

ROTARY CLUB NEWS: Reflections on Rotary and world peace

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Martha Pritchard Spear (Provided photo)

These are my own thoughts, not a statement of the Rotary Club of Lake Placid. I long for world peace, and I accept that there are those who will think I am nave and a dreamer.

Yet I am beginning to comprehend that the journey toward peace is sometimes reached by passing through violence. There are terrorists, there are fascists and totalitarian leaders who scorn peace. Is there a nonviolent defense against people like that? I have faith that Rotary and other humanitarian organizations will continue to educate, advocate, mediate and practice peace. I would like to think that peace will prevail. But my faith that it will has been shaken.

For those of us living in Lake Placid, there are many ways to promote peace. When driving on Main Street, you can stop for people to cross the street, smile and wave to reassure them it's OK to walk. When coming up Saranac Avenue on a slushy day, you can stop and offer a ride to the person walking home with their heavy grocery bags or pushing a laden cart. When

you are in line at the Stewart's store and someone is short a couple dollars, you can open your wallet and help them out. You can give groceries to the food pantry, donate a coat to the coat drive or a bra and tampons to the Zonta Club of the Adirondacks.

Every small act of grace is a nugget of peace.

Being a Rotarian in Lake Placid means being a catalyst for peace, such as moving past social divisions. For us, it is typical for a conservative Christian, an apolitical Jew, an atheist and a liberal feminist to sit down together for breakfast. We wish each other "Happy Holidays," "Merry Christmas," "Blessed Kwanzaa" and "Happy Hannukah" and talk about the weather, our families and the next Rotary volunteer project.

We live by the credo of the Four-Way Test: "Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?"

Rotary International prioritizes peace as one of its core goals.

Peace is elusive. The Oct. 7 terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel followed by devastating "collateral" military consequences for Palestinians in Gaza does not lend itself to peace. There is civil war in beautiful Ethiopia, my son's country of birth. The entire continent of Africa is convulsing with civil wars, terrorist insurgencies and ethnic violence.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine especially hits home for us in Lake Placid. Many of us know Ukrainian expatriate Dmitry Feld, respected for his work with USA Luge and as president of Shipman Youth Center, who in 2022 organized the village to put up Ukrainian flags on light poles, inspiring business owners to put up their own Ukrainian flags. Dmitry has also organized supplies to be sent, and traveled to Ukraine with Dr. John Cogar to assist pets in peril due to the war. North Country School made it possible for a young Ukrainian boy named Yehor to leave his home in the great city of Kharkiv, where he was in grave danger, and come study in Lake Placid. Beth and Frank Brunner hosted a Ukrainian refugee family in their home for six weeks. There are many stories like these, of regular people advocating for peace by doing the morally right thing.

In this time of terrorism, wars and deep, painful divisions among us Americans, peace is personal. Peace is complicated. By advocating for peace I am acting in hope that the words of Anne Frank are true: "In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart." Peace.

The Rotary Club of Lake Placid meets weekly on Thursday mornings at 7:20 a.m. at the Hampton Inn. All are welcome.

(Martha Pritchard Spear is a member of the Rotary Club of Lake Placid.)

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Rotary International statement on peace

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Today, over 70 million people are displaced as a result of conflict, violence, persecution, and human rights violations. Half of them are children. Rotarians refuse to accept conflict as a way of life. Rotary projects provide training that fosters understanding and provides communities with the skills to resolve conflicts. Rotary creates environments of peace.

As a humanitarian organization, peace is a cornerstone of our mission. We believe when people work to create peace in their communities, that change can have a global effect.

By carrying out service projects and supporting peace fellowships and scholarships, our members take action to address the underlying causes of conflict, including poverty, discrimination, ethnic tension, lack of access to education, and unequal distribution of resources.

Our commitment to peacebuilding today answers new challenges: how we can make the greatest possible impact and how we can achieve our vision of lasting change. We are approaching the concept of peace with greater cohesion and inclusivity, broadening the scope of what we mean by peacebuilding, and finding more ways for people to get involved. Rotary creates environments where peace can happen.