

# The Catalyst



A Monthly Membership Newsletter for Rotary International District 6890 • June 2020

## What a Long, Strange Year It's Been!

It's difficult – if not impossible – to find a more turbulent year in Rotary's history. In my 30 plus years as a Rotarian, I certainly cannot recall one. We entered the 2019-2020 Rotary year mired in the same challenges that have haunted many of our clubs for decades: changing landscape of Main Street businesses, an aging membership, increased competition for time and resources. In March, COVID-19 plagued our world, forcing Rotary clubs to suspend the long-standing tradition of weekly face-to-face meetings. Amidst the uncertainty of these circumstances, we are called upon to examine inequalities in our world, in our communities, and in our clubs. It is unsettling. It is difficult. And at times, solutions seem distant and ambiguous.

As Rotarians, we are *People of Action*. In recent years, Rotary District 6890 has chartered two new, alternative-format clubs, bringing new people and new ideas into Rotary. We created the first-ever hybrid Rotary-Rotaract club, enhancing the pipeline for young people to become Rotarians. And when COVID-19 closed down our meeting places, we led the way to support clubs migrating to online meetings (see the interview with George Robertson-Burnett on page 57 of the June edition of *The Rotarian*). As we enter the 2020-2021 Rotary year, the question is not, "How can we survive?" The question is, "How will we thrive?"

Incoming RI President Holger Knaack asks that districts and clubs articulate strategic plans with emphasis on Membership. Our own Governor-Elect Mark Scolnick will be reviewing Membership plans as part of his official club visits. Plans should include a "state-of-the-club" assessment to understand trends. Plans should include goals to reflect the demographics of the communities we serve. Plans should include action steps to achieve measurable outcomes. This year-end edition is a collection of articles from throughout the year, designed to stimulate thoughts and highlight resources. We must be the *catalyst* for change!

## "Please Explain It Using Grocery Store Analogies!" (from August 2019)

Having spent much of my career in the supermarket industry, I still tend to view the world through the lens of that experience. When coaching managers on merchandising basics, a common theme would be, "imagine you weren't allowed to use signs." Of course, signs remained an integral part of our communication strategy. However, my premise was that even without reading giant item and price messages, based solely on the presentation of our products, exciting features and great values should be obvious to a customer from the moment they first enter any given department.

With that analogy in mind, consider a visitor's first impressions upon entering your Rotary club. How quickly are our values evident (service, fellowship, diversity, integrity, leadership)? Unlike the often impersonal grocery store environment, we enjoy the benefit of being able to control guests' (members and visitors) experiences through direct contact. How far does a person travel into the room before they are greeted? Is greeting simply an assigned duty or do the majority of members make an effort to welcome others as they arrive? Is seating comfortable and inviting, or do outsiders feel like the unpopular kid in the school lunchroom (sorry, a pre-grocery-store analogy). Other than a "Rotary Club of..." banner, is it obvious that a Rotary meeting is taking place? Is the Rotary logo prominently displayed? Are local leaders wearing name badges highlighting their vocations? Do the faces of attendees reflect the community composition? Is the meeting conducted with professionalism and integrity?

Long-time managers often became "store-blind," losing sensitivity to worn equipment, dirty corners, or other gradual conditions. Similarly, it is easy to grow both comfortable and complacent in our Rotary clubs. If you've been around for a long time, please beware: It is easy to be "club-blind!"

**Note: This month's edition of Zone 34 *MEMBERSHIPPLUS* has been sent as a separate file.**

## How Much Should It Cost to be a Rotarian?

(from September 2019)

Travel from one club to the next and you will get a wide variety of answers. In truth, there are three primary factors that contribute to membership dues. First, Rotary International and Rotary districts each charge administrative fees (for D-6890, combined, about \$125 annually). Second, clubs usually cover the cost of sending their future leader to the annual President-Elect Training Seminar (PETS). The approximately \$300 registration charge is typically spread across all club Rotarians such that a club of 30 members would include \$10 in their dues, for a total of \$135 in “external” Rotary costs. Anything beyond that is really value added by the club experience.



Value may be added by holding meetings at a unique venue, offering exceptional quality meals, hosting extraordinary speakers, or otherwise providing “value” in the eyes of the membership. Value means different things to different people and it is unlikely that all will agree on a single definition. Each club must ask and answer the question for themselves: What do we offer of value to justify the cost of being a Rotarian? For most of us, value is measured – to varying degrees of importance – in opportunities for networking, service, friendship, and leadership development. Is your club a bargain for the investment?

## Everyone Knows November is Rotary Foundation Month

(from November 2019)

November, Rotary Foundation Month, is surely the best known Rotary themed month of the year. But what do we do to celebrate? Many District 6890 Rotarians recently attended our annual Foundation Gala where clubs and individuals received awards for TRF participation during the 2018-2019 Rotary year. Still there are abundant opportunities for clubs to celebrate and recognize their own achievements.

One of the most overlooked data points on club Contribution Recognition Summary (CRS) reports is “All-Time Giving.” Found in the upper right corner of the first page, this represents the total amount members have contributed to The Rotary Foundation since your club’s charter. The figures may surprise you. Many of our clubs have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to TRF! If you have just crossed a milestone, it’s time to celebrate. If you are approaching one, it’s time to set goals and strategies. As we contemplate membership growth opportunities (including “Leap Into Rotary 2020”), sharing impressive club generosity is a real attention getter. And don’t forget to highlight how District Designated Funds are applied to LOCAL projects and charities.

## Learn More About the Rotary and Toastmasters Alliance

(from March 2020)

Earlier this year, Rotary International announced a new strategic partnership with Toastmasters International. Much like the evolution of RI-mandated club bylaws, the alliance appears to have very few, if any, rules. Briefly examining the Toastmasters website, it appears they have very similar individual club autonomy to Rotary. Most Toastmasters clubs meet monthly. According to [Toastmasters.org](http://Toastmasters.org), dues are only \$90.00 per month, though clubs may charge differently, depending upon how they are structured. This time of “social distancing” may be an ideal time to make contact via phone or email and explore possible mutual interests. More information from Rotary International is available by [clicking here](#) (log in to My Rotary may be required). What about a group that concentrates Rotary initiatives three weeks per month, and public speaking and leadership once?

## It’s About People, Not Numbers

(from April 2020)

With the help of PDG Tom Wagner and our district leadership team, many clubs have quickly transitioned to a new reality, meeting online and scrambling to adapt to our “safer at home” COVID-19 response. Understanding that, I debated the wisdom of continuing my practice of posting quarterly club membership statistics. But, amidst all of the changes, it struck me that the numbers are not simply statistics, they are *people*. We are fortunate to have more than 1,700 Rotarians in our district.

Now, more than ever, clubs should take *inventory* of their membership to ensure that we maintain communication by any means necessary! Whether by Zoom, phone, or US Mail, club leadership must act now to demonstrate that “Every Rotarian has value, every Rotarian is *valued!*”

## **I Guess the Joke was on Me!**

(from December 2019)

Early in my career as a supermarket store director, I set out to prove a point among my department leaders, all fairly mature in their roles. For months we had been working on providing line level employees with a greater understanding of our business, including key performance indicators (KPIs) and individual roles in achieving them. I was convinced that, despite their good intentions, my leadership team had been deficient in communicating departmental business objectives and issuing periodic report cards on our progress. My solution was to facilitate meetings in which I would ask associates to describe how they felt their department was performing and why. Assuming respondents would be bewildered, having no idea if their team was performing well or not, I drew some satisfaction anticipating the “I told you so,” I would subsequently deliver to the surely embarrassed department managers. Our meetings did not go exactly as I had planned.

Qualitatively, our staff was surprisingly in tune to the general health of our business (or at least their portion of it). “I think we’re doing well” or “I know we have room to improve” or “We seem to be doing great,” were directionally accurate in their respective areas. However, when came to the justification, a shockingly high number of associates cited he awareness of their

department’s affinity for “cutting scheduled hours” as the key metric by which they gauged their success. Clearly, our department managers were making this a highly publicized, though somewhat disproportionate priority. But, instead of enjoying the spoils of being right, I had to look inward for the real source of the information problem.

Our company had become such micromanagers that they required stores to send in daily departmental payroll variations from plan. So, guess what I was talking about to my managers every morning? It was a valuable lesson and a catalyst for me to begin better emphasizing sales, conditions, and inventory management.

In most of our Rotary clubs, we meticulously track our giving to The Rotary Foundation. And we recognize our most generous donors with plaques and pins. We frequently brag about our fundraising activities. We regularly promote our community and international projects. But how many meetings, or portions of meetings, are spent discussing membership trends? How much energy is placed on improving member (or visitor) experience, venue conditions, or meeting management? If our clubs facilitated similar meetings to those described above, how many Rotarians would include membership statistics in their assessment of club health? Who would be embarrassed? What will be the catalyst for clubs to prioritize membership with the same passion we emphasize other endeavors?

***Find Abundant Resources at [Rotary.org](https://www.rotary.org)***  
***My Rotary > Member Center > Rotary Club Central***  
***(Club Goals, Membership Trends, Demographic Profiles, and more!)***

## ***Rotary Opens Opportunities, but We May Have to Look for Them***

(from May 2020)

In January, Rotary International President-Elect Mark Daniel Maloney unveiled the annual theme for our 2020-2021 Rotary year: Rotary Opens opportunities. Surely, he did not imagine that we would all enter the new year on the heels of a worldwide pandemic that has radically changed the way we meet. But, perhaps by meeting radical change with radical response, Rotarians can discover opportunity previously not considered. In the face of digital meetings, what if:

- We engaged high-profile speakers that are otherwise unavailable (out-of-town, out-of-state, or out-of-country)?
- We contacted former members with distance or time constraints and invited them to reconsider Rotary?
- We actively recruited new members to whom online meeting access would appeal?
- We explored available technology to accommodate future hybrid-format meetings that would allow for “virtual” participants (speakers or attendees)?
- We assigned digitally-savvy club members to serve as “buddies” for technically-challenged existing members? This might require a weekly phone call to check in, or it could result in two Rotarians sharing a laptop – from a socially safe distance, of course.

## Another Successful Engage Rotary Youth Day!

(from February 2020)

Earlier this month, the annual Engage Rotary Youth Day was held at Rotary's Camp Florida. Roughly 60 dedicated people, including Interactors, Rotaractors, and Rotarians, gathered to discuss a variety of topics ranging from service to fundraising to how we connect and communicate. Of course, I was most *engaged* in Membership, and I came away with several key takeaways:

First, I was impressed by the thoughtful commitment of our younger participants. Many of them shared valuable ideas about how to make our organization more successful and more attractive to younger members.

Second, I was moved by a conversation about formality (or lack thereof) in club meetings. Many people voiced their preference for more casual meeting formats. I shared my "near-anxiety" when a meeting is scheduled to begin at a given time, only to have people straggle in for the first 20 minutes before a call to order. One solution is to have a clearly defined period for socializing – say, for the first 30 minutes of a gathering – with a clear understanding that the business meeting will begin at a precise, designated time.

My only disappointment was that it appears, like many of our Rotary clubs, there were very few, if any, articulated strategies to grow. Growth can be particularly challenging in school-based clubs, since there is a constant departure of graduates and arrival of freshmen – who may or may not be familiar with Rotary. We need to create a cycle of recruitment to attract and engage more members than we are losing. The first step, of course, is to examine current trends to determine future needs.

Based upon the new "crop" of future Rotarians I encountered at Engage Rotary Youth Day, I left encouraged that Rotary would continue to prosper – through necessary evolution that makes Rotary look different than the club I joined decades ago.

## Pathways to Rotary

(from February 2020)

Engage Rotary Youth Day also included several members of our unique hybrid Tampa Rotaract / Rotary Satellite Club of New Tampa Noon (see *The Catalyst*, September 2019). This prompted me to contemplate how few of our youth program alumni ultimately join Rotary clubs. What is the potential?

Consider the following member data from Rotary International as of February 1, 2020:

	<u>Countries</u>	<u>Clubs</u>	<u>Members</u>
<b>INTERACT</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>20,372</b>	<b>468,556</b>
<b>ROTARACT</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>10,904</b>	<b>250,792</b>
<b>ROTARY</b>	<b>200+</b>	<b>35,945</b>	<b>1,208,611</b>

Assuming four year programs, if we successfully matriculated all of our Interactors through Rotaract and into Rotary, we would produce an annual pipeline of over 117,000 new Rotarians...enough to replenish nearly 100% of our typical yearly attrition!

Does your (sponsoring) club provide guidance to connect graduating HS seniors with Rotaract clubs at their chosen college? Is there an active strategy to "graduate" college-based Rotaractors into Rotary clubs? While many of these life events involve relocation, Rotary's online resources make it fairly easy to locate and contact Rotary clubs around the world.

[www.Rotary6890.org/Membership](http://www.Rotary6890.org/Membership)

*Visit our Rotary District 6890 website for a selection of membership tools and manuals immediately available for download.*

## Matching Strategy to Data

(from May 2019)

District 6890 Training Assembly was held earlier this month. Among numerous topics, we discussed the importance of finding and understanding membership trends as a starting point for building an effective strategy. The table presented to the right shows our five-year starting membership by club and current levels as of May 15, 2019. District totals for prior years may include clubs that have since disbanded or merged.

Five-year trend reports can be found at

**My Rotary > Manage > Reports > Membership > Club Data > Membership Trends**

But that will only tell part of the story. Start and end figures represent only net changes in membership, not total new members added and total terminations. Termination histories are also available from Rotary.org.

**My Rotary > Manage > Reports > Membership > Club Data > Membership Termination Profile**

With an understanding attrition rates, targets can be established to attract (and engage) sufficient candidates to create a net membership gain.

Do you really know your club's five-year membership trend? If it does not appear to be moving the right direction, it may be time for action.