

# A HISTORY OF PEACEBUILDER CLUBS IN ROTARY DISTRICT 5100

District 5100 became a Rotary Peacebuilder District early in 2011. Al Jubitz, one of our long-time Rotarian Peace advocates and a member of our district's largest Club, Downtown Portland, had at the time been visiting several Rotary Clubs not only in our own district but at numerous clubs up and down the West Coast, mentioned that his own District 5100 had just become a Rotary Peacebuilder District and gave a brief explanation of what that entails. Following his presentation at one of the meetings he was asked by some Rotarians; "Since we're now a Peacebuilder District, can we have Peacebuilder Clubs?" Al shared this question with me and some of the district leadership at that time and we began to inquire if this question had ever been raised before.



After several inquiries, we discovered that no one we were aware of had ever posed the question. We had a number of discussions in the interim and found that there was

definitely interest in forming some sort of Peace entity in our clubs through which we could show further support of the Rotary Peace Centers and the Peacebuilder Districts program and proceeded to ask our then Zone 25-26 Director, Ken Boyd – a great man of Peace in his own right. Ken made a few inquiries and, having found no precedent regarding our inquiry, suggested that we proceed with our Peacebuilder Club idea, formulate rules and conditions for membership and if he encountered any pushback by any part of Rotary leadership he would let us know. Thus, we initiated Peacebuilder Clubs in District 5100.

Rotary year 2011-12 saw the advent of Peacebuilder Clubs in District 5100 as we established nine Clubs in that year. The requirements were and continue to be pretty straight forward, the first being to form a Peace Committee consisting of two or more members who agree to be involved in:

- Becoming educated in Rotary International's history and focus on peacemaking and peace building.
- Sharing this history of Rotary and peace with club members and the community.

The second requirement was to involve youth as part of the process.

Next, we asked the new Peacebuilder club to choose at least two of four additional options to complete our four requirements. These are:

1. Join the Rotarian Action Group for Peace (A Rotarian Action Group established for the purpose of connecting Rotary Peace Fellows with Rotary clubs for collaboration in peace projects, whether they are at the district or global grant level.)
2. Submit a candidate for the Rotary Peace Fellowship
3. Integrate peace into a club service project and/or partner with groups outside of Rotary.
4. Participate in and/or support peace projects in which other Rotary clubs are involved.

Originally, we had an optional suggested donation of \$350 to The Rotary Peace Centers. Following much discussion and the sharing of many ideas and suggestions, the leadership team in District 5100 put forth a recommendation that Peacebuilder Clubs in that district be assessed an annual Peacebuilder Club fee based on the number of members per Club. The amount settled on was \$2.50 per Club member. With this structure, a Rotary Club of 10 members wishing to become a Peacebuilder Club would be assessed an annual fee of \$25.00 per year. A Club having 100 members would be assessed \$250.00 per year, and so on. The funds received in the form of dues, it was determined, would be used to help offset the \$25,000.00 amount that our district commits annually to the Rotary Peace Centers giving us the designation of Rotary Peacebuilder District. The District Peacebuilder Clubs Committee voted on this recommendation in 2017 and unanimously approved it.



In the Fall of 2016, District 7610 in Virginia became the second Rotary District to officially initiate Peacebuilder Clubs and shortly after that District 5240 initiated a Peacebuilder Clubs program in their district. Shortly thereafter, Peacebuilder Clubs were formed in District 5030 in the Seattle Washington area and in 2018, Rotary District 5495 in Arizona inaugurated Peacebuilder Clubs.



The breadth and scope of the programs and projects undertaken by Peacebuilder clubs is large. Since RI officially rolled out our new "Areas of Focus" during the 2012-13 Rotary Year, it has become apparent that with these areas of focus; Fighting Disease, Saving Mothers and Children;; Providing Clean Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; Supporting Education; and Growing Local Economies, that a terrific argument can be made that these five areas of focus not only compliment but also feed into the area of focus that is Peace.



Some of our Peacebuilder Club programs include: holding Peace Conferences (both annual as well as one time only); seminars in our primary and middle schools addressing challenges and solutions relating to anti-bullying and other forms of school violence; Peace concerts; and working with local organizations to increase general awareness and cooperation. Learning and sharing various methods of how to diffuse potentially violent situations can be incredibly valuable means of increasing the level of livability of our neighborhoods and communities.

As the Peacebuilder concept became part of the culture of Rotary District 5100, the District has become heavily involved with a number of programs including Creating Friendships for Peace and Peace Village.

## CREATING FRIENDSHIPS FOR PEACE CYPRUS FRIENDSHIP PROGRAM

Originally introduced as The Cyprus Friendship Program, this is modeled after and was initiated by people formerly involved with a program known as The Northern Ireland Childrens Friendship Program which was formed during the time of the conflict between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. During that time, participant pairs from each side (Protestant and Catholic) were selected (by gender) from the ages of 16 to 19 and agreed to spend one month with a volunteer host family in the US. The participants were required to spend the month living (including sharing a bedroom) with counterparts from the opposite side of the conflict, learn about each other's backgrounds and develop an understanding and trust of each other with the focus being on the similarities of their lives rather than their differences. Following the month abroad, they returned to their homes in Ireland and delivered presentations to their classmates in school as well as through other audio, video and the printed word methods of spreading their newfound understanding in any effort they could to help diffuse the anger and mistrust they had grown up with and were surrounded by.

This program was dissolved in 2007, following the Good Friday Peace agreement signed by both sides of the conflict.

In 2011, one of the former directors of the Northern Ireland Childrens' Friendship Program named Warren Muir, visited Portland on a fact finding mission of sorts to see if there might be some Rotarian interest in participation in the newly formed Cyprus Friendship Program, molded on the former Irish program.

Cyprus, following their independence from Great Britain in 1961, suffered a bloody civil war lasting ten years from 1963 to 1973. The southern 2/3rds of the island is inhabited primarily by Greek speaking Cypriots and the northern 1/3rd of the island is populated primarily by Turkish speaking Cypriots. Today, the capital city, Nicosia, has the dubious distinction of being the only divided capital city on the planet and this separation area, referred to as the Buffer Zone, is about two blocks wide and is manned by a United Nations Peacekeeping force. Passports are required for travel between the north and south parts of Cyprus – between the Republic of Cyprus (a member of the European Union and The Turkish Republic of Cyprus (recognized only by Turkey). The Euro is the currency used in the south and the Turkish Lira in the north.

Rotarians were quick to respond when asked if they would be interested in participating in the CFP as it is known.



During the first three years of the program more than 90% of the host families were Rotarians – not surprisingly members of our district's Peacebuilder

Clubs. The original coordinator for the Oregon/ SW Washington Cyprus Friendship Program was not a Rotarian at the time but quickly became one and enthusiastically admits that his life was drastically changed for the better not just by the Cyprus Friendship Program, but also by Rotary! My wife Amy and I had the opportunity to host a pair of Cypriots last year and in addition to being delightful ambassadors of their small island country, to see the incredible transformation of bonding and friendship that occurred in just four short weeks was nothing short of phenomenal!



Currently, Creating Friendships for Peace operates in the Maryland/DC area; New Hampshire; Virginia/DC area; Oregon/ SW Washington; and San Francisco. It has been said that there are some Rotarians participating in the program in New Hampshire in a small way, but so far as we know, no other CFP areas have Rotarian participation to the extent that there currently is in the Oregon/ Washington region. Possibly a significant part of the Rotary participation in Oregon is because the original Greek Cypriot coordinator of CFP in Cyprus is the brother of the head of the Peace and Conflict Resolution graduate program at Portland State University. Additionally, the Director of the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University is a Turkish Cypriot. Both professors are Rotarians, and both have been working together with the US State Department to help effect a settlement and reunification of conditions on the island for decades.

### PEACE VILLAGE

This program, which has caught on and continues to grow with our Clubs in District 5100, goes by the name of Peace Village. It began as a result of an altercation in the late 1980s at a high school in a small coastal town in Oregon at which a few upperclassmen decided they wanted to get the better of an underclassman in the school. What they did was to secure the school library so no one could enter. Once they coerced the younger student into the room, they proceeded to pummel him to the extent that he ended up in the ICU unit at the local hospital.

Needless to say, the teachers, counselors and administrators were outraged by this incident and one of the counselors who happened to be a UCC minister, over the next few years in collaboration with other school officials and counselors developed a program that they felt might have long-range effects on students with the goal of reaching students at the very youngest ages. This new program was Peace Village.

One of the very first conclusions and decisions they came to was that there was a need to impact students at the very youngest age possible with values and skills that would allow them to diffuse future situations of potential conflict and/or violence.



Peace Village is a five-day summer (day) camp for students ages six through thirteen – basically second to seventh graders.

Sessions are held throughout the day in a fun, interactive atmosphere during which the students learn these new skills via art, music, outdoor activities in which teams learn to solve problems in a win-win context based on mutual support rather than the normal win – lose scenario we are so often brought up to embrace. One of the main objectives of Peace Village is, with the help of parents, teachers and school administrators, to attract attendees of differing backgrounds. We try to include both students who are seen by their peers & teachers as future leaders as well as students who may show tendencies towards disruption in the classroom (as well as in their future environment). The attempt is made during the Peace Village experience to have these students work and learn together and hopefully take their newfound skills with them as they continue their life's journey.



Currently there are about 28 Peace Village programs being conducted around the US. Several them are in Oregon, Idaho and California, but they are also active in other areas such as Missouri, New Mexico, Ohio, Kentucky and North Carolina.

A Peace Village program was initiated in Newberg, Oregon in 2012, following a request sent by Peace Village Inc. to a few various churches in the Newberg area. Additionally, my Rotary Club received a request to see if we might be interested in supporting such an effort. As it turned out, they received nearly simultaneous responses from our Rotary Club and one of the larger Friends (Quaker) churches in Newberg offering to organize and host the program. A committee was formed made up of members of the church as well as other interested churches, Rotarians, Kiwanians, school district teachers willing to volunteer their skills and various other community advocates and leaders. As it turned out, the organizer from the Friends church also happened to be the Dean of Education at the local George Fox University and thus through his influence, we also had the support of the University.

The program is now spreading with the support of other Rotary Peacebuilder Club committees introducing the program to their communities. There are currently six Rotary Peacebuilder Clubs in our district that are in one way or another working with existing Peace Village programs or establishing Peace Villages in their communities.



These are but a few of the programs our Peacebuilder Clubs in our district are involved with. They are also very active with the implementation of Peace Poles in various cities at schools, libraries, city halls police precincts, etc., peace education seminars, planning events for occasions such as Martin Luther King Day, the International Day of Peace, celebrated on Sept. 21, each year and many, many more events and projects.



An example of what we consider to be one of our most successful international peace projects took place in the 2014-15 Rotary year. During that year, a woman who had been sponsored for a Rotary Peace Fellowship at International Christian University in Tokyo had signed a multi-year contract doing Peace work with the government of Bhutan. She came back to the Club that sponsored her and helped them to write an international project in partnership with a Rotary Club in Pune, India. The project was entitled **"Pushing for Peace: Sanitation and Dignity for Pune's Waste Pickers"**. At the very bottom of the caste system in Pune, India are 25,000 waste pickers. These women go from door to door and small business to business collecting and recycling garbage in non-polluting manual pushcarts and segregate it manually to maximize recycling.



The grant which was written (for \$66,000 US) is being used to acquire new more modern equipment for their work but more importantly, an educational component through which the women are taught to more safely handle, inspect and determine how to dispose of the refuse. They were also supplied with gloves to help make their work less toxic. The beauty of this program is that the Peace Fellow who helped write the grant is in a position with her work in Bhutan whereby she can periodically travel to Pune and oversee the project and its implementation.

It is really the vision I see with our Peacebuilder Clubs program that more and more the Rotary Peace Fellows, whom our Rotary Clubs help to sponsor, will at some point return to these Clubs and districts and work with them to engage in the Global Grants program and develop many more meaningful projects throughout the world and in this way growing and strengthening both the programs of the Rotary Peace Centers and The Rotary Foundation through Global Grants.

Since the beginning of Peacebuilder Clubs in the 2011-12 Rotary year, our participation in the Rotary Peace Fellow application process has skyrocketed. Prior to 2011, District 5100 averaged about one applicant every couple of years. Since then, our District sponsorship of applicants reads as follows: 2012-13, eight applicants resulting in three Rotary Peace Fellowships awarded; 2013-14, six applicants resulting in three Peace Fellowships awarded; 2014-15, seven applicants resulting in four Peace Fellowships awarded as well as one alternate. And so, it continues. During the 2011 - 2019 Rotary Years, Peace Fellow Applicants sponsored by Rotary Clubs have been awarded 20 Rotary Peace Fellowships and 98%+ of these Peace Fellows were sponsored by Peacebuilder Clubs. This is one of the greatest success rates for any District in the Rotary world!

I see Rotary as a catalyst more than anything else, more-over a catalyst that has, does and will continue to transform the world. Rotary did not initiate Creating Friendships for Peace, but it does have the ability to take it to another level by increasing participation in the program by way of interested Rotary Clubs and their members. Likewise, the idea of Peace Village had nothing to do with Rotary at its outset, but Rotary can (and does in many areas) greatly expand its current national, and possibly future global reach. The Polio eradication effort began several years before Rotary became involved. Back in the 1980s in the Philippines, a group of Rotarians looked at the US and the fact that Polio Eradication had been accomplished there and thought that they would like to give it a try. They applied for and received what was then a Major Matching Grant to institute a Polio eradication program and found that in the short time of about one year they were able to attain a Polio-free Philippines. Following this great accomplishment, some of our Rotary leaders had the vision to embark on a cooperative partnership with the UN and several countries to begin the effort to make this a Polio Free world. Yes, we had a small setback in 2019, but we are STILL looking at far less than an estimated 100 cases of Polio on the planet this year and total eradication is in our sights!





Rotary does amazing things as we all know. The year I served as district Governor, RI President Kalyan Banerjee said that if we really want Peace, it must begin with each and every one of us and primary emphasis with the family: "... because the family is where all our goals are set. And then, we start looking at safe housing, at water and sanitation, at health care, at all the issues affecting mothers and children. For there to be a strong family, there must first be a strong and safe home. Only then can there be health and hope and harmony within its walls." And he continued "If we wish for Peace, we start by living in peace ourselves, in our homes and in our communities. If we wish environmental degradation to stop, if we wish to reduce child mortality or to prevent hunger, we must be the instrument of that change – and recognize that it must start within us, with each of us".

