's foundation, during a check presentation ceremony.

"We were actually going to make a positive impact for a countless number of kids and families in perpetuity."

need to wrap it up by September of 2023, so that we can have a fellow in place by the spring or summer of 2024," he says. "The mental health problem was getting worse every year. By putting a fellow in place as soon as possible, that person can then visit up to 1,500 patients a year. If we didn't have a fellow in place, we would miss 1,500 people."

Besides the money they've raised, Fennell notes, they've also

spread awareness of the issue, including to Rotary clubs and districts they hope will adopt the model in other places. "I'm not going to be teaching physicians and fellows how to make their practices better — I don't have that skill set," she says. "But what I do have is the ability to share my knowledge of the crisis we're in and to speak my lived experience to others."

— ETELKA LEHOCZKY

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health emergency, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S. by calling or texting 988 or going to 988lifeline.org. If you are outside the U.S., visit findahelpline.com to get connected with a service in your country.

BY THE NUMBERS

40+
Clubs visited during the fundraising campaign

\$500K
Total raised to fund the endowment

1,500
Number of patients a fellow can see per year

Short takes

In 2022-23, Rotary Action Groups supported 1,244 club and district projects, including 85 that received a global grant. Learn more at rotary.org/actiongroups.

This month marks the centennial of Rotary in Chile and Switzerland, where the first clubs were chartered in Valparaiso and Zurich, respectively.





PROFILE

Full circle

For J.R. Muller, joining Rotary was the latest chapter in a generational saga

J.R. Muller
Rotary Club of
Grand Rapids,
Michigan

At my pinning ceremony, I gave an emotional, heartfelt thank-you to Rotary,” says J.R. Muller, recalling the occasion in October when he became a member of the Rotary Club of Grand Rapids, Michigan. “It was a full-circle moment. If my dad’s life hadn’t been defined a little bit by Rotary, I wouldn’t be here right now.”

Muller is referring to his father, Robert S. Muller, an honored guest at the White House in 1990 when President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act. But the story actually begins with his grandfather, Thomas Muller, a longtime member of the Grand Rapids club. When Robert Muller was born with cerebral palsy in 1941, Thomas ignored recommendations that he institutionalize his son and chose to raise him at home.

Robert went on to lead a full life, attending college, raising a family, and championing the rights of people with disabilities. One of the defining moments of his youth was attending Indian Trails Camp, which offers a wide range of activities for people with disabilities and has been sustained for decades by the Grand Rapids Rotary club.

And when *his* son was in college and looking for a summer job, Robert suggested J.R. try Indian Trails. He took his father’s advice, spent several summers — and then some — working there, earned a degree in recreational therapy, and devoted 15 years to working with people with disabilities.

Today J.R. runs a successful tech company, and last year, remembering the saga of the Mullers and Rotary and Indian Trails Camp, he finally joined Rotary. “I only wish I had been involved in Rotary sooner,” he says. “That’s the place to be.” — GEOFFREY JOHNSON

Rotary and UNESCO’s joint contribution to Positive Peace will be the focus of a conference at UNESCO in Paris, 4 May. Learn more at riunescoday.org.

World Water Summit 16, organized by the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Rotary Action Group, will take place 24 May in Singapore. Register at wash-rag.org.



Eighty-one Rotary members have been selected to receive the 2023-24 Service Above Self Award.

People of action around the globe

By Brad Webber

30,000+

Meals served by Comedor Santa María school in 2023

Mexico

A community kitchen built by the Rotary Club of Nuevo Santander at a local school is ensuring hundreds of children have meals in low-income neighborhoods of Nuevo Laredo, a city on the U.S. border. “Most of the houses in this area do not have running water or electricity,” says Club President Jorge Tello. The club launched the \$150,000 project in 2018, and the kitchen at the Comedor Santa María school began operating in August 2020; meals were first served to-go due to the COVID-19 pandemic before the dining room opened in May 2021. “Operation costs for providing breakfast and lunch for 230 children every day is \$9,300 a month,” Tello says. The funds are donated by businesses and individuals. Club members supervise the operation, and Rotarians are providing solar panels to the facility.



United States

The Viva! Vienna! festival offers a master class in how a special event can galvanize residents and community groups, says Gunnar Spafford, a member of the Rotary Club of Vienna, Virginia, which took on the project in the mid-1990s. The Memorial Day weekend event in a suburb of Washington, D.C., has grown into a celebration that features food, ukulele performances, singing princesses, and tributes to those who’ve died in military service. The 2023 event raised \$230,000 and attracted 60,000 people. The biggest share of the proceeds, about \$130,000, came from carnival rides. The next highest sum was brought in from vendors, who pay higher fees for spots closer to the town green, the hub of activity. “I see this as an opportunity to have other Rotarians experience Viva! Vienna! for the fundraising prowess it has,” Spafford says.



14th century

Origin of the word “festival”

Netherlands

Thousands of Rotary members celebrated the centennial of Rotary in the Netherlands in 2023 in typical Dutch fashion: with a bicycle tour, specifically a yearlong, 3,100-mile journey on an electric cargo bicycle. Cyclists taking turns in the relay-style tour visited most of the roughly 500 clubs in the country. Past RI President Holger Knaack, district governors, and about 1,000 other revelers were on hand for the start of the relay in January at Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam. At the end of the ride in December in the province of Zeeland, Rotarians planted trees for a food forest, a type of food cultivation based on woodland ecosystems. "With the electric bike and the forest, we made many people aware of Rotary's environment area of focus," says Madelon Schaap, of the Rotary Club of Amsterdam-Zuid, immediate past governor of District 1580. The project made Rotary visible to the public. Schaap adds that "connecting the clubs and unifying them is a great achievement that we did not expect at the beginning."



22,000+

Miles of bicycle paths
in the Netherlands



Albania

In December the Rotaract Club of Durrës delivered care packages to 30 families in need in the city on the Adriatic coast. Each package was tailored for the recipients, an approach that was important to the project's success, says Club President Geri Emiri. Rotaractors gathered information on the number of family members, their genders, and their health needs before assembling the packages, which were supplied using monetary and in-kind contributions. The club distributed food packages, along with panettone (a Christmas sweet bread), lemonade, fruit and vegetables, hygiene goods, detergent, children's books, toys, clothing, household appliances, and furniture. The aid "was modest and does not solve the problems of these families," Emiri says, "but it aims to strengthen the relationships."



620s B.C.

Durrës founded
as Epidamnus

Burundi

A spinal surgery for a child in Burundi was made possible by the coordination of Rotary members on multiple continents. The young girl, named Maïssa, had early-onset scoliosis, a curvature of the spine. A team of Belgian surgeons working in the country found that she was in urgent need of intervention. A local doctor was not available, and her family could not afford to travel out of the country. So the doctors contacted Pierre De Vriendt, a member of the Rotary Club of Gand Maritime-Gent Haven with experience coordinating medical missions, to help recruit surgeons from India in hopes of finding a lower-cost option. Word of the girl's need eventually reached Els Reynaers Kini of the Rotary Club of Mumbai Sobo, which supports the work of the Spine Foundation in India with the help of a Rotary Foundation global grant. In November, two doctors, Abhay Nene and Harshal Babulal Bamb, traveled at their own expense to Burundi, where they performed the first operation on Maïssa, now 6. Reynaers Kini, who intends to expand the medical work in Burundi, relays the gratitude of the girl's mother, Martine Karabona: "Not only has Maïssa been given a new lease on life so she can grow into a confident woman, but along the way all of us have grown really close and are now truly one global family spread across India, Belgium, and Burundi."



1 in 10,000

Children born
with scoliosis





GOODWILL

The drumbeat of change

Punjab’s folk drummers help build trust for polio vaccinators

By Wasif Mahmood

The sound of drums is enough to rouse even the sun. As tea stall owners set up shop for the day, curious women peek out of their windows and children rush out of houses to flock to the mysterious drummer in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. As he moves from street to street, they run alongside him. Flushed with excitement, they start dancing to the familiar local tunes, some of the children falling over each other, but all smiling. It is a welcome distraction on a cold January morning.

This lively scene, however, is no accident. A banner draped around the drummer carries a message encouraging families to participate in the upcoming polio vaccination campaign. This attention-grabbing approach, blending cultural traditions with polio awareness efforts, is the brainchild of UNICEF’s Social Behavior Change team working with the government’s Provincial Polio Emergency Operations Centre in Punjab.

Leading this creative team is Sajida Mansoor, who understands that

information overload on polio vaccination can overwhelm parents, at times to the point of inaction.

“Out-of-the-box thinking was required to respond to the challenge. That’s how we came up with this unconventional but fun idea of using drums to spread awareness and highlight key immunization dates to reach children, especially those who were consistently missing polio vaccination,” says Mansoor, a longtime UNICEF staff member supporting polio eradication efforts in the country.

Zafar Iqbal, the drummer, suddenly stops playing to allow people to hear the call to prayer from the local mosque. Iqbal, who plays a folk drum known as a dhol, is a seasoned professional musician who sustains his livelihood by showcasing his talent at various cultural events when he is not engaged with the polio eradication program.

But the polio percussion show isn’t over yet. Joining Iqbal at center stage is 7-year-old Gul Bahisht, who confidently delivers a brief speech she has composed: “I have been

vaccinated. Why not vaccinate your child too? It’s easy and simple. Just two drops for your child in every campaign and we will all be free from polio forever.”

Iqbal resumes the rhythmic beat of his drums, bringing immense laughter and joy to the children and their families.

This strategy has struck a chord with communities. In neighborhoods where the initiative was first introduced, parents became more receptive. This enabled health workers to vaccinate a large cohort of children who had consistently missed vaccination due to reasons cited as “not available,” which often meant the parents did not open their doors to vaccinators. Children, too, embraced the teams with trust, resulting in more efficient vaccination coverage.

“This approach has helped us break down the barriers with caregivers, and they are more receptive to communicating with us,” Mansoor says. “We are dedicated to ensuring that our teams on the ground actively respect the religious and cultural norms of the local community.”

In spots across Rawalpindi and the city of Lahore where the drummer strategy was introduced, polio teams managed to vaccinate every available child. This was a significant contribution to the 96 percent vaccination coverage achieved in Punjab province during the campaign in January.

Back in Rawalpindi, Iqbal’s percussion jam for polio eradication continues to reverberate in the neighborhood. A father himself, he made sure his youngest daughter was vaccinated at 2 months old during the recent campaign.

“I feel very happy and blessed that the beats from my drums bring joy to people,” Iqbal says with a smile, “and at the same time support an important cause that protects our children in Pakistan from deadly diseases like polio.”

Wasif Mahmood is a UNICEF polio communication officer. This story originally appeared on the website of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, polioeradication.org.

↑ Zafar Iqbal (left) plays a folk drum known as a dhol to draw a crowd and help raise awareness of an upcoming polio vaccination campaign in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.



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ESSAY

The privacy of patient zero

A close encounter with the SARS virus shaped a journalist's attitude toward confidentiality

By Rebekah Raleigh



Twenty-one years ago, I was an international incident. It's a story that comes with all the expected drama: worried loved ones, diplomatic intervention, hustling reporters, and a lonely and terrified foreigner. That would be me.

I wasn't even supposed to be in India. My best friend and I had been traveling in China as tensions mounted around a mysterious new virus: severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS. Since we couldn't read or speak Chinese, we relied on a few English-language news sites that we could access at internet cafes. The stories from Western journalists we read implied that SARS was deadly and that it wasn't being taken seriously enough in East Asia. We didn't know what to believe, but when a single cough in the airport sent everyone's eyes darting, we knew it was time to go. We chose India because we could afford the flights and the visas.

The stars aligned poorly for me that next week. My friend and I decided to split up for a few days and meet in Agra. That's how I found myself alone in Mumbai, running a fever and fueling the kind of panic that often accompanies issues of public health. I went to a private hospital, but my symptoms and travel history suggested I might have contracted SARS. The doctors were sympathetic but couldn't treat me. Instead, they called a taxi to drive me to a government hospital.

It was April and Mumbai's tropical climate combined with my creeping fever meant I was hot inside and out. My mind raced, but somehow my cortisol-addled brain found the wherewithal to stop at my hotel, check out of my room, and move my luggage to the hotel's storage closet. (I mean, either this was going to take awhile, or I was going to die.) Most importantly, I called the local U.S. Consulate.

My fever kept rising. By the time I reached the public hospital, my body ached so much that it hurt to sit upright. The hospital had cleared out a room meant for dozens of patients, and there I was isolated. I spent three nights in various stages of sleep and sweat. Sometimes I'd awaken in the cavernous space with a stranger at my bedside dressed like the evil government scientists in *E.T.* There were doctors, nurses, public health officials — and this is probably a fever dream, but I swear someone introduced himself to me as the mayor of Mumbai.

I don't remember much else from this time except that the Indian doctor treating me was attentive and kind. "You don't have SARS," he predicted with confidence and a reassuring smile. His was the only face I could see; everyone else was masked and shrouded in plastic. No doubt they were taking every precaution given that, rightly or wrongly, I had been publicly identified as patient zero. Members of the media pieced together my movements across Asia and reported every detail. After newspapers named the hotel I'd booked in Mumbai, the poor innkeeper, desperate to save his business, had the place fumigated. Back in the States, my mother's answering machine was inundated with interview requests from television news.

All this had gone on without my knowledge: Not having access to a television or radio for three days, I hadn't realized that I had become the news.

After all this, my doctor's early assessment proved true: It turned out that all I had was the flu. Still, the health worker delivering a package entered my room dressed like a cling-wrap mummy. The U.S. Consulate had sent me a prepaid mobile phone and a letter requesting that I call as soon as possible. "Despite what you may have read in the papers," they added, "we have been actively working on your case."

I spoke with the consular officer assigned to my case. He'd been working tirelessly behind the scenes, speaking with my family, doctors, and public health officials. He told me that the U.S. government had sent a doctor to observe

me while I'd been (mostly) sleeping and had blood drawn for lab testing to verify whether I had SARS. (Indian public health officials were also doing this work independently.) That may sound simple enough, but in April 2003 there wasn't a test for SARS. The tests only identified the broader coronavirus — which could have been, but was not always, indicative of the SARS variety — and I had tested negative. Finally, the officer explained that I had two choices: leave India that day or spend another 10 days in quarantine. I was exhausted, afraid, and homesick. The answer was obvious.

I left the hospital in a consular caravan, in the third of five SUVs (or maybe it was the second of three — another fuzzy detail). The officer advised me to duck down on the seat to avoid the cameras. By that time, it had been several days since my last shower. I assume at least one of the photojournalists who followed us was able to get pictures. While standing in the hotel lobby, trying to recoup my luggage, it was impossible to miss the popping flashes on the other side of the windows. The consulate helped me get an airline ticket to leave India. To be clear, I paid for the ticket, but I needed an assist from the government, because when you have been identified in the news as the person who started a public health emergency, no one wants you to board their plane.

It depends on which news stories you read, but I was either the first or second suspected case of SARS in India. Sharing information about public health is a vital purpose of the press, but it's a very different experience when you're at the center of that maelstrom. At least one news story reported that I was asthmatic. That's not entirely true, but I did have asthma in my medical history, meaning reporters were probing hospital staff for private medical information and then publishing it. When I returned stateside to my mother's house, I made the mistake of reading the comments accompanying online news stories. People called me selfish and spoiled for having brought SARS to India. Those comments stung, and I remember wanting to respond to them. In the end, I held back, turned off the computer, and focused on my life back in the United States.

Shortly thereafter, I started graduate school in journalism and struggled

Sometimes I'd
awaken in the
cavernous space
with a stranger
at my bedside
dressed like the
evil government
scientists in *E.T.*

to reconcile the experience of being a news story with learning to be a news worker. Those online comments, from people presumably so far away, felt so near in memory. I cried in my faculty adviser's office wondering: Who was I to put someone else in that line of fire? He acknowledged my experience and encouraged me to let it guide me in my work. It was probably a regular afternoon for him, but that meeting has shaped my work for two decades.

My heart broke in 2014 when American media released the names of people treated in Atlanta for Ebola. Did public health and safety require that we know their names? Would you want part of your medical history to be the first thing about you that popped up on Google?

In many ways, I escaped that fate simply because my story is 21 years old. Two key elements contributed to the fact that it's largely excluded from my contemporary digital footprint. First, all English-language media mentions that I've encountered misspelled my name as the more-common "Rebecca." The second — and this should give us all pause — is that while I assume there were pictures of me that likely ran in newsprint, those photos weren't part of the online stories.

With the rise of facial recognition software and the rapid acceleration made possible by artificial intelligence, images and videos that we post are now just as searchable as a name. I think about the photos of me, bewildered and exhausted in a hotel lobby. An image in a newspaper — something that was once tossed away at the end of the day — is now a digital artifact discoverable by anyone with access to the internet. In my case, that would be part of my ostensibly private medical history.

This is not just about my story. It's about the work of Rotary: mine *and* yours. During Rotary years 2013-22, 43 percent of global grants fell under the disease prevention and treatment area of focus. That's innumerable people who have shared some medical experience with Rotary members or projects funded by Rotary. Here at One Rotary Center in Evanston, Illinois, we want you to celebrate and share that impact. I ask, however, that you consider consent carefully when taking photographs or making videos of your clubs' projects.



Shortly thereafter, I started graduate school in journalism and struggled to reconcile the experience of being a news story with learning to be a news worker.

Many people willingly share their stories with us. In writing this, I've shared mine and removed the protection that previous misspellings afforded me. That's the kind of partnership we strive for when reporting and documenting the work of Rotary members around the world. Rotary's recording policy asks permission from everyone — or in the case of minors, a parent or guardian — to use their image. This is a herculean task when put into action. In the field, people working with Rotary gather hundreds of releases per story. They are then compiled into thick stacks of dog-eared documents and delivered to Evanston, where our Visual Media team pairs each signed release with a photograph of the subject. To ensure that no one is overlooked, the Heritage Communica-

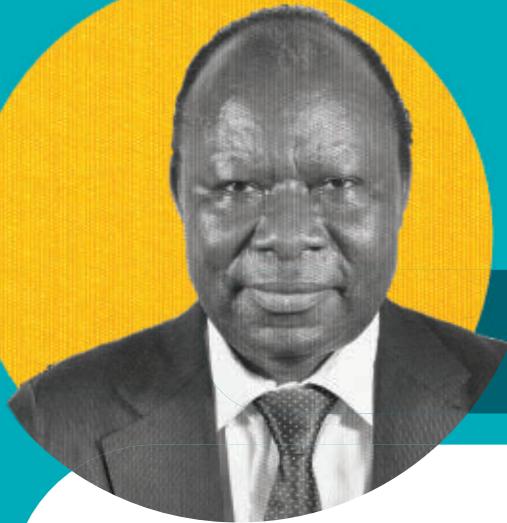
tions team — which, among other things, manages Rotary's digital assets — double-checks the work. After ensuring that every person in every image, including video footage, has a release, we use the visuals for Rotary's websites, social channels, and promotional materials. I mention all the labor involved only because it points to the depth of commitment from Rotary to protect people's privacy — and, for me, that kind of dedication comes from a very personal place.

While my story hasn't lived online in perpetuity, I suppose it might now. I'm glad that it's with my consent and in partnership with Rotary — which is exactly what we are all striving for. ■

Rebekah Raleigh is the creative director of visual media at Rotary International.



YOUR PROJECT PLANNING EXPERTS



FREDRICK MUYODI
Uganda, District 9214

CADRE TITLE:

Cadre Adviser for Environment and former Technical Coordinator for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

OCCUPATION:

University professor, water resources management



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— Osborn Mutapa, Rotary Club of Livingstone,
District 9210 (Zambia)

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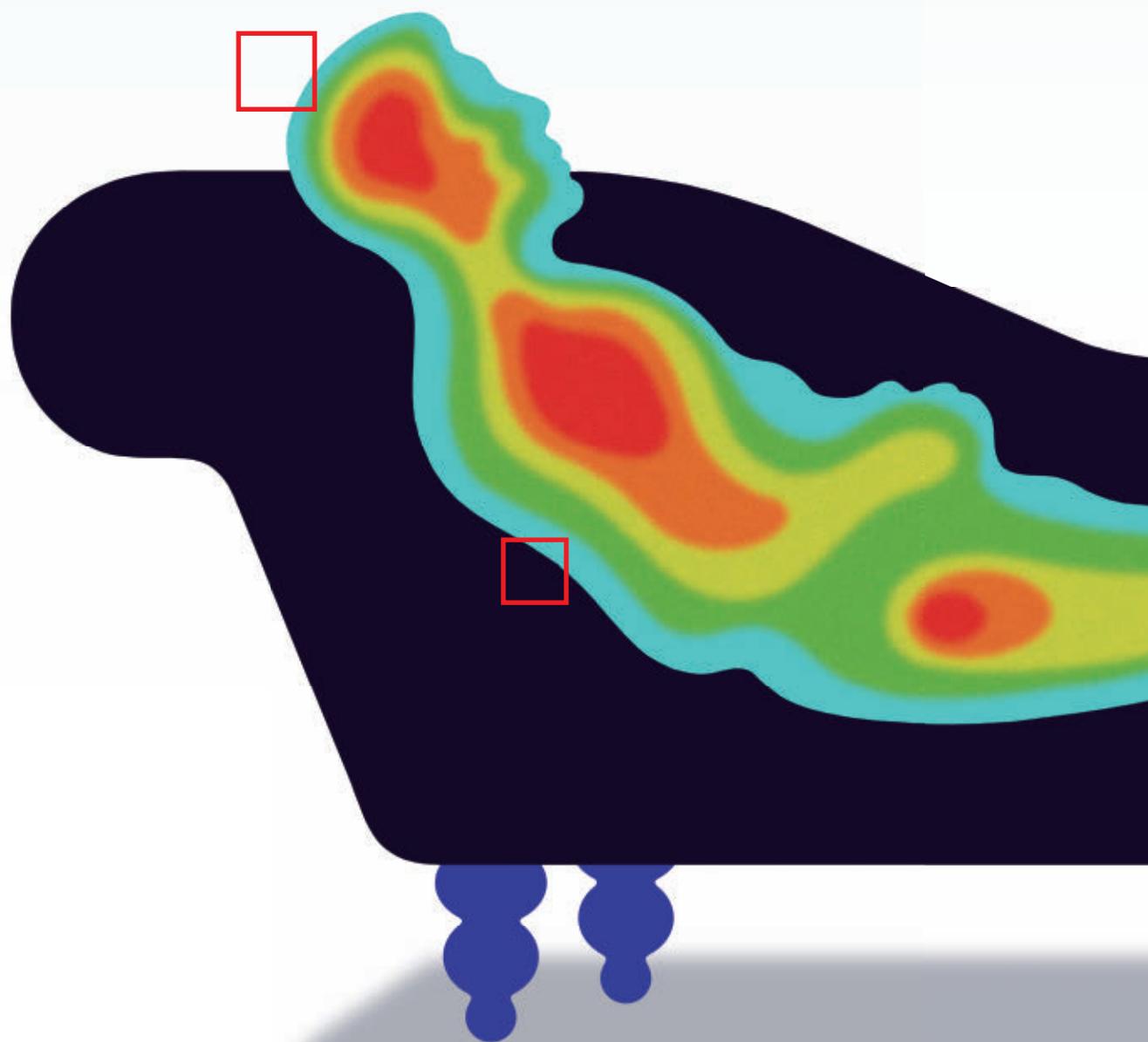
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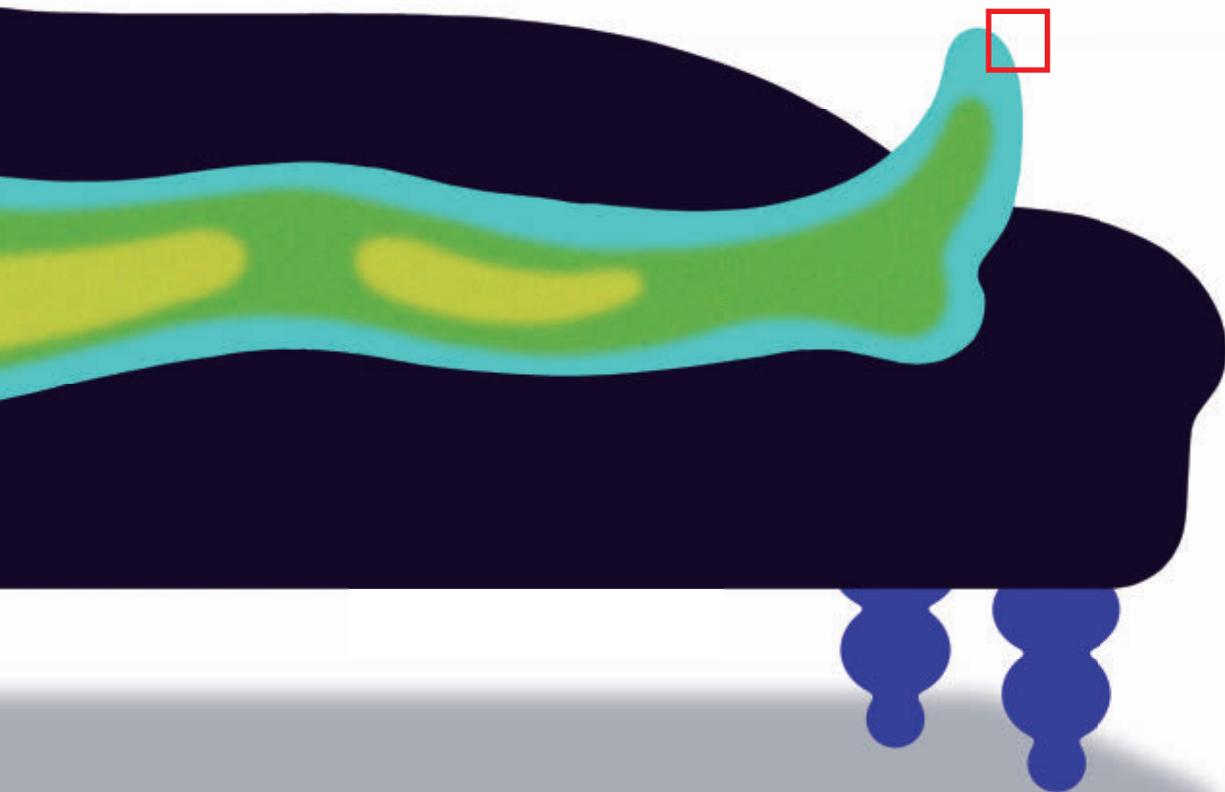




As a warming world takes a mental toll, collective action can help ease eco-anxiety

BY ELIZABETH HEWITT

● Illustration by Miguel Porlan



Marinel Ubaldo freezes when she hears heavy rain or intense wind.

“My brain just cannot function,” says Ubaldo, a climate activist who is studying for her master’s degree in environmental management at Duke University in North Carolina. “It triggers my trauma, and all the memories from the past just come rushing to me.”

A decade ago, when Ubaldo was in her last year of high school, her village in the Philippines was hit by Super Typhoon Haiyan. The community on the Pacific-facing shore had experienced many typhoons. Through Ubaldo’s childhood, prepping her family’s oceanfront home for storms was a regular part of life. As Haiyan approached, Ubaldo expected the same storm routine. But this typhoon with winds that reached 195 mph was equivalent to a Category 5 hurricane — much stronger than the storms the community was used to.

From an evacuation center in the building where she’d attended day care, she watched the storm devastate the town. The gymnasium roof floated in the wind like paper, she recalls. A wave washed a baby from the mother’s arms. Her family’s home was destroyed. And in the days after, before outside aid reached them, she and other members of her community just tried to survive.

For Ubaldo, the storm didn’t just leave her with traumatic memories. It also deepened her anxiety about the impacts of climate change, a feeling she says is common among her peers. “It’s overwhelming that you don’t know if you have a future,” Ubaldo says. “You don’t know if your family will still be there next month ... because our future is so unpredictable because of climate change.”

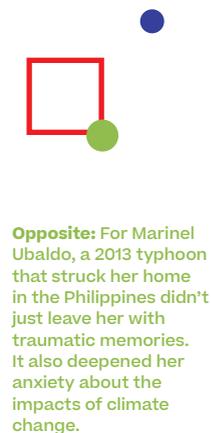
As the Earth’s climate alters, regions around the world are facing more intense storms, wildfires, floods, extreme heat, and other phenomena. Less visibly, the multilayered effects of the climate crisis have huge implications for mental health. In a number of surveys, people say climate change causes them stress, worry, or fear. And many, like Ubaldo, are already dealing with anxious feelings and trauma from its impacts today.

Decades of research on the effects of the changing climate have most often focused on the environment. But in 2022, for the first time, an assessment report published by the United Nations’ climate change science arm highlighted the impact of environmental changes on mental health and well-being. At COP28, the 28th UN climate conference that convened in November in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Rotary President Gordon McNally discussed the mental health effects of climate-linked disasters. Protecting the environment is one of Rotary’s top causes. “The record global temperatures this year have underscored the immediate need to take action on climate change,” McNally said in advance of the summit. “They have also demonstrated the massive destructive toll that climate is taking on global mental health.”

These impacts come with a significant price. Researchers estimate that mental health effects related to climate change will have a total societal cost of \$23 billion in 2030, and rise to \$245 billion by 2050. “Fundamentally we need to make sure the costs of climate change on mental health are accounted for, and the benefits of climate action to mental health are accounted for and responded to,” says Emma Lawrance, who leads the Climate Cares Centre at the Institute of Global Health Innovation at Imperial College London.

Climate change affects mental health in a range of ways, according to Lawrance, who is helping to lead a global research project, Connecting Climate Minds, that has involved more than 500 people across some 80 countries. Natural disasters can directly affect people’s well-being, as can longer-term shifts like rising sea levels, changing weather patterns, coastal erosion, and salinization. These phenomena can lead to loss of livelihoods, migration from home communities, food and water insecurity, and the deaths of loved ones, Lawrance explains. “Understandably, that can be a trauma and an ongoing stress that can lead to, sadly, more cases of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance misuse, and even death by suicide,” she says.

Research is finding links between these climate-related changes and people’s mental well-being, particularly with extreme heat. A study found that for every 1 degree Celsius rise in monthly average temperature, suicide rates increased by 0.7 percent in U.S. counties and 2.1 percent in Mexican municipalities. The researchers estimate that by 2050, rising temperatures could lead to between 9,000 and 40,000 additional suicides in the two countries. High temperatures also may raise



Opposite: For Marinel Ubaldo, a 2013 typhoon that struck her home in the Philippines didn’t just leave her with traumatic memories. It also deepened her anxiety about the impacts of climate change.



“It’s overwhelming that you don’t know if you have a future ... because our future is so unpredictable because of climate change.”

risks for people who already have mental health challenges. During a 2021 heat wave in British Columbia, 8 percent of people who died had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, while only 1 percent of the province’s general population has the condition.

There are physical effects of climate change, too, which in turn can have implications for mental well-being. During his career in cardiology, Bob Dewey saw more patients with chronic lung disease come into his office in New Hampshire in warm

months when pollen counts were high. Over recent decades, climate change has resulted in longer pollen allergy seasons. These underlying health conditions are connected to mental well-being, says Dewey, who as vice chair of the NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action has spoken with several Rotary clubs in New Hampshire. “When you have trouble breathing it’s very easy to panic,” he says. “It’s just an extremely scary thing to know that you’re vulnerable to this kind of situation.”

In general, environmental changes are compounding issues faced by people who are more vulnerable. “Climate change is essentially a risk multiplier,” Lawrance says.

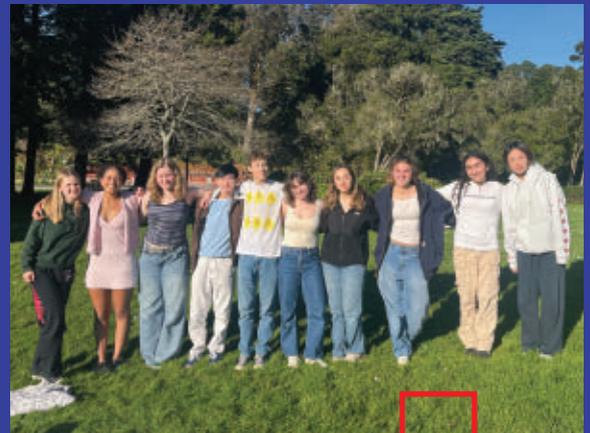
Meanwhile, stress and anxiety about the climate — often called eco-anxiety or climate distress — are taking a toll on some. In a study that surveyed 10,000 young people in 10 countries, 45 percent said that feelings about climate change “negatively affected their daily life and functioning.” According to Google, English-language searches related to “climate anxiety” were 27 times higher in the first 10 months of 2023 compared with the same period six years earlier.

Distress about the environment and climate is not necessarily a mental health condition on its own, according to Lawrance. “But it can be an ongoing stressor that without support can worsen people’s mental well-being, disrupt their sleep, disrupt their daily life.”



Lead with hope.
(Fear, guilt, and shame don't work.)

Above: The 2023 Bay Area Youth Climate Summit in San Francisco was organized entirely by high school climate activists. Over 230 students and educators from 93 high schools gathered around the themes of resilience-building and how to “lead with hope.”
Below: Finn Does (in the hat at left) and others at the March to End Fossil Fuels in New York in September 2023.



Finn Does used to feel paralyzed by bad news about the climate crisis. The San Francisco Bay Area 18-year-old says he often read headlines and saw social media posts about environmental disasters and alarming studies. “I was caught in this whirlpool of all this news about climate change and the climate crisis,” he says.

For Does, anxiety around climate change led to feelings of despair, guilt, grief, hopelessness, and fear. Then one day, as wildfires blazed in California, the sky in the Bay Area turned orange. The scene was “apocalyptic,” he recalls. He describes that day as a wake-up call that spurred him to take action. “I was just thinking about, ‘Wow, I have a whole life ahead of me,’” Does says. “If this is happening right now at such a young age, what’s going to be happening to me 10, 20, 30, 40 years from now?”

Now a senior in high school, Does is co-chair of the Bay Area Youth Climate Summit, an environmental justice activism network. He’s also involved in a project researching emotions related to climate change among young people across California. Through his research and conversations with other young people, his impression is that those who aren’t involved in climate work seem to feel more isolated and pessimistic. Meanwhile, people who participate in climate action seem to feel a sense of community and connection. “They have an extreme amount of awareness about climate, which gives them a lot of fear and a lot of anxiety,” Does says. “At the same time, they have way more optimism and way more hope than those folks that aren’t involved in climate work.”

Along those lines, taking part in collective action related to the climate may help relieve eco-anxiety, suggests a study led by the Yale School of Public Health published in 2022. Robert Feder, a retired psychiatrist member of the Climate Psychiatry Alliance

and NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action, says that for mental health professionals, treating eco-anxiety involves trying to help people strengthen their responses to stress. Alongside general tools for resilience — like eating well, exercising, and mindfulness techniques — building up social connections is important, he says. Getting involved with climate work can help people find social supports and address stress linked to climate change. “Not just sitting and worrying about it and feeling distressed about it, but doing something about it is really the most helpful thing to deal with the anxiety that it causes,” says Feder.

Experts say climate action can take many different forms. Some people might enjoy demonstrating in the streets, but others may find environmentally minded groups that suit their particular interests.

When the Rotary Club of Orléans, Ontario, launched a project in 2023 to work with high school students to plant 1,000 trees outside of Ottawa, part of the goal was to create an opportunity for young people to address feelings of eco-anxiety by engaging with the environment, according to Phil McNeely, who chairs the club’s environmental sustainability committee. One rainy day in May 2023, 70 teenagers came out to plant trees on farmland. Based on this initiative, the club is now working with other local Rotary clubs to create the Ottawa Rotary Youth Forest, a reforestation project that will involve students from area schools in planting and caring for trees. “They’ll get an outlet, I think, for their frustrations about climate change,” says McNeely.

There are also groups that convene specifically with the aim of talking about emotions related to the climate crisis. Does, for instance, has led “climate cafes.” These facilitated conversations create an opening for people to discuss their feelings about climate change’s threats to the world, says Wendy Greenspun, a New York City-based psychologist and a member of the Climate Psychology Alliance North America, who leads climate cafe trainings. “People often feel quite isolated. It’s not a topic that we often think of bringing up at a dinner party,” Greenspun says. “So creating a space that’s outside of our usual hustle and bustle and ways of being social in itself already provides something.”

For some people, group discussions may not be enough support — Greenspun and other psychologists also treat people who benefit from individual therapy. But for many, she says, the group setting provides an avenue to air negative emotions. Through the process

“Not just sitting and worrying about it ... but doing something about it is really the most helpful thing to deal with the anxiety.”

When the Rotary Club of Orléans, Ontario, launched a project with high school students to plant 1,000 trees, part of the goal was to create an opportunity to address feelings of eco-anxiety.

because it really adds to our capacity if we know that what we are experiencing or what we are feeling is valid,” she says.

Ubaldo is a registered social worker in the Philippines, and as a volunteer, she’s worked with people who have experienced disasters. But she says there’s a need for government support of such relief services and for more capacity to manage the mental health effects of a climate-related disaster. “I know that there is a great need from the conversations that I have with the community members whenever I’m doing a debriefing after a disaster,” Ubaldo says.

Around the world, initiatives are working to build up mental health treatment services in regions that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Rotary members in south-eastern Australia, for example, helped start Trauma Recovery Network Australia to train health care professionals in rural areas so that communities are better positioned to counter possible mental health harms of disasters. “For mental health, you need people there, and continuously,” says Pam Brown, a psychologist and a member of the Rotary Club of Gisborne who led the creation of the network.

The initiative, which began in 2020, holds workshops in regions hit by wildfires. Often areas that are vulnerable to fires are also susceptible to other climate change impacts, like coastal erosion or weather changes that affect farming. In rural areas, mental health professionals may have fewer opportunities for trauma treatment training, and community members don’t have easy access to local support, Brown explains.

After bushfires in 2019-20, the Australian network began training groups of social workers, psychologists, counselors, and other mental health experts on how to treat people using a technique called eye movement desensitization and reprocessing. In the treatment, people bring up a traumatic memory while simultaneously engaging in “bilateral stimulation,” something like shifting their eyes from one side to the other or tapping their hands in an alternating pattern. The approach has been endorsed as a treatment for trauma by the World Health Organization, the American Psychological Association, and the Australian Psychological Society, among others. Studies find that the treatment reduces symptoms of PTSD and other distress among survivors of disasters including earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods.

Meanwhile, the mental health reverberations of Australia’s bushfires linger. A survey of people affected by the fires 12 to 18 months later found high levels of distress,

people begin to feel validated and less alone. “I call it composting our emotions,” says Greenspun. “New feelings can start to emerge and grow, like a sense of excitement that ‘maybe I can do something,’ a sense of deep meaning and connection with others, a sense of solidarity, a sense of courage.”

Approaches to help people, particularly young people, cope with climate distress are growing around the world. For instance, SustyVibes, an organization based in Nigeria, is creating online and in-person opportunities to discuss eco-anxiety among Africans. The Good Grief Network, based in the U.S., focuses on building resilience. The UK-based Resilience Project trains leaders of “resilience circles” where peers can support each other. The Climate Cares Centre, which Lawrance leads, launched a guided journal to help young people manage eco-anxiety and transform negative feelings into positive actions.

But climate action doesn’t completely address the mental health burden. Among young activists, there’s a risk of burnout. And while young people are increasingly discussing these climate-related emotions among themselves, there’s also a need for older people to support young people experiencing eco-anxiety, Lawrance says. “We see a big need to equip teachers and parents and train medical professionals and mental health professionals so they’re validating these experiences of distress,” she says.

Meanwhile, many communities are already dealing with the effects of climate change — including on mental health.

In the Philippines, Ubaldo sees the influence it has on her peers, many of whom worry for the safety of themselves and their families and question whether they want to have children because of the changing environment. The Philippines is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. In a survey of young people in 10 countries, Filipinos reported the highest levels of climate anxiety.

Reducing stigma around mental health and increasing access to services is important to support communities hurt by climate disasters, Ubaldo says. Incorporating mental health into disaster response could help people talk about their feelings and move forward. “We have to ensure that these experiences are processed or addressed before we experience another super typhoon,



including anxiety and depression. Over 60 percent of the nearly 100 mental health professionals who participated in the Trauma Recovery Network Australia trainings have completed the requirements needed to join the national association for practitioners of eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, and even more have used the treatment in their practice, Brown says. “It’s helping therapists not feel so helpless,” she says.

Supporting mental health in the face of climate change is not only about responding. Building psychological resilience can also be incorporated into climate adaptation efforts, Lawrance says. Strengthening social connections and being prepared for climate events can buffer against mental health strains. “We know that when a disaster hits, the communities that have stronger social bonds tend to be the ones who are less affected psychologically and more able to respond practically than those that have weaker social ties,” Lawrance says.

As the connection between mental health and climate comes into the spotlight, one of the challenges is understanding the full extent of this intersection. Data is hard to gather because there are so many ways that climate could intertwine with well-being. But research is growing, as are approaches to supporting mental health against climate change stressors. “There are these vicious cycles of compounding challenges, but it also means that there are compounding opportunities when we take action,” Lawrance says. “There is a brighter future to be working toward that is better for the climate and also better for our minds.” ■

This story is a collaboration between Rotary magazine and Reasons to be Cheerful, an online magazine.

“When a disaster hits, the communities that have stronger social bonds tend to be the ones who are less affected psychologically.”



For years, Mary Lawal endured the dismissive remarks.

She's just a moody teenager. It's just the hormones. She's acting out for attention. Someone must have gotten her period. None of the adults in her life seemed to understand that her flashes of anger, intrusive thoughts, and even her attempts to take her own life were signs of a serious mental health condition.

But there were people who understood, plenty of them, other young people who had gone through similar experiences. And after what she describes as “so many years of struggle,” Lawal found them, on YouTube and all over social media. Her journey to recovery began there, with a sense of connection to people whose stories sounded like hers and who had found help. “I didn’t feel as alone,” she says. “I felt like someone saw me.”

Now 22, the college student living in the Washington, D.C., suburbs in Maryland is in treatment and recovery for bipolar and borderline personality disorders that had gone undiagnosed for years. She has become a mental health advocate, sharing her story with audiences and leading youth peer support groups, and she

is working toward a psychology degree.

Like Lawal, many young people are turning to social media to share their mental health struggles and seek advice from each other. It’s one form of peer-to-peer support gaining attention as a much-needed missing link between people with mental health needs and professional care. At high schools, on college campuses, on social media, and even within online video gaming platforms, young people are finding — and offering — support. Research is recognizing that peer support can be an important first step in overcoming barriers to care, including social isolation, mistrust of formal health care, and difficult home environments and other challenging circumstances.

Schools, nonprofits, and other types of community-based organizations, includ-

ing Rotary clubs around the world, are tapping into that potential. “We need to focus on our youth,” says Dr. Geetha Jayaram, a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and a member of the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives. “That spirit of wanting to do something for somebody else, our youth have it, and I don’t think we’re harnessing it enough.”

Last fall, Jayaram’s club, Howard West in Maryland, and six other Rotary clubs in the area organized a youth mental health summit for students throughout the area. In an auditorium at Howard Community College, outside Baltimore, dozens of young people listened to speakers addressing topics related to peer support: suicide prevention; how to recognize, pre-



■ **Previous page:** Mary Lawal, a 22-year-old psychology student, had to advocate for herself to access treatment for bipolar and borderline personality disorders that had gone undiagnosed for years. Today, she's a mental health advocate, sharing her story with audiences and leading youth peer support groups. ■ **Above:** Lawal (left) testifies at a 2023 U.S. congressional hearing in support of a bill related to mental health services in schools. “We need mental health services in place in learning environments, especially for teen girls to open up and be heard,” she told the lawmakers. ■ **Right:** Lawal (second from right) poses with House members and other participants in the hearing. She also testified before the Maryland Legislature in support of a bill related to the 988 crisis hotline.



vent, and find treatment for depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders; and how to administer naloxone, the opioid overdose reversal medicine.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound and lingering effects on young people’s mental health, throwing millions into isolation at a time when their development depends on interacting with their peers. Jayaram says the full impact of that may not even have emerged yet, since it can take years for mental health problems to manifest in ways that push someone to seek professional help.

That isolation magnified the existing challenges of coping with the stressors of adolescence, which today include not just the pressure to excel in school, sports, and other activities, but also anxiety over climate change and school shootings.

In the U.S., about 20 percent of surveyed teens reported symptoms of major depressive disorder in 2021, the first full year of the pandemic, but fewer than half of those who needed treatment received it, according to an analysis of survey data published in *JAMA Pediatrics*. Adolescents belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups had the least access to treatment.

Lawal says that for a long time when she was growing up she didn’t realize mental health care was an option for an African American girl. She even wondered at one point if she was supposed to just walk into a pharmacy as a child and ask for antidepressants, or if the staff would “look at me crazy” and ask where her mom was. There were no answers to be found in her schools, where guidance counselors, she says, were focused solely on academics.

There were also barriers in her own family. She was only 8 years old when she first tried to take her life. Yet, she struggled as a child to get her parents to understand what she was going through, a battle exacerbated by being shuttled between her father’s home in Nigeria and

her mother’s in the United States. “They didn’t really understand,” she says. “Because of our cultural background, they had difficulties accepting my mental health struggle, so they would tell me to pray it away, to use my faith to overcome it,” she says. They also didn’t want her to talk about it with anyone outside of the house — they believed such things were best kept in the family.

Things reached a turning point at the start of the pandemic. After scrolling through mental health videos online, including from doctors explaining specific disorders and symptoms, she showed some to her parents and pleaded for help getting professional support. “For two weeks, there were a lot of tears and I said, ‘If I’m your daughter and you love me, you should get me the help I need.’” Eventually, they understood, and she found a psychiatrist, who prescribed therapy and medication and taught her coping skills.

Today, Lawal is an active advocate nationally and in her community. She’s on a 10-member young adult advisory group at the National Alliance on Mental Illness. She has facilitated youth peer support groups through NAMI’s Baltimore affiliate organization, and she has testified before the Maryland Legislature and the U.S. Congress in support of bills related to the

“For two weeks, there were a lot of tears and I said, ‘If I’m your daughter and you love me, you should get me the help I need.’”

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF MARY LAWAL







PHOTOGRAPH: (RIGHT) COURTESY OF GEETHA JAYARAM

988 crisis hotline and mental health services in schools. She's founder and president of a mental health awareness club at Prince George's Community College. And she has shared her story in speaking engagements and media appearances. Lawal has also started a Spotify podcast on mental health called *Journey with maree*.

Examples of peer support in mental health go back several centuries with the periodic practice of hiring recovered patients as staff members at psychiatric hospitals. The concept has expanded globally in recent decades with a focus on young people, a vulnerable population that has been particularly hard to reach. As a result, peer support is showing up in some unexpected places.

Twitch, the livestreaming platform focused on video gaming, is home to a variety of channels hosted by young people who have experienced mental health challenges and who chat and exchange stories with others. One channel, called Anxiety Tonight, lightheartedly bills itself as "live mental breakdowns nightly."

Nonprofit organizations also offer and promote peer-to-peer support groups. One of them, Youth Era, trains young

people who have their own experiences of either drug use or issues like depression and suicidal ideation to reach out to other young people who may be suffering in isolation.

Martin Rafferty, the group's founder, says the organization holds online forums and actively goes out to find at-risk groups, rather than waiting for people to come seeking help. "It's scary out there right now for young people," he said in a recent interview with KOIN-TV news in Portland, Oregon. "A lot of adults can understand that they didn't grow up in the same world that young people are growing up in today. School shootings, addictions,

"We need to focus on our youth. That spirit of wanting to do something for somebody else, our youth have it, and I don't think we're harnessing it enough."



■ **Left:** Dr. Geetha Jayaram, a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and a member of the Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives. ■ **Above:** Last fall, Jayaram's club, Howard West in Maryland, and six other Rotary clubs in the area organized a youth mental health summit. Dozens of young people listened to speakers addressing topics related to peer support, including suicide prevention and how to recognize signs of depression and anxiety.

climate change, these are things that are on the minds of all high school students, all middle school students. Our message is really clear: Don't go it alone."

And on TikTok and other popular social media platforms, influencers focused on mental health are practicing their own brand of peer support, offering viewers everything from advice on surviving break-ups to personal accounts of depression narrated with wry humor.

Social scientists at Harvard University have taken notice and invited social media influencers to partner on an experiment last year to see if they could be persuaded to weave into their feeds evidence-based content on themes such as mind-body links and climate anxiety. The project resulted in such content being viewed hundreds of thousands of times, a much wider reach than a typical study.

Researchers are also seeing a steady growth in mental health references in chart-topping pop songs, with some therapists finding that such depictions have

helped encourage clients to seek help.

In formalized programs, peer support specialists go through many hours of training. As of 2020, nearly all U.S. states had such training and certification programs. And NAMI runs a teen and young adult helpline that connects each caller with another young person who shares similar experiences and is trained to offer information and direct people to resources. But even with the informal sharing communities online, the benefits seem to outweigh the risks, which include exposure to misleading information or hostile comments. Though most research on peer support has not looked at objective health outcomes over time, surveys, interviews, and analyses of online discussions support that conclusion.

For instance, people interacting online can remain anonymous if they choose, shielding them from the fear of judgment in face-to-face encounters. The sharing that's encouraged can help ease stigma and allow people to focus on positive stories of

recovery and address myths and misperceptions about living with mental illness.

Ultimately, this kind of peer sharing should be seen as a bridge to formal, professional care, cautions Dr. Karen Swartz, a Johns Hopkins professor of psychiatry and another of the presenters at the Rotary clubs' youth mental health summit in September. But with fragmented health care systems, peer support can be an important initial step.

Most young people will experience some periods of depression or anxiety, but when they recur frequently enough to affect a person's lifestyle and choices, that is when they need to seek out professional help, Swartz says.

She notes that, without treatment, a depressive episode could last months. "A whole school year essentially," says Swartz, who directs a program focused on adolescent mental health. "In that time, you maybe decided you were not a good student, you were not a good athlete, maybe you shouldn't try to do that



Freddie Almazan, seen here at the 2023 International Assembly, will speak at this month's Rotary Convention.

CONVENTION SPOTLIGHT

Youth mental health

On the mainstage and in breakout sessions, several speakers at the 2024 Rotary International Convention in Singapore will address mental health topics, including those concerning young people.

Freddie Almazan, a motivational speaker, will deliver a message of inspiration and hope about learning to grow after trauma. At age 13, Almazan was shot in the head and left paralyzed on one side of his face and body. It was one of several traumas he endured when he was a child growing up in California. Almazan overcame despair, depression, and thoughts of suicide to live a "ridiculously good life." In his talks to teens and young adults, Almazan shares tools for overcoming adversity, developing self-esteem, and building resiliency.

■ Hear Freddie Almazan speak at the Rotary International Convention, 25-29 May in Singapore. Register at convention.rotary.org.

program in college. So it can change the trajectory people are on, change how they feel about their future.” Having a peer recognize the signs of struggle and encourage treatment could have a huge effect.

Though young people are successfully sifting through social channels to find credible mental health information and affirmation about their own concerns, the electronic devices that students had to rely on during the pandemic could also decrease in-person connection. And persistent use has potential negative effects from “doomscrolling” and exposure to distressing images and other content. Nina Mezu-Nwaba, a long-time Rotarian and a pharmacist who demonstrated how to use the opioid overdose treatment at the September youth summit, says that during the pandemic she was advising young people to take breaks from the news and social media. “I’d have people call and say, ‘I’m crying, this is just too much, I can’t take it anymore, people are dying everywhere.’” Too much time spent on digital media or media multitasking are behaviors that friends and family in peer support roles can be on the lookout for.

It can be hard, however, for parents to spot signs of depression, especially when their children are going through all sorts of natural changes in their lives, from puberty to figuring out who they are and where they fit in. Experts say that in young children, it can be especially difficult, since anxiety or depression can manifest itself in ways parents might not equate with mental health issues: headaches, stomachaches, not wanting to go to school, or fear of being away from their most trusted people.

Often, children with a mental disorder find it hard to focus at school or throw tantrums when there is even a small change in their routines. For instance, a child with ADHD, one of the most common childhood developmental disorders, may have trouble sitting still or being quiet, frustrating teachers who then label them as troublemakers. That, in turn, can add to a child’s anxiety.

Fellow students who are aware of the

signs can help. At a basic level, these skills don’t require hours and hours of professional training. The Rotary Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives, for instance, developed a toolkit for use in schools called Wellness in a Box.

Through videos, workshops, and group discussions, Wellness in a Box presents information to students, parents, and teachers about depression and suicide, activities to foster coping skills, and how to seek help. Student leaders are taught to help lead a curriculum focused on preventing depression. The program promotes awareness, decreases stigma, and creates a network of teens and adults who can identify those who need help and refer them to professionals. It has expanded to schools around the world.

Consulting psychologist Rita Aggarwal, an officer of the action group and a member of the Rotary Club of Nagpur, India, has applied the toolkit in her hometown. A community assessment carried out by members of the action group and a study published in the *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* both found that mental health literacy among young people in India was very low.

The project, which led to Aggarwal’s selection this year as one of Rotary’s People of Action: Champions of Impact, created a curriculum for 14-year-olds that covered depression awareness and ideas for coping. “Many of the students were unaware of counseling and how it works,” Aggarwal says. “But they had a desire to speak out,

“School shootings, addictions, climate change, these are things that are on the minds of all high school students, all middle school students. Our message is really clear: Don’t go it alone.”

share, and be heard. They struggle with loneliness and have communication gaps with their parents who don’t understand them generally. Teachers, too, can be critical and unaware of mental health issues these children feel.” The project taught teachers counseling skills and educated parents, and 100 young people have volunteered for further training as peer mentors.

Lawal says that even after she was in therapy, her mother didn’t always seem to accept that her illness was real. It was only after hearing similar stories from other young people, including other young African American women, at Lawal’s speaking events that the idea finally seemed to click, she says. “She would hear their experiences and know that it’s not just a thing that only I went through. She hadn’t understood that it’s something that can happen to anyone.” Some of her speaking engagements are focused on audiences of parents for just that reason.

Today, Lawal, who loves swimming, posting photos on Instagram, and podcasting, is planning to become a clinical psychologist. She is open about her mental health journey and says that she continues to rely on support. She sometimes calls 988 or texts the Crisis Text Line (741741 in the U.S.) when she needs help, someone to talk to, or a reminder about how to de-escalate. And when she facilitates group support sessions, she sometimes needs them too, she says, for that chance to connect with people who get you, without judgment.

But her biggest wish is to reach even just one young person at a support session or speaking event with words that could help them through their journey. “I want my story to be the difference.”

In her talks, she emphasizes that there is help available, that they’re not alone even when people misunderstand or judge them. Most of all, she wants them to see in her a real-life example of recovery, to know it’s possible. “I tell them to know that you have a reason why you’re on this earth, you have a purpose, you have a plan, and your story isn’t over yet.” ■

Awash in woodland wonder, a skeptical writer
acknowledges the therapeutic benefits of forest bathing

BY JEFF RUBY ♦ PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF MARINI

Arbor daze



We wander aimlessly through the woods on a Saturday morning, all 16 of us,

mouths agape, arms outstretched in search of sustenance. But we're not undead. In fact, the entire group is hyperaware, our senses tuned to every detail of the forest around us: the smoky, resinous scent of spruce trees; the way a spiderweb reveals its intricate architecture in golden beams of sunlight; the gentle trickle of a distant stream. As we sift through layers of inner noise and clutter to clear a mental path, all that's left is a single, simple thought, felt and understood more intensely than everything else combined: *Wow, this is beautiful.*

When my editor asked if I'd be interested in writing about "forest bathing" for *Rotary* magazine, I assumed I heard him wrong. Florist raving? Tourist baiting? Some other goofy trendlet I was too old to know about? Had the editorial focus of *Rotary* shifted dramatically without my knowledge?

No, he assured me. Forest bathing. I envisioned something like a polar bear club, with more privacy and fewer clothes. I also envisioned increasing my freelance fee. But before I could respond that, when it came to matters of personal hygiene, I was just fine with my own bathroom, thank you very much, my editor proceeded to educate me. It's not bathing, nor is it hiking — or even exercise, per se — but rather an experience in which people immerse themselves in nature, often guided as a group through meditation and sensory exercises that make use of all five senses. Think of it as outdoor mindfulness, he said.

Forest bathing, also known as forest therapy, started in 1982 as part of a national campaign in Japan that promoted visiting forests as a way to reduce work-related stress. The concept was called *shinrin-yoku* (yes, it translates as "forest bathing" or, if you wish, "bathing in the forest atmosphere"). The ritual has grown into a movement sparked by Japan's Forest Therapy Society, which has certified 65 forest therapy sites in the country. Meanwhile, forest bathing has spread like gentle ripples in a pond, with thousands of guides leading retreats and themed events around the world. Eco-hotels catering to forest bathers have popped up everywhere from the Barrenjoey Peninsula near Sydney to the Pocono Mountains in eastern Pennsylvania. Closer to my home in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood, organizations from the Morton Arboretum to the Chicago Park District offer some kind of forest therapy outing.

Some people have incorporated *shinrin-yoku* into their daily routines. "I work right next to a park with a famous shrine where there are lots of trees," writes Qing Li, a leader of the forest bathing movement. "From my office window I can see beautiful scenery, and I walk in the shrine at lunchtime almost every day."

Those comments appear in Li's 2018 book, *Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness*. The 310-page volume has become something akin to a holy scripture among forest bathers. In it, Li, a doctor at Nippon Medical School Hospital in Tokyo who has spent 20 years studying forest bathing's benefits, implores readers to leave their phones behind and find a spot where they can open their senses to nature. If you don't have a forest handy, any small green space will do. "It will improve your mood, reduce tension and anxiety, and help you focus and concentrate for the rest of the day," he promises.

None of this feels entirely new. We're living in an existentially fraught moment in time when the need for "self-care" is a constant refrain. The idea of self-care has evolved into a catchall encapsulating any pastime unrelated to work, from ballroom dancing to journaling to petting puppies. Not long ago, this was called "me time," but now everyone — doctors, teachers, bartenders, barbers — recommends self-care interventions far and wide. It's not hard to imagine the guys in my pickup basketball game recommending forest bathing the same way one might suggest, say, paintball.

I've always been wary of the line between self-care and self-indulgence, so before the knee-jerk cynicism kicked in, I had to see Dr. Li for myself. In a YouTube video, he appears as an unassuming middle-aged man in an orange North Face jacket strolling through the woods, periodically stopping to caress and sniff various moss-covered trees. In between, he warns viewers that Japan has a word, *karoshi*, that means, basically, "death from overwork." As he lists the medical perks of forest bathing — reduction of stress hormones, lowered blood pressure, strengthened immune and cardiovascular systems — the whole enterprise gives off the vibe of a benign self-help video. But the message is clear: Unless you want to die at your desk, you need to take care of yourself.

Point taken. I've been living in Chicago for 26 years now, and I have raised three children here, with all the glories and miseries that entails. For nearly half my life, my brain has been bombarded

Previous and opposite: The Arashiyama Bamboo Grove, in Kyoto, Japan, is a haven of sylvan serenity.





with construction noise, horns honking, car stereos blaring, the dog barking, kids *needing*. The sound of sirens is so persistent from my home office that I don't even notice it anymore until I'm on Zoom and someone asks if everything's OK. I exist in a state of heightened stress and agitation. Of course, I'm not special: Nearly all of us are in danger of losing ourselves in the intermittent boops and bings of beckoning technology, a daily onslaught of headlines and deadlines and responsibilities that never end. Li would probably say we're all candidates for a slow-motion *karoshi*.

There's an old adage that it's not the stress that kills us — it is our reaction to it. And even my most positive reactions to my stress — half-hearted stabs at meditation, podcasts, therapy, walking the dog — were obviously not cutting it. Maybe disappearing into the woods for a three-hour forest therapy walk at the Morton Arboretum would help. I called back my editor and signed up.

Located about 25 miles west of downtown Chicago, the Morton Arboretum feels like another planet. Calling itself “the champion of trees,” the sprawling suburban oasis boasts 16 miles of hiking trails, over 200 species of resident and migratory

birds, and more than 100,000 live plants across woodland, wetland, prairie, and meadow habitats. It's hard to imagine a more relaxing setting so close to one of the least relaxing cities in America.

Yet, as I arrive on a recent Saturday morning, late and lost, I am a mess. No amount of natural beauty or mindfulness can tamp down my anxiety as I wind along the botanical garden's looping roads in search of the elusive parking lot P-29. By the time I find it, I feel my heart knocking against my ribcage like an angry neighbor. Nice start.

Ever forward-thinking, education staff members at the Morton Arboretum learned about the rise in forest bathing a decade ago and realized it dovetailed perfectly with their mission. “These experiences that get folks out into the forest and consciously tap into that power to help with mental and physical health — that's what we're all about, finding opportunities for folks to connect themselves with nature,” says Megan Dunning, the arboretum's manager of adult learning programs.

After working with the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy in 2015 to train and certify guides, the Morton Arboretum launched its own forest therapy program. Now, more than 500 guests participate annually in walks lasting two or three

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“I'm just a guide,” says the Morton Arboretum's Beth Bengtson. “The forest is the one that provides the therapy.”

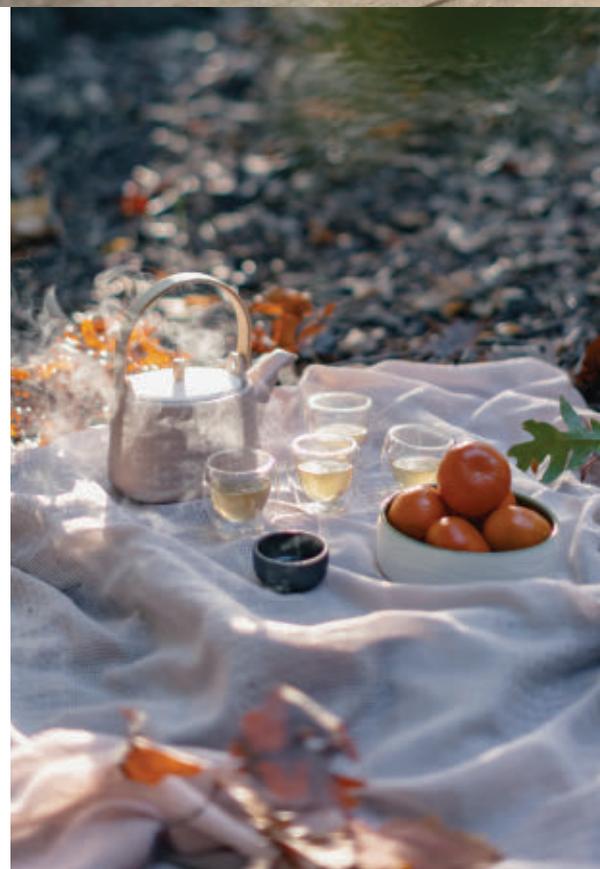


Clockwise: As manager of adult learning programs at the Morton Arboretum outside of Chicago, Megan Dunning is on the lookout for opportunities to connect people with nature; at the conclusion of a three-hour walk, Beth Bengtson, a certified forest therapy guide at the arboretum, serves a spruce-infused tea to the forest bathers.

hours. Some are processing grief or trauma, others learning to live with disabilities — people who are at what Dunning calls transitional points in their lives. Many are simply seeking an emotional reboot.

No one asks what issues people are dealing with in my group, which includes 14 women, one man who appears to have been dragged along by his wife, and me. Our leader, the soft-spoken and preternaturally calming Beth Bengtson, describes the forthcoming encounter as a series of invitations to interact with nature and embrace the experience with all five senses. “I’m just a guide,” says Bengtson — actually, a certified forest therapy guide with more than a decade of experience leading education programs at the arboretum. “The forest is the one that provides the therapy.”

We are no more than a few hundred steps into the hiking trail when Bengtson hands out tiny mats and leads the group in a meditation session, right there in the dirt. I find her gentle entreaties to focus on the sounds of nature nearly impossible to carry out. First, a familiar old ache settles into its usual spot in my lower back. Then I feel distracted by noise from nearby traffic on Interstate 88 and the groups of curious hikers who keep passing. Just as I get into a groove, a



plane screams across the sky, en route to O'Hare. Such is life when your forest preserve is just a few towns over from an international airport. After that "invitation" concludes, Bengtson passes around a talking stick so we can describe our experiences. I keep my mouth shut as my fellow bathers describe their experiences as grounding and restorative. *Sounds like someone drank the herbal Kool-Aid awfully fast.*

I got a C in high school biology, but even I know that when a human experiences tension and anxiety, it sends a lightning bolt from the brain through the autonomic nervous system. Waves of stress hormones hitch a ride in your bloodstream until the stressor subsides. But if this happens too often, it can weaken the autonomic nervous system's ability to stop the stress response, resulting in the production of even more stress hormones. Calling this process a vicious circle is not evocative enough. Imagine it as a traffic jam going in and out of a city in which the driver of every single car persuades another person to drive downtown, until every road leading in and out is a clogged thoroughfare of angst.

That is the image in my head when the next invitation begins. Bengtson challenges us to move at a snail's pace and notice the world in motion around us, and, as if on cue, a rabbit bounds past, which seems a good omen. I observe a tree waving in the breeze and think about the way my shoes sink into the soft earth. The creeping bugs begin to appear less as nuisances than curiosities. Something is happening.

"Shinrin-yoku is like a bridge," writes Li. "By opening our senses, it bridges the gap between us and the natural world." It is during the third invitation that I officially cross the bridge. The goal this time is to find a quiet spot, sit down, and manipulate your surroundings to create a mini work of art in nature. Bengtson's voice enters my thoughts: *Try and access feelings that have always been there, like from when you were a kid, and you'd just play.*

I admit that my attempt to stack pebbles does nothing for me, but as I feel the smooth soil in my fingers, something in my brain shifts. Or empties. All other sensations begin to fade, and the tactile sensation becomes everything. Regular life begins to feel farther and farther away, supplanted by the kind of heightened alertness and wonder that ordinary meditation never quite sparks in me. "These are feelings that we've lost as we become adults and stop being curious," Bengtson explains.

Not long ago, my own therapist asked me to visualize myself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with

From left: A wild autumn bloom adorns the Morton Arboretum; visitors flock to the Arashiyama Bamboo Grove.





Forest bathing: What the science says

Scientific research into the practice of forest bathing, or *shinrin-yoku*, is confirming “what we have always known innately” about the soothing effect of a walk in the woods: that it has real benefits for physical and mental well-being. That’s how Dr. Qing Li of the Nippon Medical School Hospital in Tokyo describes the evolution in our understanding of what he calls “the healing power of the forest.”

In his book *Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness*, Li says that what began with a “preliminary ... speculative investigation” in 1990 among the pristine forests of the Japanese island of Yakushima has evolved into rigorous scientific inquiries in the decades since.

Reviewing these studies, Li, who is considered a foremost authority on the practice, concludes that forest bathing can boost the immune system, increase energy, reduce stress, and decrease anger, anxiety, and depression. (As an ancillary benefit, it also provides an incentive to preserve and enlarge our forests.) That conclusion is backed by numerous independent studies and published articles, including one written by Li that appeared in *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine* in 2022 and provided endnotes citing dozens of other scientific studies and publications.

As Li points out, forest bathing has been linked to measurable decreases in levels of the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline as well as blood pressure. In 2019, three researchers screened 971 articles devoted to the effects of forest bathing on levels of cortisol and went on to conduct a systematic review of 22 of them and a meta-analysis of eight. All but two of the 22 studies showed that the cortisol levels of people who had gone forest bathing were significantly lower than other people’s, or else lower than they were before the experience, though the scientists advised additional research.

Another sign of science’s acceptance: More and more doctors are prescribing forest bathing to improve their patients’ overall health and mental well-being. And it’s not just forest bathing. Physicians now use “social prescribing” too, as the journal *eClinicalMedicine* put it in 2021, “either directly or indirectly link primary care patients with non-medical interventions which aim to reduce the burden of health-care concerns.” This can include activities such as art classes, walking, singing, or knitting groups. “It has never been more important,” concluded the journal, “to consider the role health care should play in addressing all aspects of social well-being.”

Forest bathing stands out as a useful therapeutic tool, one that a person can enjoy either in solitude or in more social occasions. “We may not travel far on our forest walk,” Li counsels, “but, in connecting us with nature, *shinrin-yoku* takes us all the way home to our true selves.”



leaves floating along the surface and told me to place every thought on a leaf, one by one, and let it float away. At the time, I protested that the exercise wouldn't work, that I would always be running on the shoreline alongside the leaf to be sure it made it downstream. But during the next invitation in my forest bathing experience, as I climb onto a log that had fallen across a creek and dangle my feet into the cool water, I can barely remember feeling that way. With every leaf that floats past, I feel my heart rate slowing. It is the opposite of exercise, and I didn't realize how badly I needed it.

A natural high carries me the rest of the way through the experience, during which I find inexplicable peace in simple observations such as a cauliflower-shaped cloud drifting by and fiery red leaves clinging to the base of a tree trunk as if unwilling to let go. The beauty around me is both granular and enormous at the same time, leaving me both exhilarated and exhausted. I forget the other members of the group entirely.

The experience ends with a purifying group tea party in a sunny clearing, where Bengtson pours tea made with spruce tips that she had picked from trees a few hours back and brewed in filtered

water. As she dumps a small amount into the dirt to "interweave it back into the natural ecosystem," I feel a bittersweet tinge. I have to return to my regular life.

This time, when the talking stick comes to me, I'm not so dismissive. But I am too embarrassed to tell the truth: that I came in thinking this whole thing was ridiculous, and after three hours, I feel better than I had in years. I pass the stick to the next person and drive home in a state of suspended bliss, hoping it will last.

Did it? Yes and no. When I think back on my morning in the woods, it feels like it happened to someone else. Attempts to recapture those feelings of peace and awe have been elusive.

But sometimes now when I walk the dog, I close my eyes and concentrate on the wind whispering through the canopy of majestic oaks that line my street. It's an old song, but it's new to me. And I'm finally listening. ■

The former chief dining critic at Chicago magazine, Jeff Ruby graduates in June with a Master of Social Work from the University of Missouri; he described his dramatic career change in a November 2021 essay for the magazine.

◆
A natural high carries me the rest of the way through the experience, during which I find inexplicable peace.

Both pages: Not far from Chicago's urban cacophony, Morton Arboretum's hushed tranquility prevails.



OUR CLUBS

VIRTUAL VISIT

Service is their cause

Rotary Satellite Club of Kansas City Plaza Working for Veterans

When Oliver Allen enters the corridors of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, his face lights up. The black and white photos of baseball heroes like Jackie Robinson and life-size bronze sculptures of greats like Satchel Paige and Cool Papa Bell transport him back to his youth. He played for his high school team in Kansas City and had high hopes of going pro, but his father wouldn't allow him to accept a sports scholarship he had been offered.

Instead, Allen joined the U.S. Air Force and later worked for the Marine Corps for 28 years before retiring at St. Michael's Veterans Center Apartments in Kansas City. Though St. Michael's is less than 5 miles from the museum, he had never visited.

In December, the Rotary Satellite Club of Kansas City Plaza Working for Veterans finally made the visit happen for him and other St. Michael's residents. "They give us a chance to see different events," Allen raves. And the club helps in other ways: "When I need help, they are there. They

drive me to the VA when I need a ride," he says, referring to the medical center run by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Started in 2021, the cause-based club, which is a satellite of the Rotary Club of Kansas City-Plaza, focuses on the needs of local veterans. "For our members, this satellite club combines the best of both worlds — Rotary's worldwide network and knowledge, and working on behalf of veterans," says Steven Rotkoff, the club chair.

A former intelligence officer, Rotkoff grew up in New York and was stationed all over the world before he settled in Kansas and then became a member of the Rotary Club of Kansas City-Plaza in 2018. "I wanted to add a veterans component to my Rotary service," he says. He had dedicated much of his life to serving his country, and after his career with the Army, he felt a significant gap: "I missed the camaraderie among members of the military services."

He started the satellite with the support of the sponsor club. His boss in the Army, Gary Phillips, retired after nearly 50 years of service and felt similarly. He was one of the first to join the new club, which has 13 members. "We are truly making a difference, one person at a time," Phillips says.

Apart from Rotkoff, the club's members had not been in Rotary before. Rotkoff found them "by calling everybody I know." He made it clear that the club's purpose "was not to simply throw money at a problem. We're also not a social club who sits around and talks. What we really want to do is create a sense of community with the veterans."

Because the area is home to Fort Leavenworth, one of the oldest active military

installations in the U.S., many active and retired military personnel live nearby. The club looked for veterans projects where it could make a difference. It soon found St. Michael's, a state-run apartment center for 130 formerly homeless veterans who fall into the facility's lower-income limits.

The satellite club takes a "hands-on approach," says member Deanna Campbell. "It would be easy to just donate money or clothes and then be done with it. But this is boots on the ground."

At least once a month, Campbell and her husband, a retired veteran, serve doughnuts and drinks at the St. Michael's coffee shop, which the club keeps open every Saturday. It also offers help with filling out tax forms, donates used computers, and provides technology assistance.

When Campbell realized there were only 15 women among the residents, she started organizing events just for them "to make them feel like they matter, because they do matter. They're like family."

The benefits flow in both directions. "The women have changed my life," Campbell says. Phillips, too, confesses that when he leaves St. Michael's or the VA, he feels "at least as fulfilled and satisfied as the guys there."

More recently, the satellite club has begun to support a local Veterans Affairs clinic that helps veterans with substance use disorders. It also bought a fridge for the food pantry at Fort Leavenworth. And at St. Michael's, the change is noticeable. "When we first got to St. Michael's, the residents would pretty much keep to themselves," Phillips says. "At the last dinner, the residents were sitting at full



Members of the Rotary Satellite Club of Kansas City Plaza Working for Veterans (from left) Perry Campbell, Deanna Campbell, Steven Rotkoff, and Gary Phillips pose with Oliver Allen (far right), a resident of St. Michael's Veterans Center Apartments, where the club regularly volunteers. Rotkoff, a former intelligence officer, formed the club to focus on the needs of local veterans.

tables, eating chili, and talking to each other. We are not just giving them food. We are building a community.”

In addition, four club members, including Rotkoff, serve as mentors to the county’s Veterans Treatment Court, which offers veterans charged with criminal offenses treatment for substance use and mental health disorders as an alternative to incarceration. Rotkoff, Phillips, and a few others are also training with Veterans Last Patrol to support veterans in hospice care.

Among the club’s events, the visit to the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum stands out. “A lot of guys had tears in their eyes,” Rotkoff says. It’s the only museum dedicated to preserving and celebrating the history of Black baseball and its impact on the social advancement of America. That history — like the contributions of veterans — is sometimes overlooked or forgotten. For Oliver Allen and his friends, the chance to celebrate those stories is deeply meaningful. It feels like hitting a home run.

— MICHAELA HAAS

Learn more about satellite clubs and other flexible club models at rotary.org/document/club-types.

SUCCESS AS A SATELLITE

Members of satellite clubs often want a club experience or a meeting format that differs from what’s offered by clubs in the area. Some satellite clubs eventually form standalone clubs, while others, sometimes called companion clubs, continue to run in collaboration with a sponsor club. For Steven Rotkoff, establishing a satellite club in Kansas City, Missouri, offered lessons in these areas:

A focus on service: Our club prioritizes cause-based projects to support veterans. Our meetings are nontraditional, short, hybrid planning sessions. Most of our time is spent implementing service projects.

Growth orientation: Cause-based clubs are an effective way to grow Rotary. Except for me, our satellite club members are new to Rotary.

Community reach: Our club developed visibility with community organizations, and soon they were reaching out to us.

Membership pipeline: We have 13 official members, and we also have auxiliaries, people who are not ready to join the club but who assist with projects. These people often have connections in the community to link us to even more people.

Leadership lessons: To form a new club, you need to be a champion. You must serve as a liaison between the satellite and sponsor club, find members, and select worthy projects. The return on your efforts is serving a cause you love with the power of Rotary behind you.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Guiding light

A week at a RYLA camp shaped one teen's life — and her social conscience



"RYLA — and Rotary — has been the number-one most influential thing in my life," says Jennifer Chang. "It has made me who I am."

Can one week in the life of a teenager set the course of her life? For Jennifer Chang, the answer to that question is a resounding yes. In her case, that week came between her junior and senior years in high school at a Rotary Youth Leadership Awards camp in California's Santa Cruz Mountains. And that made all the difference.

"RYLA — and Rotary — has been the number-one most influential thing in my life," Chang says. "RYLA has always been what pushed my social conscience. It has shaped my career; it has made me who I am." And as Chang tells it, she's not the only young person on whom RYLA made such an impact: "There are several campers I know personally whose experience at RYLA shifted the course of their lives in dramatic ways."

Today, in addition to her work as an immigration lawyer, Chang is a member of the Rotary Club of Cupertino, California, and since 2018, she has served as the RYLA chair for District 5170. The daughter of hardworking parents who emigrated from Hong Kong to the United States, Chang began her involvement with Rotary at a young age. Following in her brother's footsteps, she joined the Interact Club of Los Altos High School.

In 1998, after she was elected president of the club in her junior year, the outgoing president told Chang she must attend Camp RYLA 5170 before taking office. It turned out to be the most felicitous of job requirements. "It was an incredible experience," Chang says. "There's something so utopian and heart-warming about the RYLA camp. There's a level of trust and intimacy that's built in a short amount of time. It's a place that makes you feel so good about yourself and the world that I was sure I wanted more of it."

That turned out not to be so easy. Chang applied to become a RYLA counselor as soon as she met the age requirement — after her freshman year at the University of California San Diego — but she didn't receive her interview

notice until after the hiring deadline. The following year, she interviewed for a counselor position but was turned down. “I was totally crushed,” she recalls.

In 2002, Rotary contacted Chang and asked if she was still interested. She leapt at the chance, and she has been involved with RYLA ever since. She climbed the organizational ladder to join the leadership team, which teaches modules on leadership to the students, and later the management staff, which devotes a year to planning the camp. In 2015, she was appointed camp director.

It was RYLA, Chang says, that ignited her passion for working with young people. After graduating from college with a degree in French literature and political science, she joined AmeriCorps and spent a year working at a high school in East Palo Alto that resembled the California school in the 1995 movie *Dangerous Minds*. The school had many students from immigrant families that faced disadvantages and lacked permanent legal status to stay in the U.S., and the environment was vastly different from the affluent community where Chang grew up.

“Another big discovery that I came to through RYLA was realizing that success could be defined in ways other than how much money you make,” she says. “Coming from a background with parents who

struggled, my early concept of success was associated with financial wealth. RYLA helped me embrace the idea that there are other ways to be successful.”

Chang went on to study in Boston at Northeastern University’s School of Law, attracted by its reputation for focusing on public interest law. She intended to become a children’s attorney, and in her first job after law school, she represented foster children while working with Sacramento Child Advocates. When that position vanished after the agency lost its contract with the county, she reevaluated her options.

“I realized I wasn’t cut out for the courtroom,” Chang says. “My mom suggested immigration law — she was still grateful for the help she and my father had received — and being able to work with undocumented youth and their families held a lot of appeal for me.”

Chang started an independent practice that initially focused on people in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and has expanded to serve families of many different nationalities trying to navigate the daunting challenges that come with immigration procedures. She named her firm Pyrus Law.

“It’s named for the survivor tree that was found in the rubble at the World Trade Center and replanted at the 9/11 memorial,” she explains. “I felt like that was symbolic of the

struggle that many of my clients go through. Many of them are coming from chaos or a setting that is not serving them. They are coming to the U.S. to be nurtured back to health, to replant themselves and deepen their roots in better surroundings.”

With immigration laws under scrutiny and just one paralegal on her staff, Chang has plenty to keep her occupied, particularly with her continued commitment to having RYLA play such a central role in her life.

“We’re in the process of regaining our footing,” she says of the district’s RYLA program, noting that the COVID-19 pandemic caused disruptions in what had been an efficient system of outreach to youth by the district, with 5,000 young people in attendance at the annual Interact conference and 200-plus campers at RYLA.

“It’s said that RYLA is the engine that drives the Interact train,” Chang says, “but I’m advocating for clubs to select non-Interactors as well. My hope is for Rotarians to understand just how important it is to invest in our youth. I wouldn’t be who I am if the Los Altos club had not invested in me.

“But it goes beyond the Rotary pipeline. Investing in young people is how we grow Rotary. More important, it’s how we change and improve the world.”

— PAUL ENGLEMAN

To learn more about Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, go to rotary.org/youth-programs.



Jennifer Chang

- Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, 1998
- JD, Northeastern University School of Law, 2010
- District 5170 RYLA chair, 2018-present

Building on her own experience, in 1998, at District 5170’s Rotary Youth Leadership Awards camp, Jennifer Chang (shown in 2018) went on to become a counselor and assume leadership roles at the same camp.

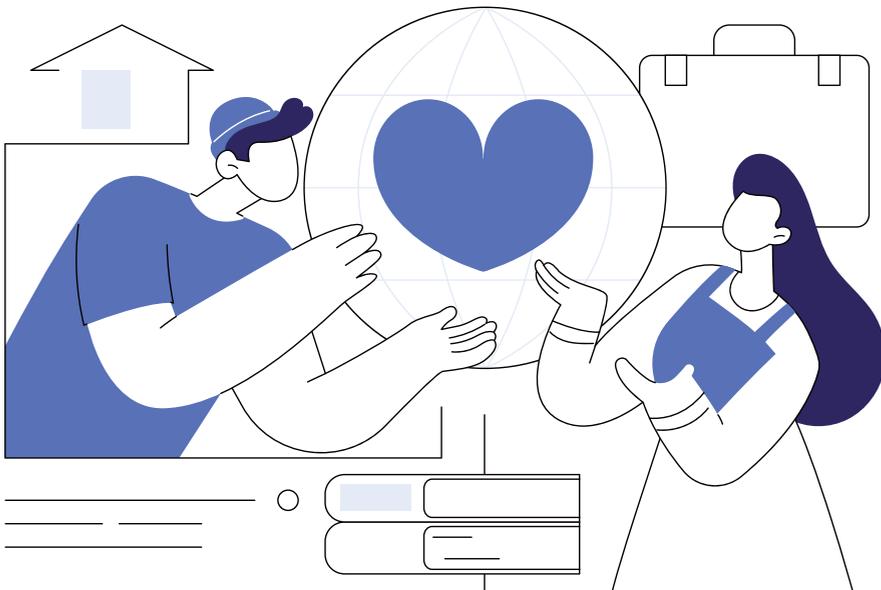
HANDBOOK

Make a difference with Rotary grants

Rotary members around the world have access to different kinds of grants from The Rotary Foundation to support service projects, offer scholarships, and organize other activities that make a difference in their own communities and far away. Explore four grant options that can help turn your vision into reality.

+ To learn more, visit rotary.org/grants.

	District grants
How do we use these?	These can address community needs that match the Foundation's mission.
What's the time frame?	These are for short-term activities that have a limited scope.
Do we need a partner?	No, but it's often a good idea to work with other local organizations.
Who can apply?	A district, which can distribute funds to clubs
Do we need to be qualified to apply for grants?	Your district needs to go through the qualification process.
What funding is available?	Your district can seek up to 50% of its District Designated Funds allocated for that year.
How and when do we apply?	Your district applies by 15 May of the Rotary year for which you're requesting funds. Your club applies to the district.



	Global grants	Disaster response grants	Programs of Scale grants
	These support larger international projects that fall under an area of focus. They can also go toward scholarships and vocational training teams.	These support relief and recovery efforts in communities affected by natural disasters. Your district also can use them to provide basic items like water, food, medicine, and clothing.	These competitive grants allow Rotary members to work with experienced partners and expand proven activities in an area of focus to make a significant impact.
	Use these for longer-term sustainable projects that address needs identified in a community assessment.	Your district works with local entities on relief or recovery activities within six months of a disaster.	These evidence-based, sustainable, and measurable programs are implemented over three to five years.
	You need to work with another club or district, either as the host sponsor or international sponsor.	No, but your district should collaborate with local organizations to meet critical needs.	You need to work with implementing and investment partners outside of Rotary and should also collaborate with other Rotary entities.
	Clubs and districts	A district	A club or district
	Both sponsors need to be qualified.	Your district needs to be qualified.	The club or district leading the program needs to be qualified.
	Global grants have a minimum project budget of \$30,000. You can ask for up to \$400,000 from the World Fund.	Districts may apply for up to \$25,000 if the Disaster Response Fund has that amount available.	One \$2 million grant may be awarded each year. Sponsors need to secure \$500,000 from one or more investment partners outside of Rotary.
	Clubs and districts can apply throughout the year.	Your district applies within six months of the disaster.	Your club or district submits a concept note by 1 August. Select programs are invited to develop a full proposal that is due in January of the following year.





TRUSTEE CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Service at the center

There's something magical about Rotary. Even after all these years of being a member, I continue to be amazed by it.

Take successful leaders from various backgrounds and professions and bring them together under a set of core values with service at the center. Add networks and friendship and then watch the magic start happening.

It's you — Rotarians and Rotaractors — who make that magic happen. You are the business and community leaders and the entrepreneurs who bring your passions, skills, and interests to everything we do. It's you who think outside of the box and apply what you know to serve others.

I see the same magic in Rotary Foundation grants that are funded by you and led by you.

It's present in the partnership between Rotary clubs in Canada and Uganda that supports economic and community development and vocational training at the same time. This global grant-funded initiative trains Ugandan youths in welding and related skills to make wheelchairs for a children's home serving people with disabilities. Technicians receive training in Canada and return home with valuable skills to start enterprises, helping meet the need for wheelchairs in the community.

Another global grant-supported project that reflects Rotary's entrepreneurial spirit is in Guatemala. To address the challenges of limited internet access for rural schools,

a host club in Guatemala partnered with Irish members to initiate a project that is equipping six schools and three community centers in the rural Sololá area with plug-and-play servers containing educational materials like books and videos. The grant also furnishes laptops and uninterruptible power supplies and trains teachers, benefiting about 1,800 individuals as it leverages technology for literacy and education.

Don't forget: Foundation global grants also support scholarships. One such scholarship, sponsored by Italian and German clubs, focuses on artificial intelligence in disease prevention and treatment. Italian scholar Salvatore Galati conducted research at a university in Bonn, Germany, using AI algorithms to analyze vast datasets for innovative drug development. Such computer-aided approaches can reduce costs and research time in the development of lifesaving drugs.

It's fantastic to see us innovating and incorporating new approaches and technology into our Foundation grants.

I look forward to meeting many of you at the 2024 Rotary International Convention in Singapore in a few short weeks, where we will learn about new opportunities to serve and innovate. It will be a chance to celebrate that Rotary magic and the many ways we *Create Hope in the World*.

BARRY RASSIN

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

May events

100 YEARS YOUNG

Event: Centennial Celebration

Host: Rotary Club of Birmingham, Michigan

What it benefits: Local and international projects

Date: 9 May

Chartered in 1924, the club is putting on a gala dinner at a hotel ballroom to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Attendees can dance to music performed by a band, and the club will present artifacts and a slideshow that highlight its history. Sponsorships and a silent auction will support a fundraising goal of \$100,000.

READY TO ROCK

Event: Rock & Soul Spectacular

Host: Rotary Club of Lake Mahopac, New York

What it benefits: Local nonprofits and scholarships

Date: 10 May

The 10th edition of this annual night of music boasts a lineup that includes the Trammps, known for their 1970s hit “Disco Inferno,” and Bobby Wilson, performing the songs of his father, soul music legend Jackie Wilson. An Elvis Presley impersonator and a group that pays tribute to female artists through the decades will also take the stage at the Mahopac High School auditorium. Snacks and drinks will be sold.

TAKE A SWING

Event: Giving Cup Golf Tournament

Host: Rotary Club of Minden, Nevada

What it benefits: Me for Incredible Youth and other local nonprofits

Date: 18 May

Golfers in this annual tournament at the Genoa Lakes Golf Club compete in a scramble format, with the chance to win



COMING UP ROSES

Event: Runs for the Roses

Host: Rotary Club of Ankeny, Iowa

What it benefits: Local nonprofits

Date: 4 May

Fans of the Kentucky Derby will enjoy this opportunity to watch a live broadcast of “the most exciting two minutes in sports” on a 17-by-10-foot screen. A catered dinner follows the race, with wine, beer, and specialty drinks included in the ticket price. The event also features live and silent auctions, and prizes will be awarded for the best Derby Day outfits.

\$10,000 for a hole-in-one. The action on the green is followed by a reception with food, drinks, a live auction, and an awards presentation. The tournament has raised more than \$100,000 since it began in 2021. This year’s primary beneficiary is a nonprofit that supports the development of young people through sports and educational programs.

CLAWS FOR A CAUSE

Event: Lobsterfest

Host: Rotary Club of Yorba Linda Sunrise, California

What it benefits: Local and international projects

Date: 18 May

Billed as “Yorba Linda’s biggest party for charity,” Lobsterfest has raised \$1.8 million over the past 36 years. This year’s event, which is expected to sell out, is held at a local community center and

features all-you-can-eat Maine lobster and tri-tip steak. Ticket buyers can also sponsor a meal for a U.S. Marine; the club transports Marines from their base to enjoy the festivities.

NEVER TOO LATE TO CELEBRATE

Event: Mardi Gras in May

Host: Rotary Club of Covina Sunrise, California

What it benefits: Local projects

Date: 18 May

In New Orleans, Mardi Gras is a late winter affair, but the Covina Sunrise club is turning its annual spring fundraiser into a belated celebration of the holiday. The adults-only event includes silent and live auctions, casino games, and music, along with food, beer, and still and sparkling wine. Attendees are encouraged to wear glamorous costumes or attire in the spirit of the theme.

Tell us about your event. Write to 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.

IN BRIEF

Women's empowerment champion wins Sylvia Whitlock Leadership Award

Manjoo Phadke, a successful entrepreneur and a dedicated advocate for women and girls, has won Rotary's 2023-24 Sylvia Whitlock Leadership Award. A member of the Rotary Club of Pune Deccan Gymkhana, India, since 2003, Phadke has helped tens of thousands of girls and women through her many projects.

"I've always felt that women think of themselves as 'lesser,'" she says. "I want to keep giving them confidence that they are not 'lesser,' and they can do whatever they set their minds to."

Phadke's Rotary colleagues praise her initiative and dedication.

"Manjoo's professional and social accomplishments, positive attitude, and passion have set her apart as an influential leader and catalyst for change," says Shailesh Narayan Palekar, Rotary Foundation chair for District 3131, who nominated Phadke for the award. "She is very determined to work for young girls and women, and that is something that makes her exceptional."

Phadke has pursued numerous initiatives to support women's health, including organizing clinics to offer medical check-ups and mammograms and leading campaigns on menstrual hygiene.

She has worked extensively to increase the rate of vaccination against HPV, the cause of almost all cases of cervical cancer. Not only did she help to secure multiple grants from The Rotary Foundation to pay for vaccinations, but she also negotiated their prices directly with vaccine suppliers, resulting in savings of nearly two-thirds off the regular price per dose. The project ultimately vaccinated some 25,000



girls in rural and tribal areas of India.

Phadke also helped design and launch Project Asmita, a program that uses specially made videos and booklets to educate girls in life skills such as financial, digital, and legal literacy, as well as self-defense, nutrition, and menstrual health. The project, which also distributes free vitamins and sanitary pads, has reached an estimated 100,000 girls and has become one of her district's signature initiatives.

Designing the program was a natural step for Phadke, who runs a company called SkillArbor that partnered with a university to provide vocational education to students from lower-income households. The vocational programs are based on a "learn while you earn" approach that connects students with employers from their first day. As an entrepreneur herself, Phadke says, she has a special interest in helping women who want to run their own businesses. Her district re-

cruited about 1,000 teenage girls for driving education that enabled participants to go into business as delivery drivers.

"We thought that if girls can be taught to drive, they can be employed as delivery girls for supply chain companies," she says. "We also gave them some vans to ferry children to school."

Phadke has conducted free workshops for women entrepreneurs for more than a decade, working closely with various non-governmental organizations. Her favorite success story was from a 17-year-old who started a business teaching martial arts to girls.

"She just started offering martial arts classes, and her business went on to become very successful," Phadke says. "She told me, 'I've now grown into a big business, and I'm earning a respectable amount of money, and everybody around me is amazed at that.' It really touched my heart."

She also helps women understand the legal system and their rights. For six years she served on the women's safety committee of the Pune police commissioner, which aimed to reduce domestic violence and advised women on legal literacy, financial planning, and conflict resolution.

"She's been a wonderful leader," Palekar says. "People are very comfortable interacting with her and working with her."

Phadke is governor of Rotary District 3131 and has served her club as president, Foundation chair, and membership chair. One of her favorite programs is Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, which she has helped her district organize since she joined Rotary. — ETELKA LEHOCZKY

The Sylvia Whitlock Leadership Award annually honors one member who is actively working to advance women in Rotary. Learn more and view a gallery of past recipients at rotary.org/sylvia-whitlock-leadership-award-gallery.

our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion



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2024 CONVENTION

Share hope in Singapore



Aidan O'Leary of the World Health Organization

The speakers list is packed with inspiration. Breakout sessions are primed to provide tools for your club. And House of Friendship booths are set to spark connections. The 2024 Rotary International Convention unfurls its pageantry this month against the backdrop of spectacular Singapore, whose beauty and cultures enrich this international business nerve center.

Listen to Aidan O'Leary, polio eradication director at the World Health Organization, discuss the work that is Rotary's legacy. Big-name speakers like O'Leary are one reason Chris Offer, a member of the Rotary Club of Ladner, British Columbia, goes to conventions year after year. "There are remarkable people onstage," he says.

Other speakers include Rotary Peace Fellow Alexandra Rose, who helps communities heal through cultural practices, and

Jack Sim, who founded the World Toilet Organization to break sanitation taboos.

Offer and his wife, Penny, also a Ladner club member, enjoy adding a vacation to convention trips, and he relishes the exciting atmosphere as well as the chance to make a "heck of a lot of new friends."

You'll find friends and excitement at Singapore's GastroBeats, a food and music festival that opens exclusively for Rotary on Saturday, 25 May. Browse all of the signature events on the convention webpage.

Mingle at the House of Friendship and choose from dozens of breakout sessions, including ones on how to grow membership and deepen your projects' impact.

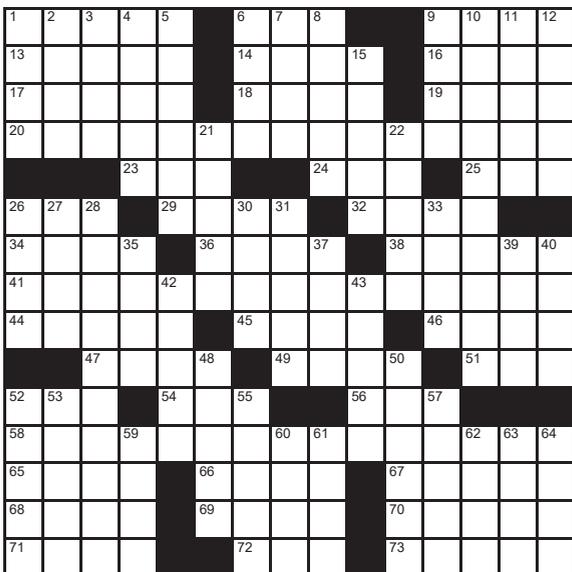
You'll be *Sharing Hope With the World* and having fun 25-29 May. Did you notice the bagpipe rock band on the schedule? Don't miss the Red Hot Chilli Pipers.

Learn more and register at convention.rotary.org.

CROSSWORD

Current celebration

By Victor Fleming
Rotary Club of Little Rock, Arkansas



Solution on **opposite page**

ACROSS

- 1 Violin kin
- 6 Start of summer?
- 9 Dilbert co-worker
- 13 Bagel flavor
- 14 Big Apple restaurateur Toots ____
- 16 McEntire of music
- 17 Brain output
- 18 Autobahn auto
- 19 TV drama set in the D.C. area
- 20 What Ponce de León searched for
- 23 Jazz band horn
- 24 Project's end?
- 25 Cape Town's country (abbr.)
- 26 Duke's sports org.
- 29 Baby back ____
- 32 Girl in a Salinger story
- 34 Amazon squeezers
- 36 "I'm ____ you!"
- 38 Camel caravan's stop-off
- 41 Sellers' assistance to purchasers
- 44 Primitive weapon
- 45 Brazen boldness
- 46 "Cool it!"
- 47 Hoop group
- 49 Come down in buckets
- 51 Sinus specialist, briefly
- 52 Slo-____ (fuse type)

54 Fury

- 56 Baker's amt.
- 58 When rent is often due
- 65 Area behind a dam
- 66 Double Stuf cookie
- 67 Desire deeply
- 68 Over again
- 69 Reagle of crosswords
- 70 Spectacle suffix
- 71 Mountain lake
- 72 Period indicated by the last words of 20-, 41-, and 58-Across
- 73 Single-celled creature

DOWN

- 1 Arrangement of the hair
- 2 "Within" word form
- 3 In ____ of
- 4 Advances of money
- 5 GM security system
- 6 Morales of NYPD *Blue*
- 7 Avoid
- 8 "Me too!"
- 9 Cartoonist Peter
- 10 Locale to which access is tightly restricted
- 11 Final bios
- 12 Buckwheat groats
- 15 Annie Oakley's prop

- 21 "A closed mouth gathers no foot," e.g.
- 22 "Please answer ____no" (litigator's request)
- 26 Basic facts
- 27 Brilliant success
- 28 Lawyer?
- 30 Rare blood type, informally
- 31 Guitar attachment
- 33 Dallas cagers, for short
- 35 Getz, Laurel, or Lee
- 37 1952 Olympic city
- 39 Touchable image
- 40 Aug.'s follower
- 42 Circle about
- 43 Avoid being caught by
- 48 "Get ____!"
- 50 *When Harry Met Sally*, for one
- 52 Note above A
- 53 Climbing plant
- 55 Actor Zimbalist
- 57 1950s Guy Williams TV role
- 59 Fastened with stitches
- 60 Trillion (prefix)
- 61 Word before cow or Toledo
- 62 Indian bread
- 63 R for the small screen, essentially
- 64 Beer froth



Let's meet up for *mate*

South America's yerba mate is a beloved brew and always shared

Ezequiel Benitez brings a little bit of home with him every time he travels. Whether the destination is the Rotary International Convention or New York's Central Park, yerba mate — South America's cherished caffeinated beverage — gets a special spot in his luggage. "In America, you say, 'Let's go for a coffee,'" he says. "Here, we say, 'Let's go out and drink some mate.'"

The brew has Indigenous origins and is made from the leaves of an evergreen tree related to holly. It's consumed both for its medicinal properties and its social ones. "We have to share it," Benitez says. "You cannot drink mate alone." The ritual involves passing the tea around in a circle, making eye contact as you do so. "That makes you have to speak, have to share," he says.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE: The ritual involves three pieces of equipment: a dried gourd, also called a mate, to hold the drink (vessels made of ceramic or wood are also used); a special straw known as a bombilla to filter out loose leaves; and a thermos to transport the hot water. People typically have their own set — even children, including Benitez's 4-year-old, who has one in her play kitchen. Mate is also available in tea bags.

FLAVOR PROFILE: Benitez prefers his yerba mate plain, but you can add aromatics such as mint or citrus or mix in milk. You can also drink it as a cold brew (called *tereré*). "The kids mix it with Fanta or orange juice," Benitez says. "They sweeten it." Try some with a *chipa*, a traditional Argentine cheese bread, and you'll be energized for the day.

— DIANA SCHOBURG

Ezequiel Benitez
Rotary Club
of Río Paraná-
Corrientes,
Argentina

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

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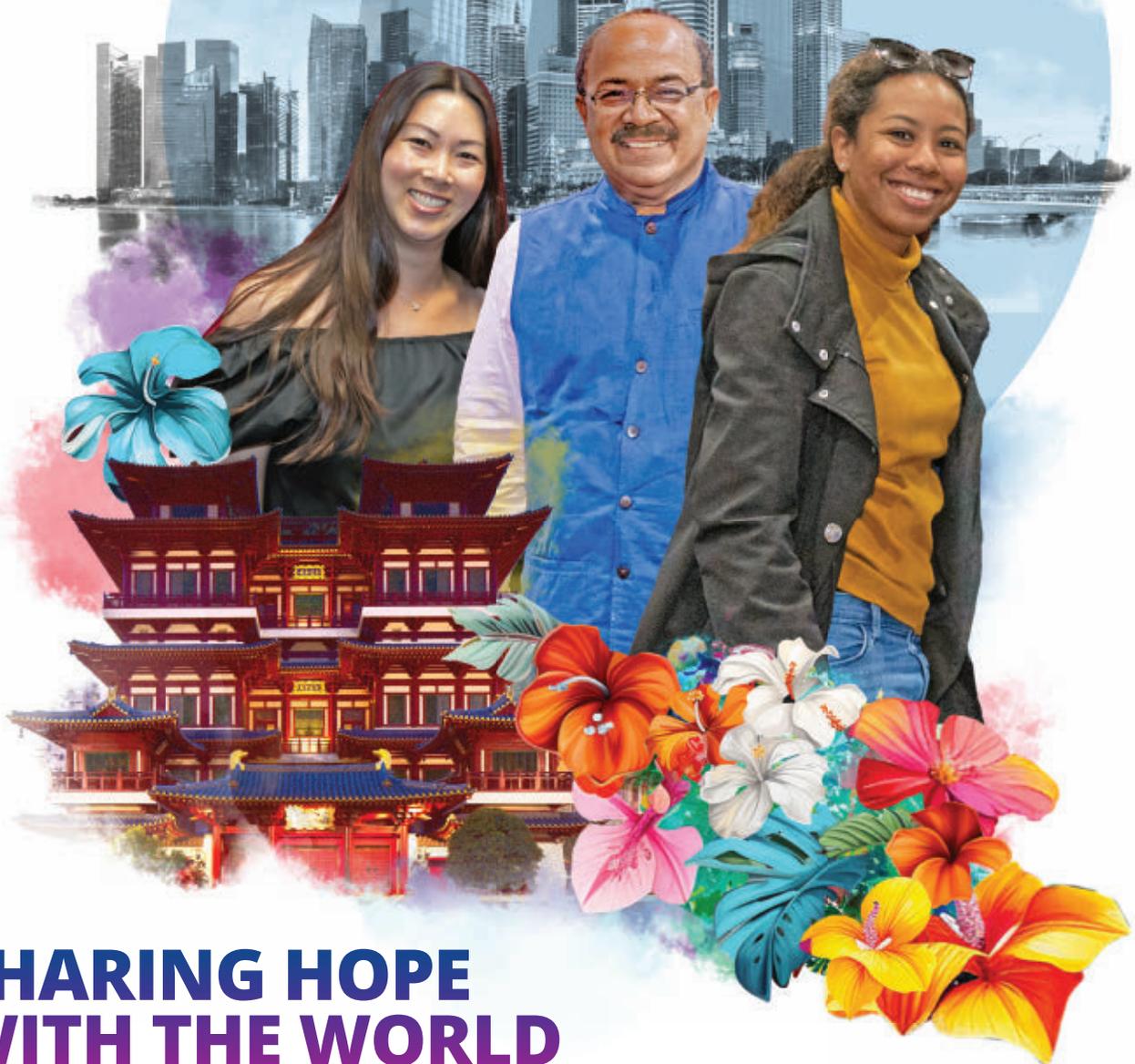
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rotary.org/membership

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