



FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER

A NEW ROTARY CHILDREN BOOK INSPIRES THE NEXT GENERATION

By Alicia C Oates

Our club is proud to celebrate the release of a brand-new children's book written especially for Rotary! This imaginative story introduces young readers to the values of service, friendship, and community in a way that's both fun and relatable.

The book was created to spark curiosity in children about Rotary's mission, helping them see how kindness, teamwork, and service above self can make a difference in their own lives and communities. With colorful illustrations and a message that resonates with both kids and adults, this project is not only a great tool for outreach but also a lasting gift to share with schools, libraries, and families.

Our hope is that this book will inspire children to dream about becoming Rotarians themselves one day, planting seeds for a new generation of leaders and change makers. It also gives us an exciting way to share Rotary's story in classrooms and community events while strengthening our club's connection with families.

Stay tuned for details on how you can get a copy, sponsor books for local schools, or use this resource in your own Rotary projects. Together, we're building brighter futures - one story at a time!



VOCATIONAL K-9 CPR

By Ed Davis on Saturday, September 13, 2025

On September 10th, Ed Davis, our Vocational Chair presented a check to the veterinarian technician program at Southern Technical College's for the purchase of a CPR Dog.

It will have a profound impact on the lives of CPR animals and provide our students with transformative hands-on learning experiences.

On September 30th he, alongside the campus director, will award a certificate of appreciation and a \$50 gift card to the deserving student from each of the five programs offered at Southern Technical College - Electrical Technology, HVAC, Medical Assistant, Surgical Technician, Veterinary Assisting. The certificates and gift cards will be awarded at the end of each quarter. Way to go Ed!



Club Meeting

Punta Gorda
Meets at FOUR-POINTS SHERATON HOTEL
33 Tamiami Trail
Punta Gorda, FL 33950
Time: Thursday at 12:00 PM

Club Leaders



[Alicia C. Oates](#)
President



[Andrea Ariens](#)
President-Elect



[Peter R. Wilkins](#)
Secretary
Past President



[James C. Williams](#)
Treasurer
iPast President



[Barbara Boncompagni](#)
Public Relations Co-Chair



[Theresa Brackett](#)
Bulletin Editor
Public Relations Chair



[Darcy Hanley](#)
Club Foundation Chair



[Nancy A. Johnson](#)
Training Officer
Club Learning Facilitator



[Breven Baima](#)
Sergeant-at-Arms



[Charles F. Marlowe](#)
Rotary Foundation Chair



[Richard D. Sell](#)
Membership Chair

[April Sue Davis](#)
Club Programs Chair

HFOH SPONSOR TO HONOR

By Theresa Brackett

Our annual Healing Field of Honor is underway! This powerful tribute at Laishley Park will feature 1,000 flags, each representing a veteran, first responder, healthcare worker, Rotarian, or local hero.

More than a fundraiser, the Healing Field is a moving opportunity for our community to reflect, give thanks, and come together. We need your help to make it a success—please sign up to volunteer here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0B44ABA72FABF9C07-57902023-healing#/>

- **Setup:** November 8
- **Event:** November 9–11
- **Tear-down:** November 12

We extend our thanks to the City of Punta Gorda for generously waiving this year's Laishley Park rental fees. Flags (*American or Canadian*) may be purchased online via QR code below or through our website: puntagordarotary.org - Events - Healing Field of Honor. Please share the link with friends and family so they too can honor a hero.

Veterans Day Weekend 2025 November 9th-11th; 8am - 6pm at Laishley Park



All proceeds benefit the Punta Gorda Rotary Charity & Education Foundation, 501(c)(3), which supports local, international charitable projects.

SPONSOR TO HONOR

Honor your American or Canadian veterans and first responders by sponsoring this annual commemorative event. You can also purchase a flag, tagged with your veteran's or first responder's name, to be displayed on the field for \$40 — and yours to keep after the event.



Email: hfoh@puntagordarotary.org
Call: 941-646-8820
Facebook: www.Facebook.com/HFOHPG

SPONSORSHIP LEVELS

Old Glory Sponsor – \$5,000

Row of 10 flags, 10 VIP seats at the ceremony, logo on field, full-page program ad, and recognition in all event promotions, social media, and websites.

Stars & Stripes Sponsor – \$2,500

8 flags, 6 VIP seats, logo on field, half-page ad, and recognition in event promotions, social media, and websites.

Freedom Sponsor – \$1,000

6 flags, 4 VIP seats, logo on field, quarter-page ad, and recognition in event promotions, social media, and websites.

Independence Sponsor – \$500

4 flags, logo on field, and recognition in event promotions, social media, and websites.

Liberty Sponsor – \$250

3 flags and recognition on the field and in promotional materials.

Patriot Sponsor – \$150

2 flags and recognition on the field.



Company Name: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Sponsor Level: _____

Amount: _____

PAY BY CHECK: Check #: _____ Mail to:
The Punta Gorda Rotary Charity & Education Foundation
PO Box 511132
Punta Gorda, FL 33951-1132

ONLINE PAYMENT:



FOUNDATION GRANTS

By Charles D. Marsee

The **Foundation Board** met this quarter and approved two grants noted below. Thank you to Charles Marsee and the grant review committee for their work. **The next grant deadline is December 1.**



[Polly Pierce Varone](#)
Community Service Chair



[Chrisanna K Wright](#)
Club Service Chair



[Arnie Eastburn](#)
International Service Chair



[Ed Davis](#)
Vocational Service Chair



[Kristin Mangas](#)
Youth Services Chair



[Paul F. Blaine](#)
Youth Services Project Chair

No Committee Selected

No Committee Selected

Events

No Events found

- \$600 to the Punta Gorda Fire Department for children's fire safety materials and
- \$4,000 to TEAM Punta Gorda for the *Paint Your Heart Out* initiative.

Our club also received two **District Designated Fund (DDF) grants for the recipients noted below**. These awards are possible through annual contributions to The Rotary Foundation. Every Rotarian is encouraged to support EREY (Every Rotarian, Every Year). Contributions may be made online through <https://my.rotary.org/en> or by check to Lach Smith, designated for The Rotary Foundation. District matching funds help maximize the impact of every gift.

The DDF grant proposals are due by May 31 each year. If you have an idea, please connect with Andrea Ciccione or President Alicia Oates.

- \$1,000 for HELP disaster posters and
- \$1,000 to publish a children's book about Rotary authored by President Alicia Oates.



NEW ROTARIANS!

By Richard D Sell

August may have been Membership Month, but our dedication to growth and connection is something we live out all year long. When we focus on growing Rotary, we expand our impact—our ability to serve, to lead, and to create lasting change.

Membership growth is more than just numbers. It's about opening doors. It's about inviting people who are ready to share their time, talents, and hearts for a cause bigger than themselves. Every new member brings fresh ideas, new energy, and a renewed sense of excitement.

Clubs thrive when membership is a true priority—and that means being willing to try new approaches and embrace new opportunities. Remember, every member is part of the membership committee! Together, let's commit to growth not just for today, this year, or even this decade—but for the next 100 years.



Please join us in welcoming our newest members since July 1st. Take a moment to greet them and share your own Rotary journey—it's how we build lasting connections.

Natalie Proctor ~ Sponsored by Richard Sell

Melissa Koch ~ Sponsored by Darcy Hanley

Tony Davis ~ Sponsored by April Davis

Simone Lohse ~ Sponsored by Barbara Boncompte

Christina Simonyi ~ Sponsored by Theresa Brackett

Cole Kelly ~ Sponsored by Chrisanna Wright & Theresa Brackett

COASTAL CLEAN UP

By Betty Kedziora

On September 20, Punta Gorda Rotarians joined thousands of volunteers worldwide for the **40th International Coastal Cleanup**, a global effort to "think globally, act locally" in protecting our waters. Our club partnered with community volunteers at **Ponce de Leon Park** as part of the Ocean Conservancy's initiative. Many pitched in across Charlotte County to clear hurricane debris and litter from beaches, canals, and roadways.



Rich and Janice Sells, Darcy, Alicia with her granddaughters and son, and Betty Kedziora together removed debris, collected data to support environmental policy, and helped safeguard our waterways for both people and wildlife. With so many willing hands, the cleanup was both impactful and FUN!

Rotarians are proud to be part of this worldwide movement of service and stewardship.

SERVING OUR VETERANS

By Polly Pierce Varone

What a beautiful day at Veterans Village Punta Gorda! Our Rotary "Service Team" shared pizza, cookies, and conversation with local veterans — and left with full hearts. Thank you Brevin Baima, Polly Pierce, and April Davis for organizing this community service event and for fellow Rotarians who attended to help support it - James Williams, Tony Davis, Darcy Hanley, Bob Clendenin, Susan Cravens and Theresa Brackett.



A big thank you to Monty's Restaurant & Pizzeria for donating pizzas, Pioneers Pizza for their support, and April and Tony Davis and friends for baking treats and gathering gift cards. Your generosity made the day unforgettable. We were honored to be joined by the Mayor and fellow Rotarian Dr. Deb Lux, who welcomed the veterans and shared in the celebration.

Veterans Village provides transitional housing and support for veterans experiencing homelessness — helping them regain stability and independence.

Learn more: Contact Nancy Ortiz at (941) 505-9261 or puntagordainfo@voa-fla.org

BINGO WINNERS!

Congrats to Chuck Marlowe and James Williams for winning the first ones to say BINGO! They both won a custom personalized stainless steel drink container made by our President Alicia Oates.

Although they tied for the first submission to the contest, **YOU** can still play until the end of this year to get a participation prize. Submit your ticket to Alicia Oates to collect your prize.



OVERDOSE AWARENESS WALK

By Betty Kedziora

On August 30, 2025, our community came together for the Overdose Awareness Mile Remembrance Walk and 5K. More than 350 participants, 80 sponsors, and countless volunteers joined forces to honor loved ones lost, raise awareness, and support prevention and recovery. Together, they raised \$33,000 — nearly double last year's total.

Fellow Rotarian **Polly Pierce served as Race Director**, leading the event in partnership with Cathy's Place of Charlotte County and Drug Free Charlotte County. Thanks to their leadership, the event has grown into one of the most impactful community gatherings of the year.

But beyond the numbers, this event carried a message that hits close to home. Addiction and recovery are not issues that happen to "other people." They touch families, friends, and yes — even us in Rotary. We have members who are in recovery. We have members who have lost loved ones to overdose. And we have members quietly carrying the weight of these struggles every day.

That's why this event matters so much to our fellowship. Rotary is about service above self, but also about lifting each other up. Standing with families affected by overdose, supporting prevention and recovery, and building a healthier community is part of that mission.

Next year the goal is 500 participants — and I hope more Rotarians will be part of this growing movement. Together we can show compassion, reduce stigma, and prove that our community cares.



EXTRA COMMUNITY SERVICE UPDATE

By April Sue Davis



Suit Drive for Success Closet

Charlotte Technical College, our upcoming guest speaker, **Stephanie Rusch, Career Specialist/Community Liaison**, is gathering

clean, gently used suits to provide students with professional attire for job interviews and new career opportunities. Your help in donating will be greatly appreciated! Contact **Betty Kedziora or April Davis** to arrange your donation OR bring your clothing donation to the 10/23 Thursday Club meeting where Stephanie Rusch will see your support.

Current Needs:

- Dresses, women's smaller sizes
- men's polos, cardigans
- men's and women's belts
- men's and women's shoes (closed-toe)

Always accepting:

- Blazers,
- dress pants, dresses, skirts
- non-denim pants
- dress shoes
- button down shirts, blouses, polos



Pop Tab Collection for Kids' Needs

Help support local students by collecting pop tabs! A2Z is generously matching all money raised from this effort! Every tab counts, so let's make it a big success together! These will go toward purchasing hygiene products through the Kids' Needs program. Please turn in your pop tabs to April Davis or Brevin Biama by December 18.

LET'S GET SOCIAL

By Chrisanna K Wright

A huge shout-out to Chrisanna Wright and the newest members of our social team, Margaret Seater and Bette Carlson! Thanks to their efforts, our members and their partners are now enjoying wonderful social events outside of our regular meetings. We had a fantastic time at the Celtic Ray Public House in September, where we also had the pleasure of celebrating Chrisanna's birthday.



THE TASTE OF PUNTA GORDA - MARCH 8TH!

By Barbara Boncompagni

Mark your calendars! The **Taste of Punta Gorda** will be held on **Sunday, March 8, 2026**. Planning is already in full swing, with monthly committee meetings dedicated to ensuring the success of this beloved Rotary tradition.

The support of our members—through your time, talents, and financial contributions—is critical to the event's success and to the community programs it helps fund. We are currently seeking volunteers to assist in a variety of roles. If you are able to help, please contact **Andrea Ciccone Ariens** at dreabugg722@yahoo.com.



Member participation is essential, and together we can make this year's Taste of Punta Gorda the most successful yet!

JOIN IN ON THE CONVERSATION AT LINKEDIN

By Alicia C Oates

Thank you to Rotary International District 6960 for launching a new **Rotary LinkedIn Group** to reach the untapped professional community in our area — and we want you to be part of the conversation.

This group is designed to:

- Highlight Rotary's impact to professionals who may not yet know us
- Share ideas and best practices across clubs
- Build stronger connections with leaders in our communities

By joining, you're not only supporting local outreach, but also helping strengthen Rotary's voice where today's professionals are already gathering.

Let's show the power of Rotary together. Join the conversation here:

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/14776009/>



REIGNITE FELLOWSHIP EXPO

By Barbara Boncompte

On behalf of the Punta Gorda Rotary, several of our members proudly attended the recent Reignite Rotary District Fellowship Event—an inspiring gathering that brought together Rotarians, non-profits, and local area vendors for an evening of fellowship, connection, and celebration of Rotary's impact.

Most of our Public Image Team was in attendance, along with Club President *Alicia Oates*, our Youth Exchange student *Blanca from Córdoba, Spain*, and *Paul F. Blaine, Youth Services Project Chair*. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet a large group of amazing people from across our district and beyond, all united by the spirit of service and community.

One of the highlights of the evening came from our very own Theresa Brackett, Public Relations Chair, who shared her personal “ah-ha moment”—the instant she realized joining Rotary was the right decision for her. Her heartfelt words reflected the pride, joy, and sense of belonging that so many of us feel as part of Rotary.

The event was filled with fun, fellowship, and meaningful connections. We left with renewed energy, fresh ideas, and excitement about the work ahead. Most importantly, it was a reminder of why Rotary continues to change lives both locally and globally.



A big thank you to all who made this event possible, and to our members who represented Punta Gorda Rotary with such enthusiasm. We are already looking forward to the next opportunity to come together with our Rotary family and community partners!

OUTSTANDING GUEST SPEAKERS

By April Sue Davis

- **Senior Cadet Nina** – Charlotte High standout, was recently accepted to the **U.S. Merchant Marine Academy**. Inspiring story of achievement and leadership.
- **Dr. Joyce** – Shared his passion for **astronomy**, including how he built a **personal telescope** at home.
- **Peter Wilkins** – Walked us through the **art & science of maple syrup making**. Bonus: we sampled the finished product!
- **Mayor Debbie Lux** – Gave an insightful **update on Punta Gorda**, highlighting progress and community growth.
- **Tobybeth Johnson (Limitless Horizons)** – Inspired us with her organization's mission and impact.
- **Brandon Watkins (Emergency Management)** – Offered timely and practical **hurricane preparedness tips**.
- **Tom Parker (Fellowship of Christian Athletes)** – Spoke on the lasting value of **youth involvement in sports** for character, leadership, and community.





YOUTH EXCHANGE LAND IN PUNTA GORDA

By Paul F. Blaine

Our Rotary Club proudly welcomed 2025–26 inbound exchange student Blanca Anguiano Ruiz from Spain on July 26. Several members and her host family greeted her at the Fort Myers airport with a warm Rotary welcome.

Blanca's first host family is Greg and Amy Thomas, along with their son, Sam. Many will remember that Sam spent most of last year in Brazil as our outbound exchange student and returned home June 27. Be sure to join us on November 6, when Sam will share a program about his exchange experience.



We are still in need of one or two additional host families for Blanca this year. Hosting is a rewarding opportunity to experience cultural exchange firsthand. If you are interested, please reach out to Paul Blaine, Charles Marsee, or Chrisanna Wright for more details.

WHO WILL GET THIS?

What are the pom-poms used for at our weekly club meetings? First one to email publicimage@puntagordarotary.org gets a prize.

PODCASTER PRESIDENT OATES

President Alicia Oates is racking up her podcast episodes — The Rotarian Rookie

Please listen in to what she has to share by scanning the QR code below to access them. Need help? Email info@puntagordarotary.org. Enjoy!



The Value in RLI

7 days ago

Passion for learning with a bonus of networking!



Membership Magnet: Attr...

Sunday Aug 17, 2025

In this episode we identify who you are really looking for and provide recruitment...



Work - Life - Rotary: The B...

Monday Aug 04, 2025

This week's theme is avoiding burnout while wearing multiple hats. Is that even...



Disasters Don't Wait — An...

Tuesday Jul 29, 2025

Listen in as this Rotarian Rookie interviews Disaster Aid USA co-founder Larry Agee.



Making a Rotarian Childre...

Sunday Jul 20, 2025

Listen as I share the details behind a children's book I made, as well as other...



Stepping into the Club Pre...

Sunday Jul 13, 2025

Listen as I cover my transition into the Club President role and even touch on the fir...



Welcome to the Rookie Zo...

Thursday Jul 03, 2025

Introduction to the Rotarian Rookie Podcast and my Club President Journey.



SAVE THESE DATES

10/17 Social Tiki Hut Sunset Cruise

10/25 Punta Gorda Fall Festival

11/1-2 SWFL International Airshow

11/9-12 Healing Field of Honor, 9:00-5:00, Laishley Park

12/13 Wreaths Across America

12/TBD Member Christmas Social

12/18 Kids' Needs Can Tabs Due to April Davis

2/21 RLI Session 1-3



2025-2026 CLUB SPONSORS



AMERILIFE®

HORNER'S

RV/Auto/Truck Service & Sales



Suncoast
Credit Union



CREWS

BANK & TRUST



FARRLAW 100
YEARS

Good things
come from
Sysco

WM
WASTE MANAGEMENT®

SUNCOAST BEVERAGE
SALES