



## WINTER 2025 BULLETIN

### \$40K+ FOUNDATION IMPACTS

The Foundation Board met on November 19 and received an update on the highly successful Healing Field of Honor. Special thanks to Chair Alicia Oates, Treasurer Peter Wilkins, and the volunteers who braved the cold to staff the welcome table—this event truly showcased Rotary’s community impact. The Board approved \$1,000 for hurricane relief in Jamaica. Members wishing to contribute additional funds to this or any other of our approved Club Foundation grants may contact **Lach Smith** to donate through our Club Foundation.

November was Rotary Foundation Month, and we thank everyone who supported the Rotary Foundation through contributions made via **My Rotary**, helping advance Rotary’s mission and moving members closer to becoming Paul Harris Fellows.



### Over \$40,000 Grants Approved for 2025 (as of July 1)

- **International:** Water for Life Mozambique (\$10,350); ShelterBox (\$1,000)
- **Flood Relief:** Jamaica (\$1,000); District 5840 (\$1,000)
- **Community Service:** Paint Your Heart Out (\$4,000); National Fire Safety Council (\$600); Charlotte Re-Entry (\$1,000); Charlotte Care Center (\$1,000); Florida Philharmonic Orchestra (\$1,000); Blue Star Mothers (\$500); Veterans Village (\$500); SMBC Outreach (\$500)
- **Youth:** Scholarships (\$4,384); Project Graduation (\$1,000); Interact (\$1,000); S4TL (\$2,200); RYLA (\$2,000); Youth Initiatives (\$1,200); Yah Yah Girls (\$1,000); CARE (\$1,000); Drowning Foundation (\$300)
- **Vocational:** Scholarship Gift Cards (\$500); CPR Dog Trainer (\$961); Student of the Year (\$600); Hammer Drill (\$400); HVAC Equipment (\$398); Charlotte Technical College (\$1,228)

If you are looking for additional details, please contact **Charles Marsee**, Chair of the Grant Review Committee, who has full information on all approved grants. The next grant approval dates are **March 1** and **June 1**.

### 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  
Club Webmaster



**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

# THE TASTE OF PUNTA GORDA - MARCH 8TH!

By James C. Williams



**We need your help!** The 18th Annual Taste of Punta Gorda is fast approaching. Festival day is **Sunday, March 8, from 11 AM-5 PM** at Laishley Park, and we need every member's support to ensure the success of our club foundation's largest annual fundraiser. Since its debut in 2007, the Taste has grown into the premier food festival in Punta Gorda and Charlotte County—thanks to strong community support and you.

## How you can help:

- **Sponsorships:** You support local businesses—now invite them to support the Taste. Contact **Darcy Hanley** or **Peter Wilkins** to sign up business sponsors. Every dollar raised supports community grants totaling nearly **\$60,000 annually**.
- **Restaurants:** Join **James Williams'** restaurant team and help recruit 20-25 restaurants to serve 3,000-4,000 attendees. This is a powerful marketing opportunity, and your relationships matter.
- **Vendors:** Know artists, crafters, or specialty food vendors? Join **Bari Amadio's** vendor team, supporting nearly 70 vendors at the festival.
- **Publicity:** **Theresa Brackett's** Public Image Team is leading promotion. Help distribute posters, flyers, and spread the word.
- **Volunteers:** We need all hands on deck before, during, and after the event. Volunteer leaders include **Bette Carlson, Andrea Ariens, Kit and Lach Smith (Restaurant Row), Betty Kedziora (VIP Tent), and Polly Pierce (Admissions)**. Watch for sign-ups on **Signup Genius**.?????

Questions? Contact Taste Director **Andrea Ariens** at [dreabugg722@yahoo.com](mailto:dreabugg722@yahoo.com).

Please join the Taste team and contribute wherever you can to make this the best Taste of Punta Gorda yet.



## BACK TO SCHOOL - RLI

New members attend RLI (Rotary Leadership Institute)!

February 21, 2026 - 8:15 am - Pre-Registration Required

Woodland Middle School,  
2700 Panacea Blvd,  
North Port, FL 34289.

Wear your club badge.

Lunch will be provided.

Our club covers \$100 fee to attend.

Founded in 1992, it offers three sessions done one at a time that combine Rotary knowledge with practical leadership skills.



**April Sue Davis**  
Club Programs Chair



**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



## Club Foundation



**Jon Michael Duszynski**  
Member



**Darcy Hanley**  
Chair



**Paul V. Lioon**  
Member



**Charles D. Marsee**  
Vice-Committee Chair



**Alicia C. Oates**  
Member



**Polly Pierce Varone**  
Club Services Chair



**Kathryn N. Smith**  
Secretary



**Lachlan C. Smith**  
Treasurer



**Peter R. Wilkins**  
Member



**James C. Williams**  
Member

## Events

- January 8th  
[Punta Gorda Weekly Club Meeting](#)
- January 12th  
[Taste of Punta Gorda Team Meeting](#)
- January 15th  
[Punta Gorda Weekly Club Meeting](#)
- January 22nd  
[Punta Gorda Weekly Club Meeting](#)
- January 26th  
[Taste of Punta Gorda Team Meeting](#)
- January 29th  
[Punta Gorda Weekly Club Meeting](#)

[February 2nd Taste of Punta Gorda Team Meeting](#)  
[February 9th Taste of Punta Gorda Team Meeting](#)  
[February 16th Taste of Punta Gorda Team Meeting](#)  
[February 23rd Taste of Punta Gorda Team Meeting](#)  
[March 2nd Taste of Punta Gorda Team Meeting](#)  
[March 7th Taste of Punta Gorda Set Up](#)  
[March 8th Taste of Punta Gorda Fundraiser](#)  
[March 28th Charlotte County Public Safety Appreciation Night](#)  
[April 15th Giving Challenge](#)

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

By Richard D Sell

**Membership Growth Highlight:** This quarter, our club proudly welcomed four new dedicated Rotarians who jumped right into service, especially through the Healing Field of Honor. With 10 new members year-to-date and a growing, younger membership base, our future is bright!

Exciting membership news as during this quarter (October, November, December) we formally initiated 4 new Rotarians. All are dynamic and dedicated participants who were "all in" for our Healing Field of Honor event held in November. Please extend a warm welcome to:

- Eryn Tocco
- Jofran Medina
- Tyler Brackett - Rotern
- Holly Tanner (photo not available)



Year to date, we have been fortunate to initiate 10 New Rotarians. All of them have been fantastic and involved in different facets of our club. We are truly excited that the average age is 42 and two of our new members have joined under our Rotern Program, which is set up for members under the age of 30.

## HOLIDAY CHEER!

By Theresa Brackett

As the year came to a close, our Rotary spirit was in play at our last meeting of 2025. We welcomed guests and jumped into a fun, interactive activity—thanks to our president—that sparked lively conversation and fresh ideas. Members shared thoughtful suggestions on how to make our meetings even more engaging and enjoyable, all in the spirit of strengthening a happy, healthy, and connected club. These ideas will be reviewed by the board as we look ahead.

The festive season continued with our Rotary Club Christmas Party. A heartfelt thank you to **Jon Duszynski and his partner, Vanessa**, for opening their beautiful home and hosting such a warm and memorable evening. Great food, wonderful drinks, meaningful conversations, and plenty of laughter made it a night to remember—and a perfect way to celebrate the connections that make Rotary so special.

Be sure to use your smartphone to scan and watch a quick video of our holiday celebration created by Alicia Oates.



## SPEAKERS



By April Sue Davis

Over the past quarter, our club has been fortunate to hear from several engaging and impactful speakers who have deepened our understanding of local initiatives and strengthened our connection to the community.

### Empowering Students - Stephanie Rusch, Charlotte Technical College (CTC)

Stephanie Rusch shared a compelling update on CTC's efforts to prepare students for careers. Our club helped donate professional attire to the CTC Closet, giving students free access to interview-ready clothing and reinforcing Rotary's direct community impact.

### Tourism Insights - Sean Dougherty

Sean Dougherty delivered a thought-provoking presentation on tourism in Charlotte County, highlighting its role in driving local economic growth as well as the opportunities and challenges the county faces. Members noted that his data offered a fresh perspective on just how vital tourism is to our community.

### Youth Leadership - RYLA Updates from Paul and Team

We always appreciate updates on Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA), brought to us by *Paul and his team*. Their dedication to empowering young leaders reflects the heart of Rotary's future-focused mission. The recent program outcomes and stories shared truly emphasized the long-lasting impact RYLA has on youth in our region.

## WHAT AN HONOR!

By Theresa Brackett

Our 5th Annual *Healing Field of Honor* at Laishley Park, displaying more than 1,000 American flags — and, for the first time, Canadian flags in recognition of Remembrance Day was a success. The \$15,000 funds raised will help support our community through upcoming Foundation grants. Each flag honored a veteran, first responder, community hero, or loved one recognized by local sponsors.

This year's event also introduced a moving new tribute: a white dove release by Florida Dove Release, symbolizing peace, remembrance and freedom. Community members walked the field throughout the weekend, reflecting on the lives and service represented in the display.

We are very grateful to our sponsors and the many volunteers who helped the day before and a day after the 3-day event to get the field ready.



## WHAT'S BREWING WITH OUR MEMBERS?

Our neighboring Charlotte Harbor Sunset Rotary Club brewed up a creative and fun-filled fundraiser with their Traditional High Tea—with a Halloween twist—on October 26. From smoking cocktails to festive Halloween treats, the “witching” affair delighted guests while supporting a great cause. A lively auction featuring many enticing items added to the excitement, making it a memorable and successful event.



## PUNTA GORDA FALL FESTIVAL

By Theresa Brackett

An unforgettable afternoon at the Punta Gorda Charlotte Library Fall Festival! Families came together for candy, games, laughter, and meaningful connection—made possible with support from Punta Gorda Rotary and incredible local 501(c)(3) partners who shared their time, energy, and generosity.

Thank you to the Punta Gorda Fire Department for the crowd-favorite burgers, hot dogs, and free ice cream. Special appreciation to Tony Varone and our outstanding volunteers—April Davis, Simone Lohse, Theresa Brackett, Tyler, Brackett, Alicia Oates, Kat and Lach Smith—who kept everything running smoothly and welcoming throughout the day. From creative costumes to smiling faces, the event was a true example of people helping people and the power of community.



## ROTARY CLUBS UNITE - SOCIAL

By Theresa Brackett

### An Evening That Sparked Connection and Collaboration

What an outstanding pop-up Business Networking Social! In partnership with the Punta Gorda Rotary Club and Harbor Heights/Peace River Rotary, we brought together business and community leaders for an energizing night of genuine connection and collaboration.

The Charlotte Community Foundation provided a welcoming, ideal setting as guests from across Southwest Florida — spanning St. Petersburg to North Port — filled the room with momentum, insight, and meaningful conversation.



A special shout out to JB's Corner Café for the delicious food and Heart and Sole Studios for setting the tone with exceptional live music. This is Rotary at its best: relationships, community, and purpose in action.

## JUST "PLANE" VOLUNTEERISM AT ITS BEST

By Barbara Boncomppte

Members of the Rotary Club of Punta Gorda volunteered at the Florida International Air Show on November 1, supporting one of the community's largest annual events through hands-on service.

The Air Show, held at Punta Gorda Airport, draws thousands of aviation enthusiasts and families from across the region each year. The show features high-performance aerobatic acts, military demonstrations, static aircraft displays, and interactive STEM exhibits that celebrate aviation, service, and community pride.

Rotarians assisted with event operations and guest support, helping ensure a smooth and welcoming experience for thousands of attendees at the Punta Gorda Airport. The all-volunteer airshow relies on civic groups like Rotary to successfully host the popular aviation showcase.



## TIKI TIME

By Christina Simonyi

The Punta Gorda Rotary Club enjoyed a lively and memorable evening during its October social, hosted aboard a sunset tiki cruise provided by Punta Gorda Water Adventures. With calm waters and a glowing sky, members gathered for an evening filled with fellowship, music, and celebration.

Rotarians were welcomed aboard by party captain and fellow Rotarian Cole Kelly, who helped set the upbeat tone for the night. The cruise also doubled as a birthday celebration for Chuck Marlowe, who was met with warm wishes and plenty of cheer from friends and members.

Guests danced to festive tunes and enjoyed delicious appetizers lovingly prepared by Bette Carlson. The event came together seamlessly thanks to Chrisanna Wright, who organized the social and ensured the evening was a smooth and enjoyable success.



## SOUTHERN TECHNICAL COLLEGE GRADUATION

By Barbara Boncomppte

On October 25th, Ed Davis, our club's Vocational Chair, proudly represented the Punta Gorda Rotary Club at Southern Technical College, where he delivered a heartfelt and motivating speech to the students. His words inspired perseverance, leadership, and the importance of service, leaving a lasting impression on everyone in attendance. As part of the ceremony, Ed also had the honor of presenting gifts to the top-of-the-class students on behalf of the Rotary Club, recognizing their hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence.

The event was truly moving and served as a powerful reminder of the impact we can make when we invest in our future leaders. The Punta Gorda Rotary Club is honored to support the students of Southern Technical College and looks forward to continuing to be a positive part of our community's future—beginning with the bright, driven students who will soon shape it.



## THANK YOU NOTE

By Betty Kedziora

The Rotary Club's Foundation President, Darcy Hanley, praised the dedication of the club's program directors this week, calling them "the silent heroes" behind the organization's continued growth and community impact.

That impact was recently reflected in a heartfelt note sent to Vocational Director, Ed Davis, by Paige Reid who is a 2025 Surgical Technology graduate from Southern Technical College in Port Charlotte. Reid received a Rotary vocational award during last Saturday's ceremony.

*"Thank you for making my graduation even more special," Reid wrote. She shared that her parents had traveled from Pennsylvania to see her honored with a medal for top academic achievement in her program. "It was the icing on the cake and such a special moment I will forever cherish."*



## IN LOVING MEMORY OF JOSE AND JOEY

In 2025, our Rotary family mourned the loss of Joey Alonso and Jose Basilo — two individuals whose lives reflected kindness, generosity, and service to others.

Joey's warmth and dedication had a lasting impact on our community and the Sea Cadets, while Jose's humility and quiet strength inspired all who knew him (Cha-Cha-Cha).

Each embodied the values of Rotary through their actions and commitment to others.

Though deeply missed, their legacies live on in the lives they touched and in our continued commitment to Service Above Self.

They will always be remembered.



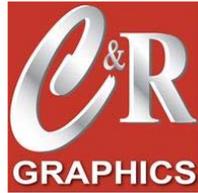
## SAVE THESE DATES

- 1/12 Taste of Punta Gorda Meeting
- 1/12 CART Conversations - Virtual
- 1/28 Foundation Meeting - Virtual
- 2/4 Foundation Meeting - Virtual
- 2/19 Charlotte County Chamber Business Expo
- 2/21 RLI Session 1-3
- 3/1 Foundation Grant Deadline by 5pm
- 3/8 Taste of Punta Gorda Festival
- 3/28pm Public Safety Appreciation Night



\* Visit <https://www.puntagordarotary.org/meetings/> for more details of these highlights.

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