

Rotarians in Action



November/December 2024

My Rotary “Why?”

By **Dena Beck**, District Trainer

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Dena Beck has been involved in community development since returning to Custer County after her graduation from Kansas State University in 2000. Her position with the Minden Chamber of Commerce “opened my eyes to what actually powers a community—

businesses, infrastructure, leaders, connectedness, opportunities, and volunteerism.” From there she went on to serve as a REAP Business Specialist & Senior Project Leader, and as Development Coordinator for the Nebraska Community Foundation.

Since July 2024, Dena has served as the Regional Navigator for the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce and Industry. And she also now serves Rotary District 5630 as the District Trainer. This year she facilitated a very successful Visioning Session in January as well as two popular online Lunch & Learn seminars – which she will continue to do.

Here is Dena’s “Why Rotary?” in her own words:

My high school sweetheart and I rekindled our romance at our 10-year class reunion. Moving home was not top of mind for me, but we decided to move home and raise our family in rural Nebraska.

There were many good reasons. However, when we made this decision, our county was 98% Caucasian. We had concerns about teaching our children about different cultures and the joy of diversity. We made a conscious effort then to 1) try to get them out into different areas and countries to experience the richness of the world and all the people in it and 2) to bring *in* culture whenever possible.

It was a natural fit for joining Rotary: hosting students from around the globe, and having an opportunity to take advantage of the Rotary Youth Exchange program with our oldest daughter.

For many years, I had admired Rotary from a distance. Then we became involved as a host family, then parents of a RYE student, assisting with outbound interviews, and presenting to the group on various topics. Once I became an empty-nester, it was time to join. The transition was smooth, thanks to a welcoming group of people in my hometown and the district.

Rotary has helped me and my family in many ways.

Dena R. Beck

Minden RYE Office

District 5630 Trainer (not the gym kind)

Note from DG Lorena Beckius regarding the US-Mexico Alliance



I couldn't make it to this incredible event [December 6], but I was thrilled to witness the amazing representation of Rotary District 5630 from afar! A huge shoutout to *Sarah Cathcart* and *Louise Hoffmann* for representing us at the signing of the ICC (Inter-Country Committee) USA-Mexico. I feel so fortunate for all the connections and the wonderful people we meet on this journey.

Harish Krishnarao (5890), your support has been invaluable to our district—thank you for helping us bridge the gap for our Global Grant! And DG *Nancy Anderson* (5890), your unwavering commitment shines through. We are truly lucky to experience the magic of Rotary together.



The ICC USA-Mexico is a Rotary initiative that seeks to strengthen the friendship between the United States and Mexico and to encourage cooperation in humanitarian service projects.



Inbound exchange students have enjoyed their opportunities to get together this fall. Joined by D-5650, eight exchangers spent an awesome weekend (October 25-26) at the Ogallala Haunt.



The Haunt is an annual fundraiser for Polio Plus, coordinated by *Jim* and *Teresa Delahunty* from the [Ogallala Rotary Club](#). On Friday night, students were treated to shrieks and scares



as they went through the event. On Saturday evening, they became the characters who sent shivers through the crowd who attended. We were also hosted in an awesome lakeside B&B at Lake McConaughy. Thank you, *Lorena Beckius*, for arranging



this! This year the Haunt raised \$6145. Kudos! to the Ogallala Club for their efforts and successes!

Just a couple weeks later, November 9-10, student applicants and their parents were invited to North Platte for our annual District Interviews weekend, hosted by the [North Platte Noon Rotarians](#). (Thank you, *Kendy McClain* and committee, for the potato bar.) Following all the information, questions and answers, bowling and overnight fellowship, we determined to offer *Mac Whitehead* (McCook) and *Owen Phelps* (Hastings) 2025-2026 exchange scholarships. *Christdolyn Hagan* (Elwood) was offered an exchange for 2026-2027. They all excitedly accepted.

As a sidenote, the interview weekend has evolved into a leadership training opportunity for inbound exchangers and Rotexes. These young adults were added to the interview teams who gather and share their observations regarding the applicants. They offer a unique but essential perspective on the applicants, from a peer perspective. They were active participants in the discussions and recommendations for the weekend. In response, students were glad to be included and felt esteemed by the additional responsibilities.

Accepted applicants Mac and Owen are now attending Rotary meetings, preparing their international applications, scheduling their health, dental and vision

appointments, and writing letters to their potential host families. In the meantime, *Paula Witt* is connecting with international partner districts and preparing exchange agreements for 2025-2026.

November and December bring more changes for the inbound students as they transition to new host families and submit their security deposits for the USA tour scheduled for June 15 to July 13, 2025. Rotarians are demonstrating their amazing generosity and commitment to RYE by supporting their students in their plans.

January is the time we will seek Rotary club commitments for hosting in 2025-26. Several clubs have expressed an interest in becoming involved again in RYE. We are looking for six to eight host clubs for inbound students next year. Contact *Paula Witt* if you have questions or want a presentation for your club meeting.

Other January activities include our annual Winter SCRYE meeting in Tulsa, Okla., January 24-26. This is a weekend of continuing education for RYE committee and upcoming District Governors, while students participate in community service and fellowship with 80 to 100 inbound students from other districts.

Outbound News

Lyssa Hoffman (Hastings to Argentina) Is nailing her Spanish, and is excited to be able to pick up on full conversations with her friends.

Iris Robles (Imperial to Romania) recently went with other exchange students to another city and learned about how previous wars have affected the country.

Zoey Dornbier (Kimball to Spain) is meeting people and making friends from around the world while attending university classes in Cordoba, Spain.

Haley Holzfaster (Paxton to Brazil) is getting to attend several concerts by Brazilian musicians during her summer break in Londrina, Parana, Brazil.

Stay tuned for more news from your Youth Exchange Committee.

Paula Witt

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My Rotary “Why?”

By **Paula Witt**, District Rotary Youth Exchange Chair

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My answer is simple. It’s because of Rotary Youth Exchange!

When we were young parents with four children in the house, our oldest son *Scott*, then a senior at Hastings High School, told us he wanted to be an exchange student. We were initially concerned because we were not upper class, and he was not a star citizen or even a remarkable student, so why would he be selected? However, he went through the application and interview process (a much, much simpler process than today), and after a couple phone calls from our local Youth Exchange Officers, Drs. *Ed Lockwood* and *Jerry Seiler*, he was selected to go to Sweden. My husband, *Dick*, a young lawyer, felt if his son was a Rotary Exchange Student, he should become a Rotarian. This was 1993.

Of course, I reasoned, if we’re sending our son halfway around the world, we were going to visit him! (It was my first international trip at 40 years old!) This is when I witnessed the *Magic of Rotary!* We met Scott’s host families and realized how much he was welcomed, cared for, loved and nurtured by them. We got a glimpse of the life he lived for a year and what motivated him to modify his life trajectory.

He experienced opportunities such a class trip to St. Petersburg, Russia, invitations to attend the Nobel Awards, and 1994 Winter Olympics in Oslo, Norway, and a trip to the Arctic Circle to view the midnight sun. While in Stockholm, he was recruited by Nebraska Wesleyan University and offered scholarships to attend.

At Nebraska Wesleyan, he developed strengths he didn’t know he had. He became a quite respectable student and leader and was elected President of the Student Body his senior year. Following graduation, he was offered a business/marketing internship in New York City with a Fortune 500 company. As part of his east coast employment, he frequently travelled internationally, representing clients such as Coca-Cola and L’Oréal, among many others. While in New York City, he met his future wife, Anita, who is a first-generation immigrant from India. He, and we, learned a new culture and customs, and broadened our Nebraska-rooted worldviews.

Fast-forward twelve years (2005-2006), our youngest son *Matt* determined international travel was in his future, too. By this time, Dick was involved with *Ronna Morse* and the District RYE committee, and I tailed along. Matt spent his year in Izmir, Turkey, and I joined Rotary. And travelled.

Matt’s year in Turkey was uniquely different from his brother’s exchange. While he experienced an earthquake, and lots of exploration and travel in Turkey, he never learned the language and didn’t develop fond bonds with his host family. But he did contract the “travel bug.” Following college, he and his wife, Hope, both teachers, travelled the world during all the school breaks and eventually accepted teaching positions at the International School of the Nations, in Macau, China. They made deep friendships with their students and families and other teachers from around the world, during their three years there.



Matt returned to the U.S. in late 2017 to receive treatment at Mayo Clinic for an aggressive cancer. Matt’s life had an enormous impact on his students and co-workers. Over 150 individuals around the world viewed a live Zoom memorial tribute to him in late 2020. <https://youtu.be/UoNuviLHbjY>

Of note, *Scott Witt* will be the keynote speaker at the 2025 winter SCRYE meeting in Tulsa, Okla., in January. He will be sharing some of the ways his life changed in response to his year of Rotary International Youth Exchange. Scott and Anita currently live in Menlo Park, Calif., with their three children. And I visit them as often as I can!

Rotary changes lives! And the ripple effect just continues.

And that’s why I am a Rotarian.



Welcome!



New member *Jill Goodwin*, Tri Valley Foundation Director, who spoke to the Cambridge club in September, pictured with President *Debra Runner*.



Holdrege welcomed *Nate Weaver*, Loomis Public School Superintendent, to their club in October, pictured with Membership Chair *Karen Stute* and Club President *Dan Janssen*.



North Platte Noon: (Above Left): Lincoln County Sheriff *Jerome Kramer* (third from left) joined the club in early December, pictured with president *Brian Phares*, PDG *Bob Mayber*, and his sponsor, *Kim Baxter*. (Above right). PDG *Bob Phares* and *Brian Phares* welcome *Gwen Golden* (with sponsor *Kirsten Parker*) and *Caleb Kim* (with sponsor *Lori Rodgers*) to the club.



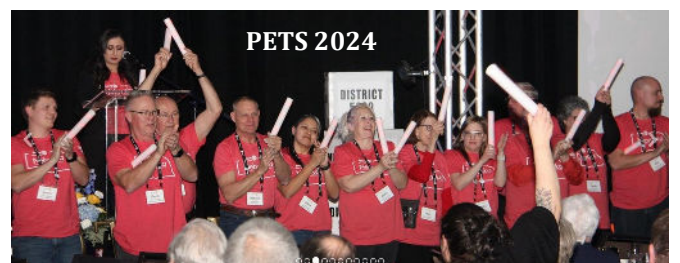
Left: *Char Swalberg*, with Operation Christmas Card, visited the club in June to speak about the North Platte Pow-Wow. And now she's a Rotary member !

More members added between August 9 and December 9, 2024 (per DACdb):

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| <u>Cambridge</u> | Cody Gerlach |
| <u>Grand Island</u> | Danielle Skorniak |
| <u>Hastings Sunrise</u> | Kristen Eckhardt |
| <u>Kearney Dawn</u> | Tim Hill |
| <u>Minden</u> | Johnie Kamery |

taking this leadership position in your club and attend PETS 2025. District 5630 will cover your seminar fees and half your hotel room. **When they ask, say "Yes!"**

High Country PETS 2025 is March 21-23, 2025, in Loveland, Colorado.



High Country PETS!

You want to be there!

Ask just about anybody who's been to PETS (President Elect Training Seminar), and they'll tell you it changed their concept of Rotary. No longer were they just a member of a Rotary club, they were part of a global network on a large scale, and on a smaller scale, part of a regional network of people who serve with joy in their local clubs and districts.

They met members of other clubs who identified with their challenges and successes. They caught the excitement from other incoming club presidents and district governors as they looked forward to all the possibilities of the coming year.

Some have said that Rotary Club President is the most important job in Rotary. If you want to make a difference in your club, your community—in the world—consider

MAGICAL MOMENTS



[St. Paul Rotary Club](#) donated a whopping \$25,000 to the Howard County Medical Center for its new wellness center, half of what the club has pledged to the Wellness Center's capital campaign. See the club's [Facebook page](#) for interior photos of the wellness center.

St. Paul Rotary will celebrate their 40th anniversary in 2025.



The [Gothenburg Rotary Club](#) has been recognized by the trustees of the Rotary Foundation for three achievements among 36,000 Rotary Clubs worldwide in 2023-24. It was

- One of only 1,520 clubs to achieve Top Three Highest in Per Capita Annual Giving for each member contributing at least \$50 to the annual fund;
- One of only 3,800 clubs to attain status as an Every Rotarian, Every Year Club meaning each member contributed \$25 or more to the foundation annual fund;
- One of only 4,600 clubs worldwide to become a 100% Foundation

Giving Club because every member contributed \$100 to any foundation gift designation.

Club president *Joan Windrum* said, "I knew we were amazing. I didn't realize we were that amazing."



On November 17, the Ogallala club welcomed *Suzi Howe*, past Rotary International Director and member of the Space Center Rotary Club in Houston. The evening was filled with great conversation, laughter, and Rotary spirit. A big thank you to Front Street for their beautiful table decorations that made the night extra special! Suzi had a wonderful time.

MORE MAGICAL MOMENTS



District Trainer and MC *Dena Beck*, *Amanda Christensen*, *Suzi Howe*, DG *Lore Beckius*, and *Abby Kemper*

Saturday, November 16, was truly a magical day as we hosted the 5630 **Women's Empowerment Summit** at the stunning Mockingbird event center in North Platte.

We welcomed 45 incredible women who came together to connect, be inspired, and learn in a space where everyone could be vulnerable, refreshed, and empowered.



Suzi Howe, District RAGAS Chair *Angie Swanson*, and District Public Image Chair, *Ariana Mungia*.



PDG *Deb McCaslin* and *Suzi Howe* ready to paint.

Thank you to phenomenal guest speakers *Abby Kemper*, *Amanda Christensen*, and *Suzi Howe* for sharing your wisdom. Attendees enjoyed amazing food, including a delicious sandwich bar, snacks, and a custom drink from [Always Kaffeinated](#).



The best kind of meet and greet: Hugs all around!

A huge thank you to DGE *Sarah Cathcart* for making sure the food and snacks were perfect, to *Angie Swanson* for handling registration, and to *Deb McCaslin* for taking photos. *Kirsten Parker* from [Golden Spike](#) blessed us with goody bags, and in the afternoon, everyone enjoyed sweet treats from [Double Dips](#). Then artist [Breeanna Benton](#) led us in a sip and paint session. A fancy dinner at [The Cedar Room](#) finished up our celebration of women.

A big shout-out to our District Trainer and MC *Dena Beck* for keeping things running smoothly! And, of course, a heartfelt thank you to all our sponsors who believed in this program and helped create a space for women to grow, believe, and empower each other. What a truly unforgettable day!

On the Dusty Trail. When a Rotary dignitary comes to Nebraska and says they want to ride a horse, we make it happen! Thanks to *Louise Hoffmann* for organizing our lunch at [The Espresso Shop](#) and to *Angie Swanson* for organizing the hour-long horseback ride, with beautiful scenery and perfect weather, at [Dusty Trails](#).



MANY MAGICAL MOMENTS MAKE A MAGICAL DAY!

November 16, 2025



After the inspiring Women's Empowerment event [page 6], we transitioned to the District Foundation Celebration at the [Golden Spike Tower & Visitor Center](#) in North Platte. Rotarians from all over Nebraska traveled to celebrate and be recognized for their outstanding support and contributions to the Rotary Foundation. The venue was beautiful, the food was amazing, and the fellowship was even better.



Scott McKelvey with Suzi Howe



Kirsten and Galvin Parker

Thank you to *Kirsten Parker* for finding the perfect venue and providing an incredible charcuterie spread. And to *Galvin Parker* for serving drinks throughout the night. The silent auction was a success, thanks to the donations of very generous businesses.

We celebrated those who contribute to the Rotary Foundation, recognizing PH +6, Major Donor Levels 1 & 2, and Bequest Society members. We also presented banners to clubs for their support last year.



Suzi Howe with our DG line: DGN Stuart Shepherd, DGE Sarah Cathcart, and DG Lorena Beckius

Our keynote speaker, *Suzi Howe*, RI Past Director and Aide to RI President Elect *Mário César Martins de Camargo*, thanked attendees for their unwavering support of the Foundation. MC and Endowment District Chair *Scott McKelvey* led by example by becoming a Bequest Society Level 2 member. "Leaving a gift that keeps on giving is so important for the future of Rotary," said DG Lore, who was recognized as a Bequest Society Level 1 member. So many helped to make this event a success, from planning to cleanup and everything in between.

Congratulations to Award Recipients:

Major Donors, Arch Klump Society, and Bequest Society Members

Major Donor Level 1

Kim Baxter (North Platte)
Ron Bazata (Kearney)
Louise Hoffmann (North Platte)
Tammy Jackson (Kearney)
Glenn Knuth (Grand Island)
Tom Kraus (Ogallala)
Jerry Milner (Grand Island)
Don & Terri Peterson (Minden)
Steve Peterson (Gothenburg)
Tom Pirnie (Grand Island)
Koby Rickertsen (North Platte)
Paul Stec (Kearney Dawn)
William Stetter (Valentine)
Lizabeth Weeth (Grand Island)

Tim Wiebe (McCook)

Delane Wycoff (North Platte)
Dale Schultz (Hastings Sunrise)
Scott McLaughlin (Kearney Dawn)
Robert Mayber (North Platte)
Thomas York (Kearney)
Scott McKelvey (Lexington)

Major Donor Level 2

Norm & Deb McCaslin (Broken Bow)
Keith Nelson (Holdrege)
Marcelle Darlene Schmidt (Minden)

Arch Klump-Trustees Circle

Frank & Shirley Sibert (Kearney)

Bequest Society Level 1

Lorena Beckius (Ogallala)
Tom Kraus (Ogallala)
Koby Rickertsen (North Platte)
Marcelle Darlene Schmidt (Minden)
James Schreck & Annette (North Platte)
Robert Taylor (Holdrege)
Christopher Tomhave (Saint Paul)

Bequest Society Level 2

Scott & Michelle McKelvey (Lexington)

Bequest Society Level 3

Frank Sibert & Shirley Sibert (Kearney)

Bequest Society Level 4

Dale Schultz (Hastings Sunrise)

Cont'd on page 7

Congratulations to Paul Harris Fellows +6, +7, and +8

Paul Harris Fellow +6

David Peterson (Hastings)
 David Malone (Kearney)
 Steve Chatelain (North Platte)
 Brian Phares (North Platte)
 Cindy Cole (O'Neill)
 Marvin Fritz (O'Neill)
 Virginia Cozad (Valentine)
 Mike McQuillan (Ogallala)
 Russell Wood (Cambridge)
 LuRae Hagans (Ogallala)

Paul Harris Fellow +7

Craig Fidler (Kearney Dawn)
 David Lenz (Kearney)
 David Harrington (St. Paul)
 Joan Johnson (Valentine)
 Milton Rogers (Chappell)

Paul Harris Fellow +8

John Hales (North Platte)
 Robert Phares (North Platte)
 Ronald Cool (Arnold)
 Todd Adams (Ogallala)
 Andrew Hanson (Kearney)
 Bernard Svoboda (Lexington)

UPCOMING EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE
ANNUAL DISTRICT 5630 SUMMIT
 January 4th, 2025
 10 AM - 3 PM
MID PLAINS COMMUNITY COLLEGE NORTH PLATTE
Special Guest Speaker:
DC AMELIA STANSELL
 Join the Rotary Wonder Woman raising awareness about the Rotary Action Group Against Slavery
Rotary District 5630
 WE ARE LOOKING FOR EVENT SPONSORS

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
RYLA 2025
JULY 7-11

Rotary District 5630 & 5610
RYLA
 Rotary Youth Leadership Award

Go to greatplainsryla.org to apply. Applications open on **February 15, 2025** and close on **March 31**.

- Open to high school sophomores and juniors.
- You must be able to attend camp from noon on Monday to noon on Friday.
- You must submit an application, which will be reviewed by your local club. After review, your club will schedule an interview. If you are accepted, you will receive a scholarship to attend RYLA 2025.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2024-25 DISTRICT 5630 SPONSORS



MICHAEL HOLZFASTER

SCOTT MCKELVEY

TRIANGLE BAR RANCH

2024-25 RI President: Stephanie Urchick | District Governor: Lorena Beckius

Send your club news items and photos to Newsletter Editor Cheryl Bryan (daa@5630mail.org)