Rotary article – Rotary members

**What does Rotary mean to you? Why join a particular Rotary club?**

These questions have been asked since Rotary was founded in 1905. And they remain central for us all, as Rotary continues to evolve to meet the needs of its members, and our communities. Never more so than as we emerge from the covid-19 pandemic, as we adjust to zoom meetings, new relationships, and new ways of building community. For the Rotary Club of Edmonton, Canada it includes reaching over time and distance.

Flashback to the early 1990’s. As the Iron curtain fell, a young schoolteacher, Anna Wieczorek, came to Alberta from Warsaw, Poland on a Rotary Group Study Exchange to learn about ESL programming. She was hosted by various Rotary clubs, of which many members were Polish Canadian descendants. A renewed sense of hope, opportunity and means were opened for Anna. Returning to Warsaw, she pursued her career in teaching with a focus on literacy; and joined Rotary.

Fast forward to the fall of 2020. After being president of two Rotary clubs in Warsaw, Anna was looking for new meaning and purpose within Rotary. In a discussion with one of her Rotary host families in Edmonton, a relationship maintained over almost 30 years Anna asked, “Can I join your club”? After a flurry of questions within the Club, District and Zone, we said “Why not, all is on zoom, and Rotary is about relationships, not boundaries”. And then we said, “What a wonderful opportunity to use the magic of Rotary to make the world a little bit smaller, and a little bit better for all”.

A little more than year later, the war in Ukraine and resulting humanitarian crisis was upon us. Anna was on the front lines with waves of displaced people pouring into Poland, and Warsaw. She provided our club with a unique insight into events as they unfolded. As aid agencies began to organize, Anna, and all of Rotary swung into action. The needs are many, as are the cracks in formal systems. Where and how could our club be most effective? Providing hope and dignity, through support for people who feel only despair and loss is part of why and who we are as Rotarians. The reports from Anna were harrowing. Our club and its foundation immediately acted. We raised and sent funds both directly to Anna, and to the Rotary Club of Warsaw City. Following days of travel fleeing war, often on foot a first hot meal, a bath and a bed organized in a friend’s house and longer stays in a Rotary supported hostel were provided. Anna purchased suitcases for refugees that arrived with just a plastic garbage bag holding their belongings. Shoes were purchased to enable people to work. A supply line with volunteers was established directly into war zones to transport medical supplies procured in Western Europe.

All based on Rotary relationships, aid was quickly and efficiently applied to areas of greatest need. Anna would say, “I only do what any Rotarian would do in such a situation, and I can only do it because of the support provided from Canada”. Financial support yes, however equally important is the moral support represented, as people of action.

The magic of Rotary, of relationships built on a strong foundation of common values, makes the world better, one step at a time.