



Rotary
District 6960



**THE MAGIC
OF ROTARY**

May 2025

District 6960 Newsletter

MESSAGE FROM DISTRICT GOVERNOR KELSEY SOLA

April was an exciting and inspiring month across District 6960! From global initiatives to local service, our Rotary clubs have been making a powerful impact. I've had the pleasure of traveling throughout the district, attending remarkable events, and witnessing firsthand the dedication and creativity of our members. Whether it's supporting international service efforts or launching impactful local projects, your passion for service truly shines. Last month, our district grew in membership and I look forward to see that growth continue. It's because of our Rotary family that we attract other like minded individuals. Let's grow together!

Our clubs have hosted some incredible events this month—each one a testament to the strength and spirit of Rotary. From fundraising galas to hands-on service projects, the energy and enthusiasm I've seen are truly contagious. Thank you for your continued commitment to "Service Above Self" and for making a real difference in the world and right here in our own communities. Let's carry this momentum forward as we approach the final stretch of the Rotary year!

I'm excited for the month ahead and what we can do together! May is Youth Service Month--how will you impact youth in your community?



2024-25 District 6960
Rotary Foundation Team

Jim Hinck

District Foundation Chair

Barb Spangler, PDG

District Foundation Vice-Chair

Julie Pedretti

District Global Grants Chair

Cindy Cedeno

District Grants Chair

Steve Schlueter, PDG

District Legacy Gifts Chair

Dr. Tam Mustapha, PDG

District Major Gifts Chair

Pam Akins, PDG

District Paul Harris Society Chair

Doug Smoot

District Paul Harris Fellow Chair

EREY Chair

David Lusty, PDG

District Major Donors Chair

Eldon Bohrofen

District Endowment Chair

Nancy Ross

District Wealth Transfer Chair

Tom Setchel

Annual Fund Share Chairman

Cheryl Willett

District Polio Co-Chair

Richard Willett

District Polio Co-Chair

Rich Kirschner, PDG

Zone Foundation Advisor

*Click a name to contact a
member of your
District Foundation Team*

THE ROTARY FOUNDATION

by Jim Hinck, District 6960 Foundation Chair

It is hard to believe we are in the final two months of this Rotary year! If your club was awarded a District Grant now is the time to see it to completion. Time is of the essence to close these grants out.

Now is also the time to make sure any Rotary Foundation money has been sent into the Rotary Foundation on behalf of individual Rotarians and clubs.

As a District we have had a banner year in Foundation giving! I want to thank each and every Rotarian in our District but especially all the members of the District 6960 Foundation team.

Thank you all for your continued generosity



Ways to Give

Donating to Rotary means clean water and sanitation. Health and hope in areas that were once ravaged by diseases like polio. Economic development and new opportunities. Your financial help makes all this...



2024-25 District 6960
Membership Team

Donald Thomas

District Membership Chair

David Lowden

District Membership New Clubs

Teresa Brennan

District Membership Committee

Brad Corbett

District Membership Committee

Jim Henry, PDG

District Membership Committee

Bob Knight

District Membership Committee

Carol Peterson

District Membership Committee

Darryl Keys

District Membership Committee

***Click a name to contact a
member of your
District Foundation Team***

ROTARY MEMBERSHIP

by PDG Darryl Keys, District 6960 Membership Committee

Revolutionizing Rotary: How RLI Sparks Membership Magic

Imagine a new Rotarian stepping into your club—eager but unsure, wondering how to fit into the whirlwind of service, fellowship, and impact. Now picture them a few months later, leading projects, forging friendships, and radiating Rotary pride. What's the secret sauce? It's not luck or endless recruitment drives—it's the Rotary Leadership Institute (RLI) Part One, a game-changer that's transforming clubs one member at a time.

The Membership Crisis: A Call to Action

Rotary clubs across District 6960 and the U.S. face a stark reality: membership is declining. Each year, our district welcomes 350 new faces, only to lose half within two years. That's 175 passionate souls slipping through our fingers, taking with them untapped potential for service projects, fundraisers, and community impact. More members mean more hands to serve, more hearts to connect, and more dollars for The Rotary Foundation. So, how do we keep them?

RLI: The Spark That Ignites Engagement

Enter RLI Part One, a single day that packs more Rotary wisdom than a year or more of meetings. This isn't just a seminar—it's a vibrant journey through Rotary's heart and soul. New members dive into its history, explore its global reach, and discover where they fit in. From brainstorming service ideas to networking with Rotarians across the district, they leave inspired, connected, and ready to make a difference.

The proof? Research shows RLI attendees are **30% more likely to stay** than those who don't attend. No other strategy comes close to this impact. Yet only 8% of our 350 annual new members—fewer than 30—experience RLI Part One. That leaves 320 members slower to engage, less aware of Rotary's value, and more likely to drift away.

A Win-Win for Clubs and Members

RLI isn't just for future presidents or board members. Think of the "L" as Learning, not just Leadership. It's where new Rotarians uncover the why behind our work—why their time, skills, and passion matter. They return to clubs buzzing with ideas, ready to lead a fundraiser, join a committee, or simply connect more deeply with fellow members. For clubs, this means more active participants, stronger projects, and a tighter-knit community. For members, it's the key to unlocking the full Rotary experience. Take Sarah, who joined a club in our district last year. Feeling overwhelmed, she nearly quit after a few months. Then she attended RLI Part One. "It was like a lightbulb went off," she said. "I met Rotarians from other clubs, learned about district and global grants, and realized I could make a real impact." Today, Sarah is deeply engaged in her club's literacy program and has hardly missed a meeting since.

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Seizing the Low-Hanging Fruit

The beauty of RLI is its simplicity. It's a ready-made solution, but it requires action. Club leaders must make RLI Part One a priority, embedding it into onboarding like a reflex. Register new members within weeks of induction—don't wait for them to "settle in." It's a small investment made by the club for a massive return. In District 6960, clubs that prioritize RLI report livelier meetings, stronger retention, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Your Club's Next Step

The membership crisis isn't a mystery, it's a challenge we can meet head-on. RLI Part One is your club's secret weapon, turning fleeting members into lifelong Rotarians. Start today: commit to registering every new member for the next RLI session after they join. Ask your board to make RLI a policy, not a suggestion. The results will speak for themselves—more engagement, more impact, and a club that thrives.

What's stopping your club from unlocking RLI's magic? Take the leap and watch your Rotary community soar!

Rotary Club of Marco Island Noontime Makes Impact All the Time

Donation to the Marco Island YMCA Healthy Living Center

The Rotary Club of Marco Island Noontime is thrilled to announce that through our successful fundraisers, we are able to donate \$75,000 to the Marco Island YMCA Healthy Living Center. We are specifically funding the Bike Racks and the Library, offering good exposure for our club as the Y is home to many community events throughout the year for Marco Island visitors and residents alike.



Our club president, Sue Haviland, along with club members, Deb Henry (Marco Island City Councilor), and Rick LoCastro (Collier County Commissioner) (both pictured) attended the groundbreaking ceremonies for this new Healthy Living Center.

Leadership Marco

We are so proud to announce that 4 of our members graduated from Leadership Marco this year and were honored at the Marco Island Chamber of Commerce Gala.

Leadership Marco is a program that teaches participants about the community through a series of mandatory full-day sessions that include the history of the island, its media outlets, law enforcement and the fire-rescue departments, the hospitality industry, economy, and education. Congratulations to Jill Sandberg, Sean Duggan, John Riley, and Deb Henry (all pictured here). We applaud these Rotarians for their leadership and commitment to their community.





Annual Charity Golf Open
Win a new **golf cart** or a
fabulous Sandals **vacation** in
our two Hole in One contests!

Sponsors:



May 22*, 2025
Babcock National
Golf & Country Club

\$150 single or \$560 foursome
Games, Prizes, Raffles, Mulligans.
Southern Barbecue Lunch

***MAY 15 DEADLINE TO REGISTER**

Register:

[tinyurl .com/BabcockOPEN](https://tinyurl.com/BabcockOPEN)



BABCOCK RANCH

Contact:(574) 274-1397
bronwynstoner@yahoo.com



The Rotary Club of Lakewood Ranch Awards \$142,000 in Grants!



At a recent awards luncheon, the Rotary Club of Lakewood Ranch proudly awarded \$142,000 in grants to 36 deserving local nonprofits and other Rotary projects! The funds were raised through the 2024 Suncoast Food & Wine Fest. This annual event is a popular mainstay of Lakewood Ranch that brings dozens of local restaurants, unique wine vendors and hundreds of people for an afternoon of fun and fundraising.

The awards luncheon was a moving celebration of impact. As each nonprofit accepted their grant, we heard powerful stories of how their projects are changing lives—like filling 1,000 backpacks with food for children through All Faiths Food Bank, furnishing the new dining hall at Foundation for Dreams' Dream Oaks Camp, and helping Good Samaritan Pharmacy & Health Services provide critical medications to those in need. More projects are listed below.

To date, the Suncoast Food & Wine Fest has given over \$2.5 million back to the community—and we couldn't do it without you.

We're already looking forward to another great event this year—save the date for Saturday, November 1, 2025. Follow the [Suncoast Food & Wine Fest Facebook channel](#) for event info and updates. Hope to see you there!



Rotary
District 6960

2025 District Conference

June 6-7 at The Westin, Cape Coral

Kelsey Mitchell
RD 6960's Governor

Don't Miss Out on the
Event of the Year

Rotarydistrict6960.org

Registration Open. Don't wait!

The 2025 Rotary District 6960 Conference is almost here! Don't wait and miss your chance for the best District conference yet!

[Register](#)

Rotary Clubs, Interact Clubs Install High Performance Microforest at Jacaranda Eco Park

On Saturday March 29th, a dozen rotarians from two clubs and three dozen interactarians, also from two clubs, installed a high performance micro Forest at the Jacaranda Eco Park. This Forest will transform the land in the most beneficial way, turning sterile Turf into a bustling forest for wildlife, water balance, cooling, wind dampening, and protection of coastal Waters. The rotary clubs represented include Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay and the Sunrise Rotary Club. The Interact clubs came from Riverview High School and Pine View High School. Students in both interact clubs received lectures on the importance of plants to restoring a Region's ecological Health and resilience, as well as demonstrations of proper planting methods.

This Jacaranda Eco Park represents the 13th microforest in the area and the 8th to have been planted under the supervision of the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay and its allies. Taken together, all of the forests will increase the region's resilience in the face of climate change.



RLI Wraps for the Rotary Year!

Thanks to everyone who made RLI possible, from the participants to the instructors. Our district is nurturing next year's leaders to continue to make an impact in our communities!



The Rotary Club of North Fort Myers Opens Thrift Store to Support Community

The Rotary Club of North Fort Myers has gotten into the Thrift Store business for a fund raiser. We have opened a store location in the Paradise Vintage Market in North Fort Myers. We are looking forward to having Rotarians and residents donate all those household items, collectibles, handbags, tools, sporting goods, books, costume jewelry, hats, scarves, small kitchen appliances and all those items that they didn't know what to do with, haven't thrown them out, and didn't re-gift them.

The store is located at what was originally a Publix, then Hope Chest, at 13831 N Cleveland Ave in North Fort Myers. It is open 7 days a week from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM. You can donate items for the Rotary Club of North Fort Myers at the front desk, we just ask that you have them clearly marked that it is for Rotary and they will get them to us. All proceeds will go support our community.



More Important Than Ever... *Support The Fight Against Polio Today!*

By now, you have heard that Polio funding and support have become a topic for debate in Washington, either directly or indirectly. As a non-political organization, Rotary continues to avoid these debates and focuses on education, fundraising, and advocacy.

In 2024, through two vaccination rounds in the Gaza Strip, we successfully vaccinated over ½ million children, reaching over 95% of the target population. As poliovirus is found to remain in the environment, additional vaccination efforts are needed to reach every child and to strengthen population immunity. The presence of the virus still poses a risk to children with low or no immunity, in Gaza and throughout the region. Mothers in this war-torn region made it their priority to get their boys and girls vaccinated despite the risks of getting to a vaccination center!

So far in 2025, there have been six cases of Wild Polio Virus in Pakistan and one in Afghanistan. We need your help to eradicate this disease by joining the PolioPlus Society. Use this easy link to sign up today: rotaryfoundation6970.org/polioplus-society, or contact District 6970 PolioPlus chair Marie Turnbull (Marie.Rotary6970@gmail.com) with questions.

Yours in Rotary,

Jeff Michelman
Past District Governor, Rotary District 6970
Regional End Polio Now Coordinator Region 41 (Florida)



Read this letter from and see the power of Rotary!

THANK YOU for your Generosity Rotary Club of Anna Maria Island

My little Cortez Cottage BEFORE the hurricane



My Cottage DURING the Hurricane Helene



I had over 4 feet of water in my house. I know because I foolishly stayed during the storm. (I guess it is good because I got some great pictures for my insurance company. LOL) All my neighbors stayed because we had never had water in our homes. I WILL NEVER STAY AGAIN!

[Read More](#)

District 6960 at the Council of Legislation

Prior to arriving in Chicago, district delegates completed online training about the Council and its procedures. Representing District 6960 and Rotary Zones 33/34, we were required to attend the Zone Summit in Pittsburgh for training and held additional Zoom meetings in preparation. Our paired Zones sponsored no enactments this year. In addition representatives vote online for over 50 Resolutions that do not affect our constitution of bylaws. About 480 Rotary members from around the world, each representing a single Rotary district, are gathering this week at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago, Illinois, USA, for the 2025 Council on Legislation. They will vote on 78 proposals to change Rotary International's constitutional documents.



"This Council represents the heart of Rotary's democratic process and the best of our international spirit," said Rotary International President Stephanie A. Urchick at the opening session. "The gathering is one of Rotary's most powerful expressions of multiculturalism. Here, voices from every corner of the globe come together – not to compete, but to collaborate."

The Council on Legislation, which meets every three years, is Rotary's version of a congress. Representatives selected by their districts gather to consider proposals designed to move Rotary forward and adapt to the changing times.

Monday, 14 April

Representatives approved a measure to decrease the number of members needed to charter a new Rotary club from 20 to 15. Supporters said it would remove barriers to starting new clubs and help Rotary grow and expand its reach. The Council also defeated a pair of measures to set an age limit for Rotaractors. Opponents cited the low number of current Rotaractors over the age of 40 in arguing that limits were unnecessary and said such restrictions could force members out of Rotary.

They also rejected limiting the number of honorary members a club can have to 5% of the club's active membership. Opponents noted that many clubs use honorary membership to stay in contact with former members, many of them longtime Rotarians with valuable expertise to offer.

Tuesday 15 April

After 45 minutes of debate, the Council approved an increase in the dues that every member pays to Rotary International of US\$3.50 in the first year and US\$3.75 in the following two years. Supporters said the increase is needed to meet rising costs and continue providing essential resources and services to clubs. They said that the dues increase is below the inflation rate, indicating that RI is working to cut costs and manage revenues responsibly. Opponents felt that dues increases may hurt membership and wanted more transparency from RI about what cost-cutting has been done.

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Representatives also approved a measure allowing the Board to test additional new governance models in districts beyond those approved by the Council three years ago. A governance pilot is currently being tested in districts in RIBI, New Zealand, and Australia, with some modest success in membership growth. Supporters noted that the system in which governors oversee districts dates back to the early days of Rotary. They argue that trying new governance models can help Rotary adapt to future needs and train and develop new leaders.

In another measure, representatives agreed to allow the Board to consider factors such as culture and language, not just the number of Rotarians, in deciding zone boundaries.

Wednesday, 16 April

Representatives voted to require that the five-year financial forecast presented at the beginning of each Council include updates on specific process improvements and cost-reduction measures taken by RI. Several representatives wanted RI to provide more details about cost reductions to justify any increase in dues.

In a similar measure, the Council approved commissioning a regular professional analysis of processes and cost structures in RI's administration. They declined to require, however, that Rotary's annual report include an itemized list of every expense over US\$1 million. After considerable debate, the Council voted to make holding a district conference optional.

I want to thank PDGs Janet DiBenedetto, Pam Akins (our alternate), and Brad Robinson for their counsel. Each reminded me to listen carefully to the speeches of delegates representing other parts of the world. Our decisions affect more than North America!

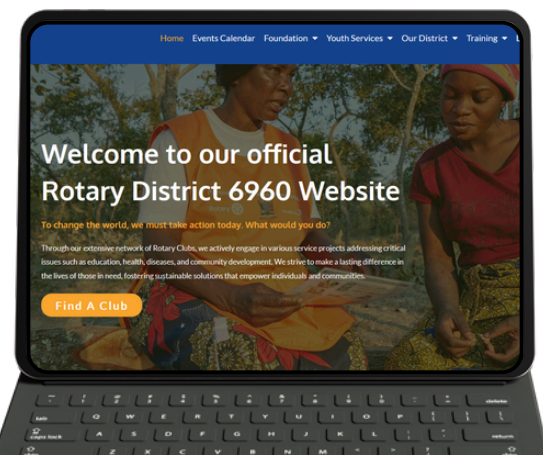
I am grateful for the trust given me to represent our District 6960 by all of you. I look forward to supporting the next PDG we select to attend the Council in 2028.



PDG Rich. Kirschner 2019-20

Have you visited District 6960's **NEW** website yet?

Redesigned to connect our
communities to the world of Rotary.
Check it out at RotaryDistrict6960.org



A New Era of Rotary Begins: SWFL Rotary Club Celebrates Groundbreaking Charter Night

In a historic and vibrant celebration at the Collaboratory in downtown Fort Myers, over 85 Rotarians, community leaders, and changemakers from across Southwest Florida gathered to witness the official charter night of the Southwest Florida (SWFL) Rotary Club — an innovative new club in Rotary District 6960 founded by Priya Ahluwalia and Mohit Pohani, residents and Rotarians from Babcock Ranch.

Attendees hailed from across the region — including Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee, Hendry, and Collier Counties — reflecting the truly regional and inclusive spirit of the club.



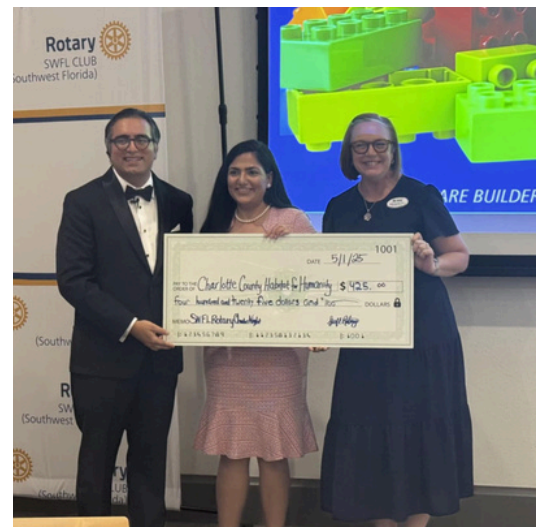
What makes SWFL Rotary truly exceptional is its origin. The inspiration for this new club came directly from Rotary International President-Elect Mario César Martins de Camargo's powerful address during the President-Elect Training in Orlando in March 2025. His call to reimagine Rotary as a force that adapts, includes, and inspires all sparked a vision that Priya and Mohit turned into action in just under two months.

SWFL Rotary is not just another Rotary Club — it's a movement. Designed as the first of its kind globally, it's founded on the three guiding principles of Flexibility, Fun, and For Everyone. It breaks the mold by removing rigid geographic boundaries and mandates, and instead fosters a welcoming, hybrid, family-friendly space where community, creativity, and impact thrive.

From the idea's inception on March 14, 2025, the club has grown rapidly, now boasting 23 founding members and 21 community partners and businesses who saw the vision and joined hands to build something extraordinary.

The event began with a delicious dinner from Mxuma Tacos Mexican Grill, followed by a LEGO icebreaker where attendees, without knowing, built symbolic structures representing a home. The night's first big surprise was revealed when Priya and Mohit announced that **\$425** (representing \$5 for each attendee) was being donated to Charlotte County Habitat for Humanity — showing the power of community even in play.

District Governor-Elect Gerard Sola spoke on Rotary's seven areas of focus and the tangible changes Rotary has brought to the SWFL region. He was followed by District Governor Kelsey Sola, who shared heartfelt stories from her leadership during Hurricanes Ian and Helene and voiced excitement for the future of this unique club.



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Each guest was then invited to vote on Rotary's areas of focus, giving the club a democratic and community-driven roadmap for future service.

SWFL Rotary Club's Charter President Mohit Pohani delivered a moving address, sharing his personal Rotary journey, the club's mission, and how SWFL Rotary will define success through community impact, service innovation, and inclusive fellowship.

A second surprise was unveiled when Cesar Aguilera, curator of the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center, led attendees in creating a collaborative art piece. Each person contributed their name or design to a stunning, symbolic canvas that was revealed at the end of the night — a vibrant reminder of the power of unity and expression.



The evening concluded with the official signing of the charter by District Governor Kelsey Sola, followed by cake cutting and dancing in celebration of a new legacy. "We are just getting started," said Co-Founder Priya Ahluwalia. "If you live anywhere in South Florida and want to be part of something that blends passion, people, and purpose — SWFL Rotary welcomes you."

About SWFL Rotary

Founded in 2025 and inspired by Rotary International President-Elect Mario César Martins de Camargo, SWFL Rotary is a new kind of Rotary Club in District 6960 that reimagines service and fellowship. Built on the principles of flexibility, inclusivity, and joy, the club unites diverse voices to address local and global challenges through meaningful service and lasting impact.



To learn more or get involved, visit swflrotary.org or email impact@swflrotary.org

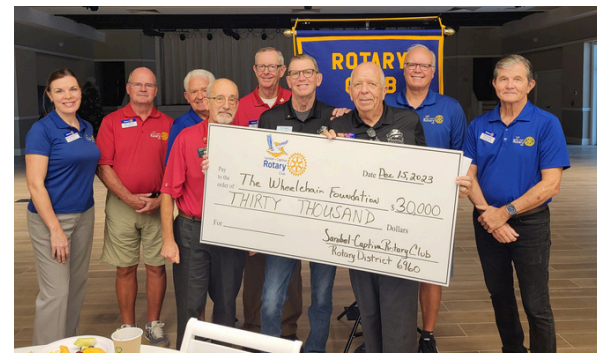
The 6th Annual Howard S. Danner, Jr., Wheels for Wheels Cycling Challenge

In 2013, John Danner marked his 60 th birthday by cycling from Fort Lauderdale to Key West, Florida. The solo ride was co-sponsored by the Sanibel Congregational UCC and the Rotary Club of Sanibel-Captiva. That year, in the first Wheels for Wheels ride, some \$22,000 was raised to purchase wheelchairs that went to Trinidad. Subsequently, the rides have evolved into the Howard S Danner, Jr Wheels for Wheels Cycling Challenge, with many participants from the Rotary Club of Sanibel-Captiva. Since the second ride, fellow San-Cap Rotary members Roger Grogman and John Henshaw have co-chaired the event with Danner and have been joined on the committee this year by Maria Espinoza and Tom Green.



Each year on average over \$25,000 has been raised, totaling over \$150,000 since the inception of the event. Working with Rotary Clubs abroad and the Wheelchair Foundation, wheelchairs to those in need have gone to Guatemala, Bermuda, Barbados, Peru and most recently Belize. Members of the Sanibel-Captiva Rotary Club have often accompanied the wheelchairs and helped to distribute them. Six members of the Sanibel-Captiva Rotary Club (Linda Arnold, John Danner, Barbara Ellis, Roxanne and Bob Stern and Michael Young) went to Belize. They were also joined by three members of the North Naples club (Charlotte Nal, Roger Dick and Joe Badway). Locally, following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Ian, wheelchairs were provided to FISH, the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum and the Sanibel Community House to replace those lost in the storm. Hurricane Ian washed their wheelchairs out to sea in the surge.

This year's ride, the 6th annual, culminated on April 5th with a celebration at the Sanibel Community House. There the club was presented with a special award by Gary Dworkin and Jim Fabry, representing Rotary District 6960 and the Wheelchair Foundation, in recognition of the over 1400 wheelchairs provided over the years by the Sanibel-Captiva club. The Wheelchair Foundation is a nonprofit organization leading an international effort to create awareness of the needs and abilities of people with physical disabilities, to promote the joy of giving, create global friendship, and to deliver a wheelchair to every child, teen, and adult in the world who needs one, but cannot afford one. For those people, the Sanibel Captiva Rotary Club and Wheelchair Foundation delivers hope, mobility and independence to many.



Howard Danner, for whom the ride is named, was confined to a wheelchair for the last 17 years of his life and was the inspiration for John's first ride.