

# The RIM Newsletter

# Rotary

# InMotion



Club 16 (2809) District 6290, Chartered May 1, 1916  
<http://www.muskegonrotary.org>

*Is it the truth?  
Is it fair to all concerned?  
Will it build goodwill and better friendships?  
Will it be beneficial to all concerned?*



Celebrating the people, events, and actions of the Muskegon Rotary Club

March 5, 2026

March 12, 2026, 12 – 1:30pm — Chicken Parmesan at the **Delta**  
Program – District Governor Mark Andresky (See page 8 for details!)

## What's Coming

Mar 12—District Governor,  
Mark Andresky  
Mar 19—The Corner, A  
Community Collective  
March 26— Economic  
Development Overview



**Bill Erickson** delivered the Reflection sharing humorous words from Mark Twain.

## Visitors & Guests



**Greg Borgman** introduces his guest, Kate Lillie.(Your Plate or Mine)

## Upcoming Birthdays


Mar 16 Jonathan Seyfert  
Mar 16 Brock Johnson  
Mar 17 Eileen Stoffan



Demonstrating proper bell-ringing technique, **President Dave** announces we will meet at the **Delta** next week.



**Cece Riley** introduces her guest and work colleague, Maria PENA.

 **Caring Connections Fund**  
[Click here to donate](#)

## Stage Manager This Week

Rem Sprague

## Greeters This Week

Don Kalisz and Tara Foreman

## Reflector This Week

Bill Erickson

## RIM Reporting this Edition

Photographer – Roger Morgenstern  
RIM Reporter – Kathy Moore  
RIM Editor – Ginny Sprague

## Muskegon Rotary Board

Dave Alexander, President  
Roger Morgenstern, President-Elect  
Lisa Tyler, President Nominee  
Tim Arter, Past President  
Kimberly Taylor, Treasurer  
Jane Clingman-Scott, Secretary  
Kim Boersema, Club Coordinator  
Directors:  
Esther Ricco                      Brandon Turnbull  
Melissa Moore                  Samantha Scott  
Arlen-Dean Gaddy              Dimitri Poland  
Sarah Rinsema-Sybenga      Lisa Kraus

Please email Club Board Members through this [link](#):



**Alex Fonseca** introduces his guest, Dan Costenbader. (Ringnalda-TenHaken Insurance Group)

Muskegon Rotary March 5<sup>th</sup>  
YouTube Video: [CLICK HERE](#)

## Visitors & Guests cont.



**Marianne Bockheim-Verhil** introduces her guest and work colleague, Sarah Stechschulte.



**Lisa Kraus** steps in to introduce **Emma Schroeder's** guest, Adam Yost. (Trinity Health EMS)



**Marty Ferriby** introduces her guest, data scientist Catherine Tolley.

### RIM Reporting Team

Editors: Susan Besteman,  
Jackie Farrar, & Ginny Sprague  
Reporters: Kathy Moore, Roger  
Morgenstern, Meredith Smillie,  
& Sue Samaniego  
Photographers: Wyatt Huggett, Brock  
Johnson, Emily Morgenstern,  
& Roger Morgenstern

## Student Guests



**Kendrah Robinson** introduces our guests from Fruitport HS, pictured left to right: Cole Ferrier, Alaina Shaw, and Superintendent **Jason Kennedy**, Muskegon Rotarian.

## This Week's Program Transportation Options in Muskegon County

Presenters: Allison Revell and  
**Bob Lukens**

Introduction by: **Melissa Horton**

RIM Reporter: **Kathy Moore**

**Melissa Horton** introduced the program speakers: Allison Revell, who works for Access Health as the Muskegon SHIP Project Manager.

**Bob Lukens** is the Community Development Director for Muskegon County. He is responsible for the operational oversight of Muskegon County's Airport, Transit System, Parks, and Visit Muskegon (our local convention and visitors bureau).

Allison Revell shared that Access Health has successfully operated in the Muskegon community since 1999, providing low-cost, comprehensive health (insurance-like) coverage to eligible individuals. The model is rooted in an integrated systems approach to improve health beyond traditional healthcare by also addressing socio-economic barriers through community programs and initiatives, such as the Access C3 Health Coverage, Livability Lab, Muskegon CIE (Community Information Exchange), and



**Melissa Horton** Introducing our program speakers.



Allison Revell, Access Health



**Rotarian Bob Lukens**



Muskegon SHIP (Sustainable Health Investment Partnership). Allison Revell explained that ‘transportation challenges have been a recurring topic of discussion within the various programs and initiatives.

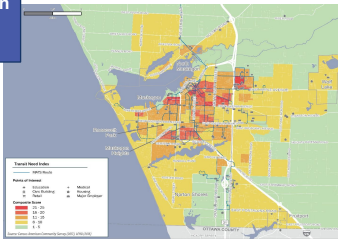
**Livability Lab Transportation Team**

- Transportation to work was identified as a high need at Livability Lab 6.0 in February 2026
- Team set forth to engage employers and for the community to develop solutions
- Team Members include representatives from:
  - City of Muskegon
  - County Of Muskegon
  - Muskegon Area Transit System
  - Wheels to Work
  - Pioneer Resources
  - J.S. Veterans Administration
  - United Way of the Lakeshore
  - Local Non-Profit Agencies
  - Local Faith Leaders
  - Community at Large

Judy Kell has been a long-time champion, along with a team of community residents and leaders, in identifying practical solutions.

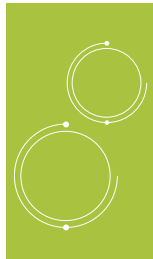
**Transit need in Muskegon County**

- Highest**
  - Central Muskegon (Marsh Field, Nims and Oakview)
  - Near Former Mercy Health General Campus
- Significant Concentrations**
  - Southern Roosevelt Park
  - SW and NE Muskegon Heights
- Moderate Need:**
  - North Muskegon
  - Northern Norton Shores
  - Whitehall
  - Montague
  - Area around Shetler Elementary



**Why Transportation is a Human Resources Issue**

- Reliable and convenient transportation helps attract top talent and retain employees, especially in competitive job markets
- Employees with reliable transportation are more likely to arrive on time, focused and energized, leading to greater productivity and efficiency
- Employees who provide access to transportation demonstrate a commitment to employee well-being, which improves the company's image and can foster a positive work culture
- Employees that offer transportation resources enables business to hire from further distances, increasing access to a more diverse and skilled workforce
- Corporate transport solutions can reduce carbon footprints, traffic congestion and air pollution



Bob Lukens highlighted several transportation options in Muskegon County and shared some potential strategies for improvement. The Muskegon Area Transportation System (MATS) is an affordable, reliable option for residents in the urban core of Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, and Norton Shores.

Additional or new revenue could help access more federal funds to expand the number of routes, hours, and

days of operation, better serving our residents across the County. The Rideshare Solutions with Enterprise (Michigan) connects 4 – 15 employees on the same shift, reduces commute costs, and frees up parking. Wheels to Work provides direct, door-to-door rides on a limited and pre-scheduled basis. Employers can partner with Pioneer Resources to pre-arrange rides to work or specific trainings.

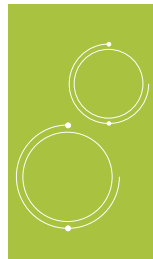
**The SHIP Initiative: Supporting a Pathway Forward**

- Sustainable Health Investment Partnership (SHIP)**
  - Focus on removing barriers that keep workers from stable employment
  - Transportation is a primary priority area
  - SHIP is exploring:
    - Partnerships with MATS, private carriers, and local employers
    - Solutions tailored to address work shift schedules and geographic needs

Bob Lukens also explained how improving transportation access offers clear benefits for employers – such as decreased turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness; employees – such as safe, dependable commutes; and the community – greater family stability and a more resilient economy. In summary, Lukens stressed that continued collaboration among community partners is essential to advancing solutions that improve mobility and opportunity for all Muskegon County residents.

**What Employers Can Do**

- Employer-supported transportation is a proven solution
- **Muskegon Area Employer-Supported Transportation**
  - Hope Network's Wheels to Work model shows success in West Michigan
  - Commute with Enterprise service available in Muskegon
  - **Both these options offer**
    - Shared employer/employee cost
    - Direct-route transportation to job sites
- Opportunities for Muskegon County:
  - Employer-subsidized rides
  - Partnership with MATS or community providers
  - Support for Regionally-based Transportation developments
  - Even small subsidies dramatically improve job access
- **Employer ROI:** reduced turnover, larger hiring pool, improved reliability



To see the full video presentation: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= cjMGul18ng&t=502](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjMGul18ng&t=502).

**Spotlight Video  
Rotary Exchange Student  
Neve McGinn**



Neve discussed her delight and excitement about the upcoming outbound youth exchange travel to Denmark. She is currently a sophomore at Muskegon High School and plans to pursue a career in the culinary field upon graduation. She knows several students who have said that it is a “life-altering experience.” Neve is looking forward to representing her school, our Club, and our County. She also said she hopes to expand her knowledge and find herself while abroad.

**Muskegon Rising Podcast**

Listen, watch, and subscribe to Muskegon Rising.



**Muskegon Rising**

Why Muskegon Is Rising—[CLICK HERE](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR ALL PODCASTS](#)

# Inductions



## **Gavin Poulin and Michael Poulin, sponsor**

Gavin Poulin's leadership journey began in high school when a Rotary Youth Exchange trip to El Salvador profoundly shaped his worldview and commitment to serving others. That experience inspired Gavin to pursue a path of service through the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he graduated in 2021 with a bachelor's degree in law with a nuclear engineering track and was commissioned as a Military Police Officer.

After completing the Military Police Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC), Gavin was stationed in South Korea, just 13 miles from the DMZ, leading soldiers in a forward-operating environment. During his time in South Korea, Gavin was nominated for and awarded the Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal and the Gold Presidential Volunteer Service Award. During a 3-month period, Gavin volunteered over 400 hours of his personal time with the American Red Cross, the Army Community Service Center, the United Service Organization, and the Impact Zone. As a result, Gavin was the recipient of 4 separate awards at the 2022 Volunteer Recognition Ceremony, where he also received the Camp Casey Military Active-Duty Volunteer of the Year Award for the Pacific Theater.

Gavin later returned to West Point to serve as the Officer in Charge of the West Point Honor Guard, where he led military funeral honors missions with precision and reverence, overseeing 222 funerals during his tenure. He was promoted to Captain during this time.

Amid his military service, Gavin and his wife, Summer, welcomed their daughter, Evelyn, who is now four months old. Currently on ETS leave through May, Gavin is working at Sanborn's Jewelers while building his startup software company, Eternum - a performance and management platform designed to optimize operations and elevate employee performance within the jewelry industry to help other independent stores grow.



## **Jessie Wilde and Don Kalisz, sponsor**

A proud Oakridge High School and Muskegon Community College graduate, Jessie Wilde was not born here but will tell you without hesitation that Muskegon is home. It is where she raised her five children, built her career, and planted roots that run deep in this community. She is known for rolling up her sleeves and getting to work. She believes in showing up, whether that is for a nonprofit board meeting, a community clean-up, a fundraiser, or a late-night marketing deadline. She serves on boards such as Taking Back

Muskegon, which helps at-risk youth in high-risk areas of our community, and has been deeply involved in supporting veterans through the WMK9 Foundation and other local resource groups. Jessie carries supporting those who have served our country close to her heart.

Her love for community started young. In elementary school, she organized her first fundraiser, collecting spare change from classrooms to support domestic violence shelters, and raised over \$2,000. That spark for gathering people around a cause never left her. Many of you have seen her on a stage somewhere. Jessie has exceeded everything from Parties in the Park to formal galas and conferences, using her voice to celebrate local organizations and rally support for meaningful work. She has a gift for connecting people and for helping them see what is possible.

Professionally, she helped Kindred Marketing by working with businesses and nonprofits to clarify their messages and expand their impact. While she now supports Kindred in a limited capacity, she has stepped into her role as Chief Marketing Officer at HarborLight Credit Union, so you will certainly continue seeing her influence throughout our community.

At home, her family motto is simple: "Do Better." She challenges her children to walk into any room — school, work, relationships — and ask how they can use the gifts God gave them to leave it better than they found it. She teaches them that honesty and integrity are the two things you cannot buy back once they are gone.

Jessie leads with grit, faith, and heart. She loves this community fiercely and believes that when we each do a little better, Muskegon becomes truly special.

Congratulations to newest Rotarians in the world, Jessie & Gavin!



## Announcements

**President Dave** began with some save-the-date reminders:  
**Lakeshore Literacy Summit** on Friday, March 27 (See flyer on page 7)  
**Pours for Community** begins on April 15 (See flyer on page 6.)  
**Muskegon Rotary Food Truck** on Wednesday, April 22  
**Muskegon Rotary District Visioning** on Saturday, May 2



**Jim Fisher** displayed the flyer for the **Rotary Lakeshore Literacy Summit 2026** to be held on **Friday, March 27**, at the Trillium Event Center. (See page 7 for more details.)



**Ginny Sprague** urged 17 Muskegon Rotarians to be brave and sign up for the

**March Madness Brave Rotarian contest.** (See details on page 6.)



**Dimitri Poland**, on behalf of the JCI Board, encouraged Rotarians to join in the **13<sup>th</sup> annual St. Patrick's Day Parade**, Saturday, March 14, at 11:00 am on Western Avenue. This year's parade is in remembrance of Muskegon Rotarian **Kevin Donovan**. Dimitri directed any questions to Rotarian **Kat Hyder**, JCI President. To register, please sign up by Wednesday, March 11, on JCI's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=JCI%20St.%20Patrick%27s%20Day>.



**Claire Root-Benson** Promoted DEI-related events being presented at the Corner, including **Play It Straight**,

March 20, 21, 27, and 28, and **author Curtis Chin, *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant*** on April 13. (See page 7 for more details.)

**Missy Horton** invited our two newest Rotarians, **Jessie and Gavin**, along with all new members and their sponsors, to attend the **New Member Coffee on March 20.**

### Rotary ReWine Schedule

**1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays** each month

- **5:00-5:15 pm** social time
- **5:15 pm** Meeting begins

**March 19<sup>th</sup> at Puerto Vallarta**  
 292 W. Western Ave, Suite 103  
 Muskegon, MI 49440

RSVP by 5 pm on Wednesday for the meeting on Thursday.

Contact **Kaytie Drake**  
 at [kaytieely@aol.com](mailto:kaytieely@aol.com) to RSVP (total # attending including guests)

**ROTARY**  
*New Member Social*

<i>Who</i>		New Rotary Members and their sponsors
<i>What</i>		Appetizers in the City Barn followed by a tour of Thomas Hume's house
<i>When</i>		March 20, 2026 4:00 P.M.
<i>Where</i>		Hackley & Hume Historic Sites 484 W. Webster Ave. Muskegon, MI 49440

RSVP: [melissa@lakeshoremuseum.org](mailto:melissa@lakeshoremuseum.org)

## Announcements continued



**Dom Bunker**, chair of the Youth Exchange Committee, announced that we have been notified of our first Inbound student, a young man from Germany, and that we await notification of two more. Please consider welcoming one of these students as a **host family!** Contact Dom for more information: [Click Here](#)

### Youth Exchange Outbounds

Now is the time we begin recruiting the next class of outbound students from Muskegon County. Volunteers will also be needed to help speak with students too. If you are interested in volunteering and/or know any students who may be interested in being an outbound Rotary Youth Exchange student, contact **Dom Bunker**.

### Community Yard Sale—May 15-17th

Rotarians, outbound youth exchange families, and friends are invited to donate items for a community yard sale on May 15th-17th at the United Way building parking lot. More details to come but please start thinking about items you may be able to contribute.

### Next Committee Meeting

Our next meeting will be:  
Thursday, March 26 at 5:30 PM  
United Way of the Lakeshore Building



**Tim Lipan** announced the next Social Committee Rotary After Hours event, **Wednesday, March 25, from 5:30 to 7:00 P.M. at Kids Food Basket**, 2330 Barclay Street, Muskegon. Your evening includes appetizers, adult beverages, water, soft drinks, facility tours, and the opportunity to decorate food bags. Your cost for this event is **FREE!** Mark your calendars, and [CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP](#). Follow on Facebook—[Click Here](#)



**Wednesday, April 15, 5-7:00 pm,**  
794 Kitchen & Bar

**Monday, April 20, 5-7:00 pm,**  
Unruly Brewing

**Friday, April 24, 4-6:00 pm,**  
Wonderland Distilling

**Tuesday, April 28. 7:30-9:30 am,**  
Community House \*\*

**Thursday, April 30, 5-7:00 pm,**  
Muskegon Brewing

\*\* Please note the **April 28** event is a **morning coffee hour** at the Community House.



We need **17 more Brave**

**Rotarians** to fill out our brackets for the 2026 Men's and Women's basketball tournaments. \$100 secures your spot in the contest. Not only could you win a Paul Harris Fellow for yourself or as a gift to a worthy recipient, but you also fulfill your **Every Rotarian Every Year** contribution to The Rotary Foundation! Sign-ups will continue through March 12, 2026, and payment is expected by March 12. You may pay by **check to the Muskegon Rotary Foundation**, cash, or the QR code to pay by credit card.

Contact **Meredith Smillie** to sign up and pay or click the QR Code below to pay.



## ReWine Updates

### Adopt-A-Highway Program Looking for Volunteers

Our next pickup for the Muskegon Rotary stretch of highway on I-96 will be on Saturday, April 18. Volunteers will meet promptly at 8:45am for a short safety talk, then head out on the road to pick trash. (We will finish no later than 11:00am, sooner if we get a lot of help 😊). Also looking for two drivers to drive along with the volunteers who are picking trash. If you can help, please contact **Esther Ricco**, [riccoe@gvsu.edu](mailto:riccoe@gvsu.edu) and she can provide you with details. Be a part of keeping our adopted stretch clean and taking action to protect our environment!



Here's a link to recommended books for Women's History Month:  
<https://muskegonadl.bibliocommons.com/v2/list/display/1892109169/2253452269>



**Rotary**

**LAKESHORE**

**LITERACY SUMMIT**

**2026**

**Friday**  
**March 27**  
**8:30AM**  
**TO 12PM**





Join community members at a gathering focused on strengthening literacy on the Lakeshore. Through inspiring speakers and breakout sessions, become a literacy ally and support learners of all ages. Connect, learn, and help shape a more literate Lakeshore at this no-cost event.

**Learn more about:**

- ✓ How the brain develops reading skills
- ✓ What local literacy organizations are doing
- ✓ Why reading aloud to young children matters
- ✓ What you can do to make an impact

**Trillium Event Center**  
17246 Van Wagoner Rd, Spring Lake, MI

**A collaboration of Rotary Clubs of Grand Haven, Muskegon, and Spring Lake, in partnership with:**

**READ**  
MUSKEGON

**READ**  
OTTAWA

**HACKLEY**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Louitt**  
District Library

**Spring Lake**  
District Library

**MADL**  
MUSKEGON AREA DISTRICT LIBRARY

**Grand Haven**  
Area Public Schools

**Fruitport**  
District Library

**Sponsored in part by:**

**COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**  
for Muskegon County

**Grand Haven Area**  
Community Foundation

**Cost: Free!**

**REGISTER NOW**



**GREAT MICHIGAN READ AUTHOR EVENT WITH**

**CURTIS CHIN**



BOOK SIGNING AFTER THE EVENT

Join us for an evening with Curtis Chin, author of *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant*, as part of the statewide Great Michigan Read tour presented by Michigan Humanities.

Chin's memoir traces his experiences growing up Chinese-American in Detroit—balancing humor, heart, and the lively world of Chung's Cantonese Cuisine, his family's restaurant that fed people from all walks of life in 1980s Detroit. His story captures the complexities of coming out as a gay Asian-American, his years at the University of Michigan, and his later work writing for film and television.

**APR 13 | 6:30pm**

The Corner (280 W. Muskegon Ave)

Doors open at **6pm** with tastings from local Chinese Restaurants available until the event begins. Books will be available for purchase courtesy of the Book Nook.



Save your seat with this QR code



**Event on April 13, with Curtis Chin, author of *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant*.**

Chin's memoir traces his experiences growing up Chinese-American in Detroit—balancing humor, heart, and the lively world of Chung's Cantonese Cuisine, his family's restaurant that fed people from all walks of life in 1980s Detroit. His story captures the complexities of coming out as a gay Asian-American, his years at the University of Michigan, and his writing career. Presented by Muskegon Area District Library in cooperation with Muskegon Pride and MCC.

## You Are Invited!



Muskegon Rotarians and families are invited to see the magic and hear the great positive messages of **Michigan Magician and Keynote Speaker Anthony Grupido on March 16 at Reeths-Puffer's Rocket Centre**. Our RP Interact Club has led the effort to bring Anthony to their school and community to discuss Mental Health, Resiliency, and Suicide Prevention. Our Muskegon Rotary Club and friends have donated nearly \$500 from pop-can proceeds to help move this along and involve other partners. They have invited us as a club to come and enjoy and learn with them. Thank you, Reeths-Puffer Interact and School District!

There are three opportunities for you to witness this amazing program.

**School assembly**—Check in at the main office, off Roberts Street, fifteen minutes prior to the program

12:40 to 1:40 pm — school assembly

1:40 to 2:50 pm — school assembly

**Community Magic Show at Rocket Centre at 7:00 pm.** Bring your family! Go directly to the Rocket Centre entrance!

## March 12 Meeting Special Guest District Governor Mark Andresky



**Mark Andresky, CExP, CEPA, MCBI, M&AMI**, is a Principal with Performance Business Advisors, LLC. He concentrates his practice on helping small business owners plan and execute their transitions out of their businesses through comprehensive transition planning and business sales. He is a Certified Exit Planner, Certified Master Business Intermediary, Mergers & Acquisitions Master Intermediary, Business Appraiser, and Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker.

Mark's affiliation with Rotary began as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar studying in Strasbourg, France, in 1988 – 89, and he became a member of the Rotary Club of Charlevoix in 2010, where he serves on the Board of Directors and is the Club Foundation Chair. He is a Past President of the Club and a former Assistant Governor of the Top of Michigan Clubs.

Most recently, Mark served as the District 6290 Lead Education Facilitator and currently serves as District Chair of the Paul Harris Society and a Regional Vision Facilitation Coordinator. He is a Paul Harris Fellow, Major Donor, and a member of the Paul Harris, Polio Plus, and Bequest Societies.

When he's not serving clients and Rotary, Mark loves to run, cycle, and drive fast cars.

## Rotary Youth Exchange

Many of you helped make Ziyah's exchange year possible. Today, she's living that dream in Brazil with Rotary Distrito 4700, attending school in *Trindade do Sul*, and representing Muskegon Public with strength, courage, and heart.

In her latest letter, Ziyah shares honestly about the highs and challenges of exchange life, what it meant to be the first Rotary Youth Exchange student hosted in her town, how Brazilian jiu-jitsu helped her grow in confidence, and how Brazil is becoming her second home.

This is exactly why we do Youth Exchange.

**Dom Bunker, Chair  
Youth Exchange**



## From Muskegon to Brazil—Ziyah's Journey

Dear Rotary,

I wanted to share a little about my experience here in Brazil so far. My exchange is going well, and I am very grateful to be here. Of course, some days are good and some days are harder, but that is part of the experience. When I do have a hard day, I remind myself that even a bad day in Brazil is still something special. I try to stay positive and learn from every situation. Thank you for your support and for giving me this opportunity.

**Arrival and Responsibility**  
Living in Brazil as a Rotary Youth Exchange student has been one of the most transformative experiences of my life. When I first arrived in Trindade do Sul, I felt excited but also nervous about starting over in a completely new environment. Everything was different — the language, the school system, the routines, and even the way people express affection. Being the first international Rotary exchange student hosted here made the experience even more meaningful. I felt a strong responsibility to represent my country well and to build positive relationships in my new community. Over the months, what once felt unfamiliar slowly became normal, and Brazil truly began to feel like my second home.

**Host Families and Travel**

Throughout my exchange, I lived with different host families, and each one

shaped my experience in a unique way. Some families had large gatherings and loved being surrounded by extended relatives, while others had quieter routines, but all of them welcomed me with patience and genuine care.

Transitioning between families was sometimes emotional, but it helped me grow more adaptable. I traveled with my host families to different places, experienced holidays and celebrations together, and was included in everyday life — from simple dinners at home to special events. I also met grandparents, cousins, and family friends who treated me like one of their own. Their constant support helped me feel safe, even when I was far from my home in Michigan. Through Rotary meetings and local activities, I felt embraced not just by one family, but by an entire community. School, Language & Jiu-Jitsu  
Attending school in Brazil was both challenging and rewarding. In the beginning, understanding Portuguese in class was difficult, but each month I noticed improvement. My classmates were welcoming and patient, and over time, I became more confident speaking and participating. One of the biggest personal steps I took during my exchange was starting Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Trying something so new pushed me outside of my comfort zone, but it became one of the most important parts of my routine. Training consistently taught me discipline and mental strength. It helps me focus on something else and let out the built-up anxiety I have from being in a new country. Earning an award in jiu-jitsu was a proud moment because it symbolized how

much I had grown — not only physically, but emotionally and culturally as well. It showed me that I didn't have to be afraid of stepping out of my comfort zone into trying something new.

#### Reflection

Over the course of this exchange, I have grown in independence, confidence, and maturity. Living in another country taught me how to adapt, communicate across cultures, and appreciate differences. There were moments when I missed home or felt challenged by transitions, but those moments helped me become stronger and made me more committed because I'm not just doing this exchange for myself but for the people back in my home country. My host families truly cared about me like their own daughter, guiding me while also allowing me to become more independent. I have learned that growth happens when you allow yourself to be uncomfortable and open to change.

My experience here has forever changed me from the person I was back in the USA. I have experienced so much, grown in ways I never expected, and learned lessons that will stay with me for the rest of my life. This journey has shaped me into the person I am becoming today. Brazil will always feel like home to me, and I am so grateful to Rotary for making this incredible and special part of my life possible.

