



MATHEW MCCARTHY, RECORD STAFF
Amrik Ahuja (left) became a Rotarian for a time after he immigrated to Waterloo in the 1960s. Now his son, Romy, is joining a local Rotary Club.



PETER LEE, RECORD STAFF
Rotary clubs in Kitchener and Waterloo created the Rotary Peace Park at RIM Park in Waterloo as a millennium project. These panels will tell the service club's story.

Rotary: It started in 1905

CONTINUED FROM PAGE P1

Rotary was founded in 1905 by Paul Harris, a young Chicago lawyer who grew up in a small town and said he felt lonely in the big city. He invited three business acquaintances to his office to talk about his idea for a businessman's club.

The four began meeting regularly, rotating as hosts in their offices. That's how the name Rotary came into use.

Rotary is dedicated to humanitarian service, "high ethical standards in all vocations" and it aims to "build goodwill and peace in the world."

In 2000, Rotary clubs in Kitchener and Waterloo decided to create a millennium project to boost the profile of the organization, said Kathi Smith of the Kitchener-Grand River club.

The \$125,000 Peace Park in Waterloo contains a "circle of peace" where up to 300 people can gather for quiet reflection and enjoyment of nature.

"It is really to say, 'Here is Rotary in this community,'" Smith said.

The Rotary committee behind the project secured a \$70,100 grant from the Ontario government's Trillium Foundation to help pay for a sculpture and signs.

A walking trail through the park will lead people past signs explaining the history of Rotary. The \$50,000 statue will be a focal point to the park and may be installed this fall.

In Cambridge, the city's four Rotary clubs are looking into their own history as they celebrate the centennial.

They're spending \$80,000 over the next two years on the rejuvenation of Dumfries Conservation Area, which was donated to the province in 1967 by Percy Hilborn, a long-time Preston businessman who was first president of the Preston (now Preston-Hespeler) Rotary club in 1926.

Dumfries Conservation Area is bounded by Hespeler Road, Dunbar Road, Concession Road and, roughly on the south side, by CP Rail tracks.

When the Grand River Conservation Authority was handed control of the conservation area in 1972, most of the surrounding land was rural. Now it's full of homes and businesses.

The Rotary clubs received a \$12,300 Trillium Foundation grant to help install a new Dunbar Road sign for the conservation area. An information kiosk will be installed next month.

Rotarians will be at the park today to help in the annual cleanup, organized by Elinor Heuton, Hilborn's daughter.

Next year, they will spend \$40,000 to place boulders along Dunbar Road, to keep motorists from driving across the greenspace.

In future, the local Rotary clubs may take on a \$100,000 project to install washrooms in the park, said Mike Thomas, a past president of the Preston-Hespeler club.

And after that, the projects may continue with the installation of a wheelchair accessible playground structure, he said.



PETER LEE, RECORD STAFF
Rotary Club isn't for everyone, says Bill Muirhead of Kitchener, an organizer of the annual Skate 48 fundraiser hockey tournament that raises about \$90,000 for Rotary community projects.

Five years ago, Rotary gave Bill Muirhead the chance to turn his love of hockey into a big fundraiser that the Kitchener-Grand River club now organizes every year.

The Skate 48 tournament attracts 60 teams and raises about \$90,000 annually for local projects.

In an interview, Muirhead, a Rotarian for the past 15 years, said he doesn't want just anybody to join the club. They have to be people willing to work together for the common good.

"My view of Rotary? It's not for everybody," he said.

And while community work is important, so is the fellowship, Muirhead added.

When he travels, the little Rotary pin he wears on his lapel opens doors and sparks friendships.

If he's standing in an elevator, fellow Rotarians will strike up conversation with him. When he was travelling in Florida, he had no trouble finding Rotarians who offered him hospitality and insider travel advice.

"Rotary hits your life all the time," Muirhead said.

"You can go anywhere in the world and feel at home."

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As a boy growing up in Waterloo, Romy Ahuja was well aware that his father was a Rotarian.

In fact, going to Rotary events with his father, Amrik, was just about the only time he got to share with his busy dad.

"I thought Rotary was always about fun," he said. "It was good, fun times. Rotary, he made time for that."

With memories of Rotary fish derbies in his head, the junior Ahuja, who now is manager of the Best Western Hotel in Cambridge, didn't have to think long before accepting an invitation to join the the Preston-Hespeler club this month.

"I'm all for it. The one thing I really like is the motto, 'Service above self,'" he said.

For Amrik Ahuja, Rotary membership was a way, as an immigrant, to contribute to his new community. It wasn't about making business contacts.

He came to Waterloo in 1967, recruited by Mutual Life from a major life insurance company in India. His family followed the next year.

In 1976, when his son Romy was 10, Amrik was encouraged by his employer to build contacts in the community. At first, the Westmount Golf and Country Club was suggested.

"I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't golf," Amrik shrugged.

So his branch manager, Don Ayr, invited him to join him at a Waterloo Rotary club meeting.

"He convinced me, not pushed me," Amrik said.

"It was great. I loved it, every minute."

His membership, however, lasted just two-and-a-half years because of a series of unfortunate events.

Amrik fell and broke his leg on a step outside his house. It took almost a year to heal properly.

Shortly after the fall, his wife was injured in a car crash. And then, within days of that collision, there was a bad fire at the family's home.

The misfortunes took a toll, hurting Amrik's career and income. He had no time for Rotary as he rebuilt his life, even though he missed attending club meetings and community events. He never rejoined, even though he pondered the thought.

"I didn't do it for business (connections). I believe in making a contribution. I'd been new to the country. The kids would be proud."

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Kathi Smith was a guest speaker at local Rotary clubs for several years before she got a chance to become a member herself in 1989.

Kathi Smith always enjoyed being invited to speak at Rotary club meetings when she was the executive director of Junior Achievement of Waterloo Region — even though she wasn't allowed to join the organization herself at the time — during the 1980s.

"I was really amazed at what they did," the Kitchener resident said.

But her chance to belong came in 1989 when the Kitchener club changed its policies to allow female members.

That change came about after the Ontario Human Rights Commission decreed that men-only rules at Rotary were discriminatory.

Kitchener club members took the lead in responding to the decisions.

Both Smith and Pat Tallman, president of Southwestern Ontario Better Business Association, were invited to join.

Newspaper, radio and television reporters were on hand for their first luncheon meeting at the Valhalla Inn (now Four Points Sheraton) in Kitchener. The fact that two women were joining the region's oldest Rotary club was big news.

"It was really blown out of proportion as far as I was concerned," said Smith, now a member of the Kitchener-Grand River club.

Today, 15 years later, the Kitchener-Conestoga club is the last in the region to have a male-only membership.

Its 85 members have talked about having female members, but have no plan to push the issue, said Bill Spall, a past president of the club.

Still, it will eventually happen. "It's inevitable," Spall said.

Kitchener-Conestoga is so successful with its fundraisers — such as the annual Rotary Dream Home lottery — that it attracts people who want to join, said Spall, who sits on the membership committee.

Even so, in the 20 years that he's been a member, no club members have ever proposed a woman for membership.

"We are on record. If a woman is proposed, we would consider her . . . If we didn't, we'd be in the glue with the human rights commission."

Women do attend Kitchener-Conestoga luncheon meetings, as the guests of club members and often as guest speakers.

And female Rotarians from other clubs may attend Kitchener-Conestoga meetings to "make up" for missing their own club gatherings. (It's a Rotary policy that members must attend at least 60 per cent of the weekly meetings annually to remain members.)

"It's not a good-ol'-boy's-stag club," Spall said.

He said the Kitchener-Conestoga club likely wouldn't induct only one female member when the change happens. His preference would be to bring in three or four women, so that those individuals wouldn't feel like they were token female members.

The fact that the Kitchener-Conestoga club is one of the last all-male Rotary clubs in North America perplexes Smith, even as she praises the club's tremendous success fundraising and helping the community.

"I tease them about it. I'm torn about it. It's the go-to club," she said.

Preston-Hespeler Rotarian George Szczepski remembers when women first joined his club a decade ago.

"I didn't like it. I missed the boys club," he said.

He thought about quitting, but then realized he didn't want to lose what had become a critical part of his professional network, a place to hand out business cards to prospective clients.

"This organization had been good to me. If I left, who was going to lose more? It would have been me." kswayze@therecord.com

WATERLOO REGION'S ROTARY CLUBS

KITCHENER

- Received its charter in 1922 as the Kitchener-Waterloo club. Became the Kitchener club in 1963 when the Waterloo club formed.
- 58 members
- \$175,000 raised annually
- In its founding year, members decide "the care and treatment of crippled children should be our first and major activity." They established the treatment centre that is now the KidsAbility Centre in Waterloo.

PRESTON-HESPELER

- Formed in 1926
- 42 members
- \$40,000 raised annually
- Special projects include fundraising for The Kids Country Club on Queen Street in Cambridge. It's a place where disabled children can stay for a few days at a time, to give caregiver parents a break.

WATERLOO

- Formed in 1963.
- 50 members
- \$70,000 raised annually
- It's a supporter of the KidsAbility centre, holding an annual Golf Fore Kids Tournament at the Grey Silo Golf Club in Waterloo. It also runs a Ruedesheimer Garten fest hall during Oktoberfest.

CAMBRIDGE - GALT

- Formed in 1964
- 27 members
- \$35,000 raised annually
- The club founded the Can-Am-era Games in 1971. It continues to support the annual friendly competition between Saginaw Townships, Mich., and Cambridge.

KITCHENER - CONESTOGA

- Formed in 1971
- 85 members
- \$450,000 raised annually
- Perhaps best known for its annual Rotary dream home lottery, club members have raised \$4.5 million over 19 years to help 25 local charities. The club also holds an annual Lobsterfest to raise money for international programs.

CAMBRIDGE - NORTH

- Formed in 1974
- 36 members
- \$60,000 raised annually
- A quarter of the money raised is dedicated for international development. The rest is allocated in one-time grants to local individuals and projects meeting family and youth needs. The club recently gave \$30,000 to support construction of The Bridges shelter for the homeless in Cambridge.

KITCHENER - WESTMOUNT

- Formed in 1981.
- 70 members
- \$80,000 raised annually
- From its inception, this club has supported the KidsAbility Centre. It also sponsored construction of the headquarters building for the Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region and Catholic family counselling centre.

KITCHENER - GRAND RIVER

- Formed in 1986
- 55 members
- \$150,000 raised annually
- Club supports the Mantangwe medical clinic project in Kenya and the Opportunity Village training program for orphan and destitute young women in Nepal. Its annual Skate 48 Hockey Challenge tournament and Oktoberfest Winefest are major club fundraisers.

CAMBRIDGE - SUNRISE

- Founded 1994
- 30 members
- \$45,000 raised annually.
- Supports Rotary efforts fighting polio around the world. Gave \$25,000 for The Bridges homeless shelter, now under construction.

Demographics pose challenge for service club recruiters

BY KEVIN SWAYZE
RECORD STAFF

Service clubs and other community groups are recruiting members from a shrinking pool of aging volunteers and must change their ways to stay alive, an Ontario expert in volunteering warns.

"If they're not prepared to radically reform their organizations, the kind of work they do, they'll go the way of the dinosaurs," consultant Linda Graff of Dundas said in an interview.

Local Rotarians don't appear to be worried. While it's not as easy to recruit as it used to be, they say, their clubs are holding their own, replacing members as they lose them.

"It's easy to sell something that's successful," said George Szczepski, of the Preston-Hespeler club.

The Kitchener-Conestoga club, for example, remains a magnet for would-be members because of its reputation as a fundraising force. It has its choice of members and has a self-imposed limit of 85.

Rotary has made changes over the years to assist people who are time-starved, but still want to make a contribution to the community.

Members who miss weekly meetings can now log onto a web-based "virtual club" to comply with attendance rules. Some clubs have family memberships, so either spouse can attend. And some meet for breakfast

or supper, not the traditional luncheon.

"Personally, for me, the only time I can make it is the morning because I work in Toronto," said Scott Hebert of Cambridge, president of the Cambridge Sunrise club.

Graff, who heads Linda Graff and Associates, a firm specializing in volunteerism and non-profit management, said the landscape is changing whether service clubs admit to it or not.

Between 1997 and 2000, the most recent years for which statistics are available, Canada lost a million volunteers, she said. That's a 20-per-cent drop in the volunteer pool.

"It's quite a serious issue. In six,

seven or eight years out, the entire sector is going to face a crisis. There won't be enough people to replace them."

Volunteer organizations are facing other harsh realities. People today demand flexibility about when they can help out. And many aging people are looking to retire from work in general — paid or not.

Carol Ariss sees the changing face of volunteers every day as executive director of Volunteer Cambridge, which connects would-be volunteers to organizations.

"One of the things people value is their time. Sometimes, it's easier to write a cheque and you don't have to give time," Ariss said. "It makes it re-

ally challenging: Ask me for anything else, but not my time."

Ariss tells community groups to be flexible, to pick a cause that differentiates their organization from others, and to expect fewer and fewer people to be doing more and more.

"The same people seem to be doing more," Ariss said. "If you want something done, it's easy: you give it to someone who is busy."

Rotary and other service clubs also face the challenge of members drifting to other organizations.

Probus, a club formed of retired businesspeople, is like Rotary without fundraising, Ariss said.

"They have long lines for membership. What does that tell you?"