

Unite for  
Good

ROTARY 7620 NEWSLETTER



## Stronger Together: Why Rotary Clubs Thrive Through Collaboration

It's no accident that sequoia trees are frequently highlighted in leadership development classes. They are among the strongest living things on Earth and endure storms, fire, and drought—not because they have deep individual roots, but because their roots are intertwined. By leaning on one another, they remain stable and resilient.

Rotary clubs are much the same.

Each club does meaningful work in its own community—serving local needs, developing leaders, and living the ideal of Service Above Self. But when clubs work together, our collective impact grows far beyond what any one club could accomplish alone.

Collaboration allows us to share ideas, resources, and energy, turning good projects into great ones and local efforts into broader movements.

Interclub partnerships strengthen Rotary at every level. Clubs can learn from one another's successes, support each other through challenges, and combine strengths to address complex issues. A club with strong fundraising capacity may partner with one known for hands-on service. Established clubs can mentor newer ones, ensuring continuity and growth across the district.

Working together does not diminish a club's identity. Just as sequoias remain individual trees while sharing strength beneath the surface, each Rotary club retains its unique culture while benefiting from a shared foundation of purpose and values. That connection becomes especially important during times of change, when mutual support and collaboration help clubs adapt and thrive.

When Rotary clubs lean on one another, we model cooperation, unity, and goodwill—the very principles we promote in our communities. Like the sequoias, our greatest strength is not how tall we stand alone, but how deeply we are connected. Together, we stand stronger and achieve more.



## February is Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention Month

We refuse to accept conflict as a way of life

February is  
Peacebuilding and  
Conflict Prevention Month



District 7070

## DGE Dawn Wittfelt Attended the Rotary International Assembly



International Assembly was an amazing experience. Being together and sharing Rotary ideas (and business card) with all 535 DGE's from around the world is an incredibly rich, yet overwhelming experience, all at the same time, to say the least.

We heard RI President-Elect Olayinka "Yinka" Hakeem Babalola's opening address, where he shared his story of his struggle to be included in his local Rotary club, and his passion to be sure to be welcoming to all who may think differently than we do, or come from a different background. He encouraged us to share our Rotary stories as well, and to let others know what Rotary means to us, and how it has changed our lives.



**CREATE  
LASTING  
IMPACT**

He challenged us to "Create Lasting Impact" not only in our communities, but also in ourselves. He asked us to look at our last few Rotary years, find our best, and set a goal to do better than our best in the coming year.

We also heard from current RI President, Francesco Arezzo, John Hewko, General Secretary and CEO of RI, and Jennifer Jones, Rotary Foundation Chair Elect and Past RI President, who all gave compelling speeches.

My Zone 33-34 classmates and I enjoyed continued fellowship, after having already completed our year of Governor Nominee and Elect training in Pittsburgh, Jacksonville, and over many Zoom calls. We were incredibly proud when Marshall Butler's (Zone 33 Director Elect) new video, Rotary Revolution Rap, was played on the big screen for all to see. Our members will be seeing this video as well, soon.



It was an action-packed and inspirational week with so many dynamic speakers, ideas shared with peers, and an invaluable learning experience. I feel more inspired than ever to bring this wealth of knowledge back to our District as we "Create Lasting Impact" in the new Rotary year.

## District Area Governors Meeting



*by Ronnie Teitler Davis*

**January 11 at 9:23?AM** ·

Yesterday many of the [Rotary District 7620](#) Area Governors got together to hear about what's happening in our district they will need to share with the presidents in their areas. They also got to get to know one another and build relationships, which is big part of being a Rotarian! Thanks to all who showed up! Let's do this again!!

[Mandy Warfield Granger](#), [Dave Vogel](#), [Marilyn Nevy de Caballero](#), [Chris Zabriskie](#), [Billy Louis](#), [Dawn Wittfelt](#), [Bea Carson](#), Varda Fink, CyndieShadow, [Don Rau](#), [Cindy Pehl](#), DrNinaMezu-Nwaba

## Building a Community of Readers in Rural Kenya: Grant Successfully Completed!

**By Temrah Okonski**

When I first began working with the Rotary Club of Machakos in Kenya's Mwala sub-county on a Rotary grant focused on rural literacy, I was drawn to our partner organization, Kenya Connect, and its belief that access to books fosters a lifelong love of reading. In the Mwala sub-county, many students grow up without electricity, internet, or print materials at home. English, the language used for Kenya's national exams, is often their third language, making success in school even more challenging. Kenya Connect was already known as a reputable organization helping this community strengthen educational outcomes.



From the first draft to final approval, the grant took nearly two years. At times, the process felt slow and challenging. But as the proposal moved through revisions and conversations between my club (The Ellicott City Rotary Club), the host club, the international club (The Machakos Rotary Club, District 9212), and our partner, Kenya Connect, the questions we were asked forced us to sharpen our goals, strengthen our plan, and think carefully about sustainability. Looking back now, as I see the results, I'm grateful that I persevered. The support I received from Carolyn Johnson, a member of the Rotary Cadre of Technical Advisers, Past District Governor Barton Goldenberg, and Regional Grants Officer Nora Beamish-Lannon was invaluable to the project's success.

This BEL grant was financed by the Hanson Directed Gift for BEL Global Grants and expanded upon Kenya Connect's already successful, community-wide approach to reading. Rather than focusing on a single intervention, the project increased access to a mobile library program, Saturday Storytimes, and reading clubs for students and parents. The grant also supported teacher trainings developed with local educators. Books were delivered directly to schools and to Kenya Connect's library, ensuring consistent access for learners.

What stood out most was how Rotarians became part of a shared effort to make reading accessible, valued, and joyful. Essential to the grant's implementation was the trust that developed between my club and the host club. Regular communication, careful financial oversight, and shared responsibility were key to the project's success. [Read More](#)

## District 7620 Supports First Ever Faith in Democracy Interfaith Concert

District 7620 played a key role in supporting the first ever Faith in Democracy Interfaith Concert on January 6, 2026. With many Rotarians attending, the concert was a success and featured 7620 Rotarian Dr. Vijay Gowtha and his wife sharing Hindu reflections and music. About 20 sponsors and cosponsors joined District 7620, including the DC Alliance of [Braver Angels](#). A dozen artists and speakers from the Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Bahá'í and Christian faiths joined more than 200 audience members standing and singing "Let's Stand Together" in the Grand Finale.



The concert was a big step forward to reclaim January 6 each year as a day of hope and unity, not despair and division.

Video: [Reimagine January 6! First Ever Faith In Democracy Interfaith Concert](#) (the [Livestream](#) had more than 500 views but had audio issues)

[Highlight Photos and Videos from Faith in Peace Concert Jan 6 2026.](#)

7620 Rotarian David Searby will be putting together a plan in the months ahead so that this January 6 tradition might continue. The goal is to get more great musicians and a greater number of even more committed sponsors to help us reach an even larger, broader and more diverse audience with our unifying, nonpartisan message of democracy, peace and justice. Stay tuned!

## Six Rotary Clubs Take Advantage of the Special District Grants Opportunity!

The Rotary Foundation is a catalyst for positive change, empowering clubs in our District to multiply their efforts to create lasting impact. With the goal of having every Rotary Club in our District experience the benefits of The Rotary Foundation, DG Mandy Granger and DRFC B.J. Chamberlain-Skinner introduced a special, one-time 2:1 matching DDF opportunity for District community grants. This initiative ensures that even clubs not currently MOU qualified could access essential funding, highlighting the benefit of the Foundation's resources.

We are pleased to announce that 6 of our Clubs—including one Rotaract Club—have special projects that have been approved by the Grants Committee. From installing outdoor classroom seating at an elementary school to conducting a community assessment for the renovation of a girls' bathroom, these projects showcase the diverse and meaningful ways our clubs serve their communities. Each initiative is a testament to how District 7620 Clubs join with The Rotary Foundation to turn ideas into action, fostering creativity and compassion.

Specifically, the grants awarded to date are:

[Read More](#)

## UN80 - Commemorating the Signing of the UN Charter 80 Years Ago

Hosted by District 5150, Rotarians from around the globe and members of the United Nations celebrated the signing of the UN Charter 80 years ago in San Francisco on December 11th, 2025. Global Goals, Local Action recognized Rotary's longstanding relationship with the United Nations and collective progress towards achieving the UN SDGs through local collaboration and innovation to respond to the world's biggest challenges. Among some of the participants were Francesco Arezzo, 2025-2026 Rotary International President, John Hewko, General Secretary & CEO, Rotary International, Melissa Fleming, Under Secretary General for Global Communications, United Nations, Vicki Puliz, Trustee, Cyril Noirtin, Dean, Rotary Representative Network & Rotary Representative to UNESCO and OECD, Michael J. Nyenhuis,

President and CEO, UNICEF USA and our own Rose Cardarelli and Marilyn Cruz.



## Register for 2026 Rotary International Convention in Taipei, Taiwan 13-17 June 2026

By Flora S Bartek



District 7620 Taipei RI  
Convention News Corner

There's still time to register for the 2026 Rotary International Convention in Taipei, 13-17 June 2026. Be sure to check out

<https://convention.rotary.org/en-us/registration> for registration information and all you need to know, to include travel requirements. Stay tuned for lots more District information about the RI Convention. Hope to see you in Taipei, Taiwan!

## Southern Frederick Rotary's Joe Richardson on Television Program

When Rotary talks about creating lasting change, this is what it looks like... right here in our own community We're proud to share that our very own Joe Richardson Sr. was recently interviewed by NBC to discuss Lunch Out Landfills, an initiative focused on reducing waste

and building more sustainable habits in schools and communities.

Joe's leadership is a powerful reminder that global priorities like protecting the environment truly come to life through local action. What starts with awareness turns into real, measurable impact when people step forward to lead.

The interview is scheduled to air next week, so be on the lookout, and help us share the story when it does. This is Rotary at its best: service above self, community-rooted leadership, and neighbors working together to make a difference.

Thank you, Joe, for representing our club so thoughtfully and for showing how local voices can drive meaningful change.



## Retired NBA Star Recounts Career, Shares Views on Athletic Issues

Phil Chenier, who played nine seasons for the Washington Bullets and spent 33 years in the broadcast booth, discussed that aspect of his life, and more, while speaking at a recent Columbia-Patuxent Rotary meeting.

[Read More](#)

## Rotary, Hammond High Food Drive Shows Christmas Spirit



Columbia-Patuxent Rotarians and the Hammond High School Interact Club gave an early Christmas present to the Howard County Food Bank – 1,773 pounds of non-perishable groceries. It was the largest donation ever for their annual canned food drive.

[Read More](#)

## Disaster Update – Phase II Recovery of Hard-hit Jamaica

**By Bob Grill, President, Disaster Aid USA; Paul Mahata, Co-Chair, District Disaster Relief Committee**

District 7620 Disaster Relief Committee continues to coordinate with Disaster Aid USA to respond to disasters.

Currently, we are focused on Phase II recovery of Jamaica, hit hard by Category-5 Hurricane Melissa. To support such work, money and supplies are always needed; and we request that you and your club consider donating money to DAUSA.

**Hurricane Melissa, Jamaica:** Category-5 Hurricane, with sustained winds of 175+ mph hit western end of Jamaica very hard. Framed homes were totally destroyed; and roof failure and wall collapse occurred extensively. Fallen trees and power poles isolated entire communities, and power outages have lasted for weeks. Major flooding, landslides, and road/bridge damage have made disaster response most difficult.

**Phase II Recovery: DAUSA** is officially launching **Phase II of Jamaica response**, and the needs are immediate. During this phase, DAUSA will be partnering with Pastor Dave with Uprising City Church to deliver **food packs to 150 families** who are still recovering from Hurricane Melissa. At **\$70 per family**, this effort ensures families have meals and dignity throughout the holiday season. Phase II will also expand into roof repairs, church and community center stabilization, agricultural recovery, and longer-term housing solutions. Partnering with the Montego Bay Rotary Club, DAUSA plans to help **40 farmers** restart operations with seed and repairs following storm damage.

In order for the Committee and the DAUSA to do this type of disaster relief work in the coming days and weeks, we encourage the Rotary clubs, and individual Rotarians and Rotaractors to consider donating money to DAUSA (a 501-c-3 organization, co-founded by PDG Bob Grill). Please visit the following link for online donation:



[https://disasteraidusa.networkforgood.com/projects/262272-hurricane-melissa?hid=MzA1NjkzMQ==&utm\\_campaign=dms\\_email\\_blast\\_4262456](https://disasteraidusa.networkforgood.com/projects/262272-hurricane-melissa?hid=MzA1NjkzMQ==&utm_campaign=dms_email_blast_4262456)

Alternately, you may consider sending checks to: Disaster Aid USA, 9817 Lanham Severn Road, Lanham MD 20706. For any questions on this initiative, please feel free to contact Co-Chairs: Paul Mahata ( [Pmahata@verizon.net](mailto:Pmahata@verizon.net) ) and Steve Kemp ( [Stevekemp77@gmail.com](mailto:Stevekemp77@gmail.com) ).

***DAUSA volunteer delivering food to resident of western Jamaica***

## Parole Rotary Club Pre-Charter Day/ Holiday Celebration Meeting

The Parole Rotary Club held its pre-Charter Day and Holiday Celebration meeting on December 9th. Our Arundel and Broadneck High School Interactors, along with our Youth Exchange student joined us for this special meeting. They shared their community service projects, and the Arundel music students performed holiday songs. The club previewed its history in commemoration of its 40th Charter anniversary on December 10th, which will be officially celebrated in



March 2026. Thanks to all who attended, and Happy Holidays and a prosperous Rotary New Year!



**Ravishankar Dakoju and his wife, Paola, have pledged \$50M for The Rotary Foundation**



Rotary International

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Longtime Rotary member Ravishankar Dakoju and his wife, Paola, have pledged an extraordinary US\$50 million gift to The Rotary Foundation — one of the largest individual contributions in Rotary's history... more



## In Memoriam: Jack Arness, Past President, Washington DC Rotary Club



**By Patrick Kavanaugh**

I noticed Jack Arness's Obit in this morning's Washington Post and have attached a copy from the funeral homes website (below). Jack was a Past President (1980-81) and longtime member of our club. He was also a very well respected trial lawyer as you will be able to tell from the obit. [Read More](#)

### Four-Way Test

Is it the truth?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better friendships?

### District 7620 Newsletter Team:

Bob Nelson, PDG

Dave Vogel, DGND

## ROTARY'S VISION STATEMENT

**TOGETHER** WE SEE A WORLD  
WHERE **PEOPLE** UNITE AND TAKE ACTION  
TO **CREATE** LASTING  
**CHANGE** ACROSS THE GLOBE  
IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND IN OURSELVES