

NEWSLETTER

Rotary
District 5630



Nebraska Fire Relief Effort: Feeding Those Who Protect Us

When the Nebraska fires broke out and quickly spread across our state, reaching over 800,000 acres burned, our communities were faced with fear, uncertainty, and urgency. In the midst of it all, one of the most powerful responses came not only from firefighters on the front lines—but from the volunteers who made sure they were fed, supported, and cared for every step of the way.

Through the incredible coordination of the Mobile Kitchen operated by HotMeals USA, two key support locations were established: one in North Platte to serve the Cottonwood Fire response, and another in Ogallala supporting the Morrill Fire. What followed was an extraordinary example of teamwork, compassion, and service above self.

Over the course of 21 intense days, volunteers from across the district came together to prepare, cook, serve hot meals in the mornings and evenings, and assemble packed lunches for firefighters working long, exhausting shifts. Additional teams supported the critical logistics of moving the HotMeals USA kitchen into Ogallala, ensuring operations could continue smoothly and efficiently where they were needed most.

This effort truly took a village.

We have always admired the incredible mission of HotMeals USA, but seeing it firsthand—so close to home—was something deeply moving. In the heart of crisis, the mobile kitchen became more than a food service; it became a place of comfort, gratitude, and human connection.

A special thank you goes to Rotarian Dick Cochran, whose vision of a mobile disaster kitchen made this entire operation possible, along with his dedicated team: Brenda Cochran, Amber Cochran, and Greg Clark. Their tireless work, often lasting long hours each day, ensured that every detail was managed with care and excellence.

We are also deeply grateful to Ashton Simmerman, who helped lead the Ogallala kitchen operations, and to our Rotarian Micaela Wuehler, who provided outstanding leadership in North Platte. Their coordination and commitment were essential to the success of this effort.





In total, more than 500 volunteers stepped forward, filling over 975 shifts. Together, they helped serve more than 25,000 meals—providing not only nourishment, but also saving significant costs for the State of Nebraska through the efficiency and generosity of Hot Meals USA



But beyond the numbers, what stands out most is the spirit of community.

We witnessed firefighters being greeted with smiles after long shifts, children handing out candy bars and thank-you cards, and hand-drawn notes of appreciation created by local students. We saw communities come together within hours to donate supplies, time, and heartfelt gratitude. Many firefighters shared that this was “the best camp they had ever experienced,” not because of luxury, but because they felt seen, valued, and supported.

In those moments, it was clear: this was more than just feeding firefighters. It was about lifting spirits, strengthening resilience, and showing what Nebraska is made of.

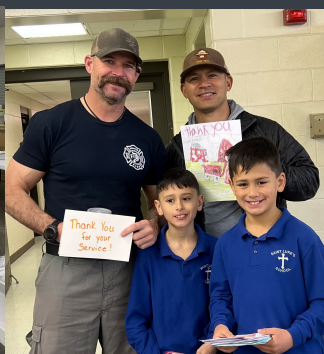
Even in the face of devastation, we saw the very best of humanity. Clubs across the district, volunteers from many communities, and countless individuals came together with one purpose—to serve those who serve us.

It truly takes a village. And in this case, that village showed up with heart, strength, and unwavering compassion.

To every volunteer, every donor, every club, and every person who shared a post, sent an email, or gave a moment of their time—thank you. Your service made a difference that will be remembered long after the fires are gone.

Together, we did more than respond to a disaster. We built hope, one meal at a time.

Lore Beckius
District Governor





CLUBS' HIGHLIGHTS

Chappell Rotary Club -hands-on community involvement.

The Chappell Rotary Club has been busy making a meaningful impact in their community through service, collaboration, and fun!

This past November, the club successfully completed a diapers and wipes drive, collecting generous donations throughout the month. These essential items were delivered to the toddler room at Creek Valley Schools, where they were met with excitement and joy. The littles especially loved seeing the Rotarians—and even more, playing on the boxes the donations came in!

Continuing their tradition of service and fundraising, on March 26th the club hosted their annual Burrito Making Day. With the help of dedicated volunteers, they prepared and sold over 67 dozen burritos—an incredible accomplishment! The Chappell Rotary Club extends heartfelt thanks to the Cheyenne County Rotary Club for joining in, as well as Creek Valley seniors Alvin Russell and Cheyenne Senf for their support. It was a day filled with teamwork, laughter, and community spirit.

Proceeds from this event directly support Creek Valley students by providing scholarships to attend RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership Awards). Applications for this summer are still open, and scholarships are available for sophomores and juniors at Creek Valley High School. Interested students are encouraged to reach out to a local Rotary member or Mr. Engel for more information.

Chappell Rotary continues to embody the true spirit of Rotary—serving others, supporting youth, and strengthening their community.



Hearts to Serve Pickleball Tournament

In honor of American Heart Month, Kearney Dawn Rotary hosted the 2nd Annual Hearts to Serve Pickleball Tournament, organized by the Kearney Pickleball Club.

From seasoned players to first-timers, the event brought the community together for a fun-filled day of friendly competition, snacks, prizes, and great fellowship.



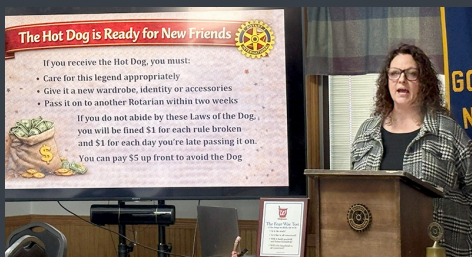
John Hales of the **North Platte Rotary Club** recently helped decorate the Rotary float for the Tournament of Rose Parade in Pasadena. It was an incredible hands-on experience representing Rotary on one of the world's most iconic stages.



The McCook Rotary Club continues to bring creativity and community together! Their recent Fat Tuesday Murder Mystery Dinner, hosted by member Melanie Goodenberger, was a fun and engaging fundraiser that brought people together for a great cause.

The club also recently hosted Rotary Radio Days, taking over KICX 96.1 FM from the Keystone Business Center. This event was a great way to share Rotary's story, connect with the community, and highlight the impact of their service.

From unique fundraisers to meaningful outreach, McCook Rotary is making a difference in a big way!



The Gothenburg Rotary Club brought humor and fellowship to their February 23rd meeting with a lighthearted discussion on the humble hot dog. What started as a simple, playful story about a leftover hot dog turned into a reminder of Rotary creativity and community spirit.

Club members shared laughs as the idea grew into a weekly presentation and even inspired a small fundraiser—showing that in Rotary, even the simplest things can spark connection and impact.



The Grand Island Rotary Club will be partnering with Habitat for Humanity on a build day scheduled for May 16th. This hands-on service project is a great opportunity to support affordable housing and make a meaningful impact in the community.

For more information or to get involved, please contact travis@babcockrealestate.net.

The Arnold Rotary Club recently partnered with Arnold Public Schools on February 25th to host Makinzie Gregory for a special forum with 4th–6th grade girls. She shared an inspiring message on leadership, confidence, and personal growth. The club also served lunch to 65 students and staff, making it a meaningful day of connection and service. Miss Gregory later joined the club as the guest speaker at their regular evening meeting.

Earlier in the year, members also enjoyed a fun social night at the end of January, gathering for card games like Pitch and 3-13, along with snacks and fellowship—strengthening friendships and club camaraderie.

The Arnold Rotary Club also recently hosted a memorable Senior Night, bringing together an evening of inspiration, celebration, and fellowship. The event featured Lore Beckius as the guest speaker, who shared an encouraging message with those in attendance.

It was a wonderful night recognizing students and strengthening the connection between Rotary and the next generation..



The Rotary Club of Imperial partnered with Interact youth to pack Mercy Meals for individuals and families in need. Together, volunteers dedicated just two hours of service and helped prepare an incredible 9,936 meals to support those facing food insecurity.

A powerful example of youth and Rotarians working side by side in the spirit of Service Above Self and making a real impact beyond our own community.



The Sunrise Rotary Club proudly recognized its four exchange students from Romania, Germany, Argentina, and Brazil by awarding each of them a Paul Harris Fellow. This special honor celebrates their outstanding commitment, engagement, and the positive impact they have made during their exchange experience. Congratulations to these remarkable students on this well-deserved recognition!



Congratulations to **St. Paul Rotary** for being recognized as Volunteers of the Year by the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce! A well-deserved honor for your outstanding service and commitment to the community.



Members of the **Rotary Club of Ogallala** recently came together to support the ongoing cleanup and restoration of the local movie theater. Their hands-on efforts are helping bring new life to the space, with steady progress being made each time volunteers step in to serve.

It's another great example of community partnership in action and the impact of volunteers working together to strengthen and support local spaces.



Congratulations to Kendra Mitchell and Toshia Jones on receiving their very first Paul Harris Fellow Award last Thursday evening at the **Cheyenne County Rotary Club Social!**



The **Gothenburg Rotary Club** collected enough personal hygiene items to pack 50 bags for the Healthy Families Center at the Gothenburg Impact Center.



The Chadron Interact club helped the Chadron Chamber with the annual Easter Egg Hunt!



Celebrating 100 Years: Minden Rotary Club

The Rotary Club of Minden is proud to celebrate 100 years of service above self in 2026—a remarkable milestone of impact, leadership, and community dedication.

To commemorate this centennial, the club will host a special celebration on June 13, 2026, at Chautauqua Park in Minden, featuring the presentation of a 25-foot flagpole to the city along with food, fellowship, and festivities.

For a century, the Minden Rotary Club has made a difference locally and globally—supporting polio eradication, providing dictionaries to students, awarding scholarships, and contributing to international service projects.

Join in celebrating 100 years of service and the beginning of the club’s next century of impact!

The **Valentine Rotary Club** made a big impact with their recent Fish Fry fundraiser, raising an impressive \$4,385 through their “Fish and Chips for Scholarships” event.

Thanks to this incredible effort, the club will be able to award four \$1,000 scholarships to support local seniors in their next chapter. Way to go, Valentine Rotary



The **Gothenburg Rotary Club** kicked off the year with purpose and momentum. On January 19, members participated in a strategic planning session to help guide the club’s projects and priorities for the coming year. Special thanks to Dr. Allison Jonas for leading a thoughtful and productive discussion.

The club continues to support local youth through one of its key fundraisers —youth basketball tournaments. The girls tournament was held on January 25, with a boys tournament following in February, bringing energy and community support to Gothenburg.

In addition, weekly meetings remain engaging and impactful with guest speakers. On January 26, Rick Squiers shared insights on the history of volleyball, his coaching journey, and fun facts for fans.

Through planning, service, and education, Gothenburg Rotary continues to make a strong impact in their community.





5630 YOUTH EXCHANGE

March. MARCH. It's March already!

M: matches with our international exchange partners.

A: applications being shared between countries/ districts around the world.

R: receiving inbound students applications

C: clubs preparing to host students this summer

H: host families are completing their applications

We will be receiving students from Finland, Germany, Argentina, Italy, Poland and Brazil. In addition, we are coordinating with D5650 (Eastern Nebraska) to serve more of central Nebraska. Sandy Creek High School (Clay Center, NE) requested two Rotary Youth Exchange students. Their nearest Rotary Club is 30+ miles away, and unfamiliar with RYE. So, we are finding local host families, and D5650 is supporting the student stipends. We are working to educate and support clubs in Hebron and Geneva to move toward more youth exchanges.

March 1 started with Outbound Orientation at Nebraska Youth Camp, near Kearney, for parents and students preparing for their exchanges this summer. This was another coordinated effort between 5630/5650. Eight outbound students and families, 10 hosted students, 6 Rotex and 8 Rotarians spent the weekend sharing and discussing many aspects and actions ahead. Their community service project was a spring clean-up of winter leaves around the camp.

March 6-10, which was spring break for most of the students, meant skiing! We looked hard to find any collection of snow this side of the Rockies. Rapid City Rotarians reached out and offered to host our group for a weekend at Terry Peak. These Rotarians provided housing and meals for the entire group as well as escorting us to the ski area, and watching over the students while they were enjoying their time in the snow. After a day and a half of skiing, we added a hike up Elephant Hill, a trip to Mount Rushmore, a failed attempt to swim in the hot springs at Evan's Plunge, and a tour through the Wind Caves National Park. They even attended a Rotary meeting on Tuesday morning in Rapid City! Several stops along the way to gather snacks and souvenir pins and we arrived home happy, healthy and with no significant injuries.

A BIG shout out! To the Rushmore Rotary Club for their hospitality and generosity in hosting us. They provided home hosting, and every meal for us for our 5 days in Rapid City. In return, our students would make you proud of their ambassadorial skills. Rushmore Rotary is looking to restart their RYE efforts, and our kids provided the energy and enthusiasm to ignite things! We are looking forward to future endeavors with District 5610 RYLA and RYE!

If your club would like more information about Youth Exchange in your community, please contact Paula Witt at wittinc@icloud.com or 402-460-0005.

Paula Witt





Rotary
District 5630



RYLA: A Life-Changing Leadership Experience

The Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) is more than just a summer camp—it's an unforgettable experience that helps students grow into confident, capable leaders.

Participants gain valuable leadership skills, build real and lasting friendships, and take part in a week filled with energy, learning, and personal growth. From team-building activities to inspiring speakers, RYLA challenges students to step outside their comfort zone and discover their potential.

Students who attend often say it's a week they will never forget—one that continues to impact their confidence, leadership, and future goals long after summer ends.

Applications are open now, with a deadline of April 15th. Don't miss this opportunity to be part of something truly meaningful!

<https://greatplainsryla.org/apply/>

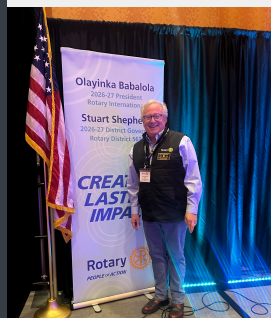


PETS 2026: Preparing Leaders for the Year Ahead

Rotary leaders gathered in Loveland, Colorado from March 20–22 for an inspiring and impactful Presidents-Elect Training Seminar (PETS). It was truly an amazing experience filled with learning, connection, and motivation.

Among those attending was Stu Shepherd, who had the opportunity to engage with incoming presidents and presidents-elect nominees. Throughout the weekend, participants focused on strengthening leadership skills, sharing ideas, and building relationships that will carry into the new Rotary year.

With outstanding speakers, valuable resources, and meaningful fellowship, PETS set the stage for a strong and successful Rotary year beginning July 1st. The energy and inspiration from the weekend will no doubt have a lasting impact on clubs and communities across the district.



Why Attend the Rotary International Convention?

The Rotary International Convention is more than a conference—it's a celebration of service, fellowship, and global impact. Attending the convention offers Rotarians a unique opportunity to connect with members from around the world, share ideas, and gain fresh inspiration to bring back to their clubs and communities.

If you're looking to deepen your Rotary journey, expand your perspective, and return home motivated to serve even stronger—this is an experience you won't want to miss.

Contact: DG.2024@5630mail.org

Want to be featured? Contact us

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District 5630 Summit

The Rotary District 5630 Summit held in Broken Bow was a powerful reminder of what makes Rotary so special—connection, leadership, and a shared commitment to service.

With nearly 50 Rotarians gathered from across the district, the day was filled with meaningful conversations, fresh ideas, and renewed energy for the work ahead. Attendees had the opportunity to learn from inspiring leaders like Patrick Harrison, Deb McCaslin, and Fred Heismeyer, whose insights and experiences sparked motivation and reinforced the impact Rotary has in our communities.

The event, hosted by the dedicated members of the Broken Bow Rotary Club, showcased not only excellent organization but also the warmth and hospitality that define Rotary fellowship. Their efforts created an environment where collaboration thrived and friendships grew stronger.

More than just a meeting, the summit was a celebration of purpose—bringing together leaders who are committed to making a difference. As District 5630 continues to move forward, events like this highlight the strength, unity, and passion that drive our mission of Service Above Self.



Why Rotary Clubs Matter in Our Communities

Across towns both large and small, Rotary clubs continue to serve as a steady force for good—bringing together people who believe that a stronger community is built through service, connection, and action.

At their core, Rotary clubs are about people who care. They are neighbors, professionals, and community leaders who come together with a shared purpose: to create lasting change locally and globally. Through projects that address hunger, youth leadership, education, clean water, and disaster relief, Rotary clubs turn compassion into meaningful impact.

Organizations like Rotary International provide a global network that connects local clubs to a worldwide mission—meaning that even a small club in a rural community is part of something much larger. That connection multiplies what each club can accomplish and ensures that no community is ever working alone.

But beyond the projects and service hours, Rotary's greatest strength is its people. Rotary clubs create spaces where relationships are built, leadership is developed, and individuals are encouraged to step forward and make a difference. Many members find lifelong friendships, mentorship, and a renewed sense of purpose through their involvement.

When a Rotary club closes, it is not just the loss of an organization—it is the loss of service capacity, leadership development, and community connection. It is fewer hands available to respond when needs arise and fewer voices advocating for positive change.

Yet even in challenging moments, Rotary's message remains strong: service still matters, community still matters, and people coming together still changes lives.

Every club—no matter its size—has the power to make an impact. And every member has a role in strengthening the future of their community.

Because when people unite with purpose, they don't just serve a community—they help build it.

Service Above Self remains more than a motto; it is a way forward.

Save the Date



You are cordially invited to our social party where we will be doing the formal Passing of the Pin and enjoying each other's company.



Passing of the Pin Social

Come and enjoy a night of laughter, great food, and good vibes.

NP Community Play House
307 East 5th Street | North Platte, NE

Dress Code: Business Casual

Sponsored by NP Noon Rotary Club and NP Sunrise Rotary Club