

WILLIAMSTON SUNRISE ROTARY CLUB

Outstanding Volunteer Program Award

2015 Governor's Service Award

Nomination Narrative

Rotary International is a world-wide service club organization with more than 1.2 million member volunteers providing time and talent to further the Rotary principle of “service above self.” One of the many Rotary clubs around the world that demonstrates exemplary community service based on the Rotary philosophy is the Williamston Sunrise Rotary Club (Williamston Rotary).

Williamston Rotary, established by a small group of talented volunteers in 1997, plays a central role in service to the people and charitable organizations in and around Williamston, Michigan. Making the Williamston community a better place to live through volunteering, is key to the spirit of Williamston Rotary. As a strictly volunteer organization, Williamston Rotary serves the largely rural area around a small city of about 4,000. Williamston is a jewel along the Red Cedar River, on the old plank road (Grand River Avenue) between Detroit and Lansing. While downtown Williamston offers trendy restaurants, theatres, and shops, there are many folks needing financial help or volunteer labor to get by. To this end, Williamston Rotary has filled a volunteer and fundraising niche in the community where other service or charitable organizations, public and private, have not been able to serve.

Williamston Rotary is frequently the first and last resort for individuals and organizations in the community when help is needed in a hurry. From the resident with MS who requires financial aid and manpower to build a wheel chair ramp to her front door, or the Food Bank that needs a new refrigerator to store perishable eggs for its needy clients, or the youth camp that has

a pressing need to upgrade its restroom facilities, Williamston Rotary has been there for the past 18 years with grant money and willing volunteers.

By Rotary standards, Williamston Rotary is a relatively small club, with about 27 members from a wide variety of backgrounds and talents. The members include retired and active state and local government officials, as well as former and current faculty and school administrators, members of the clergy, legal and law enforcement professionals, financial services and other active and retired experts in a number of fields. In addition to Williamston Rotary membership, most of the members are active in other service and charitable organizations and bring the opportunity to network throughout the community to solve problems greater than any single component group. For example, members of the Williamston Lions Club, Kiwanis, the Williamston Library Foundation, the Williamston Senior Center and the Williamston Schools Foundation frequently cooperate with Williamston Rotary to raise funds that provide cash and volunteer labor to meet specific needs that arise in the community. Partnering in order to maximize the impact of the various service organizations efforts is essential to success of Williamston Rotary.

Recent funding and volunteer projects include donations of money and labor to Habitat for Humanity, the Williamston Food Bank, YMCA Camp Pa-Wa-Pi, the Williamston Theater, Dansville Library, Williamston Band Boosters, the Scheffel Toy Project, Williamston/Webberville student of the quarter, beautification of the Williamston Post Office grounds, Williamstown Township Parks, City of Williamston Parks and grants to needy local families during the holidays. All of the funds are raised by members through a variety of activities that include individual donations, Charity poker and the annual Duck Race on the Red

Cedar River. In the past ten years, Williamston Rotary has donated nearly \$250,000 to over 30 projects. Money is largely raised locally and nearly all of it is spent locally.

Fundraising events, such as the annual Duck Race on the Red Cedar River is a well-loved community event staged during Williamston's Red Cedar Jubilee. Hundreds of residents line the river banks (which, by the way, are also cleared and cleaned by Williamston Rotary volunteers) to watch thousands of yellow rubber ducks race down the river to be caught and counted by other volunteers. Each duck has a number that corresponds to a ticket purchased by individuals in the hope of getting a fast swimming duck and a chance at one of the many prizes donated by other community businesses and individual. The businesses donate goods, services and prizes and also sponsor the entire event. This business/service club partnership fosters goodwill and hopefully makes the entire community aware of the various small companies doing business here. In this small way, Williamston Rotary promotes local job creation by working locally for the good of the community.

While money is always helpful, Williamston Rotary members frequently get their hands dirty in order to get the job done. Donations of labor include restoration of the park pavilion and restoration of the playground equipment, and construction of pickle ball courts at Williamston's McCormick Park, construction of the pavilion and Eloo sustainable toilets/restrooms at the Williamstown Township Park, construction of handicap ramp at a residents home, restoration and updating of restrooms at the YMCA's Camp Pa-Wa-Pi, and a number of other efforts. Although it is difficult to quantify, Williamston Rotary members donate many hours each week to joint efforts. It is not unusual for members to devote 80 or 100 hours to a large project. The duck race alone, conservatively consumes 50 person days of effort for planning, sponsorship,

ticket sales, event planning and the race itself. Also, no ducks have been harmed during the years of racing and relatively few have escaped Williamston Rotary's "duck wranglers."

Mentoring a new generation of those in service to their community includes the "Students of the Quarter" program with Williamston and Webberville Community Schools. Every three months, school administrators nominate students that exemplify both academic, athletic and community service. These students are honored with a small cash award and an invitation from Williamston Rotary to share breakfast and discuss their achievements. The students are encouraged to use the cash contribution to further their educational activities. While this program rewards students for their accomplishments, club members benefit by "touching the future." Club members have also been active with local scout troops, providing money and/or time to efforts initiated by the young men and women involved. Again, one of the aims of Williamston Rotary is to foster new generations of citizens involved in and caring for their community.

In closing, whether or not Williamston Rotary is considered for a Governor's Service Award, the club intends to continue with its efforts of providing service to those in need. As the individual with MS who got her wheelchair ramp said, "I am so grateful to Habitat for Humanity, Williamston Sunrise Rotary and the Williamston Lions Club. I would like to thank them very much; they cannot understand what this means to me, this is the most wonderful Christmas gift." May Williamston Rotary's yellow rubber ducks swim the Red Cedar River for many years..