

That Was the Year That Was 2021-22

It's a bird. It's a plane! No, *it's the Rotary Club of Arlington!*

2021-22 was the year the Rotary Club of Arlington came roaring back in amazing, super-hero fashion. After two years of sailing through the Coronavirus pandemic with virtual meetings and cautious, masked social events as the pandemic began to recede, the club resumed its regular, in-person weekly meetings at the First United Methodist Church shortly before the 2021-22 Rotary year began. Astonishingly, our previous, very able club president, Susie McAlister, passed the baton to Kurt Bartley, our present leader and the most extroverted president our Rotary club has recently enjoyed, a year ago with a full and growing complement of Rotarians, board members and planned events almost as though the pandemic had never happened. And it is not an exaggeration to say that Kurt did not just accept the passed baton. He tucked it under his arm and ran with it. Together with his board and our president-elect, Victoria Farrar-Myers, who we welcome to her new post this evening, Kurt hit the ground running with a dizzying array of speakers, projects and activities that made many Rotarians wonder if there had actually been a pandemic.

As with the pandemic, our club has also reacted to world events this year, most principally the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in super-hero fashion. Chris McMurrough led a team that has sold Rotary yard signs that promote peace in the region, bear a QR code that links to Rotary's website promoting peace in Ukraine, and encouraging all viewers to support Rotary's worldwide effort to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine in support of its citizens who have suffered as result of the invasion. Thanks to Chris and his team, our club and other Rotary clubs around the world who have contributed to this effort there are now 90 Rotary disaster response grants totaling \$2.4 million that have been awarded to support people affected by the war. And, as of last week, Rotarians worldwide have contributed a total of \$15 million toward this purpose. The Rotary Foundation will continue to use the donations for humanitarian aid projects in and around Ukraine. Rotary grants are presently providing funds for Rotarians on the ground in Ukraine to provide food, water,

medical equipment and shelter to the 5 million Ukrainians, mostly women and children, who have sought refuge in neighboring countries and the additional 7 million Ukrainians who have been displaced within Ukraine. The \$15 million that has been contributed toward this effort will be prioritized for disaster response grants in the region. If that's not super-hero world service, I don't know what is.

If that weren't enough the Arlington Rotary Foundation was back on track this year, awarding 45 scholarships for college, career training and other secondary education to graduates of Webb Elementary School, the Title 1 school our club adopted about thirty years ago. This was an increase over the previous two years, during which Covid anxiety brought many college-age students to sit out a year or two until the pandemic made the prospect of sitting in classrooms and breathing the same air as others less daunting. And, by the way, lest you think that the Arlington Rotary Foundation has descended into intellectual snobbery and will only fund scholarships for Webb graduates who want to attend college, we sent two Webb graduates to trade school, one to barber college and one to Tarrant County College's accredited special education program this Rotary year. And, as we do every year, we sent two Arlington High School graduates to college regardless of whether they are Webb graduates or not. And many of the schools with which we have relationships—UTA, TCC, UT, A&M and others—match our funds, effectively doubling the value of the scholarships we provide. However, we are still waiting for Covid anxiety to abate further so that we might send a hundred students to college and other secondary school programs each year as we have in the past.

But please don't think that the Arlington Rotary Foundation just funded scholarships this Rotary year. As you may know, the Arlington Tomorrow Foundation, the City of Arlington and others are in the process of creating the Arlington Dream Park in downtown Arlington. You may also recall that Arlington's first park, Meadowbrook Park, was created by the Rotary Club of Arlington and that our providing this enduring gift to the present and future citizens of our community was one of our club's first major accomplishments after its founding in 1923. For our centennial year, we have decided to do something similar. Accordingly, the foundation

has contributed \$150,000 and the club has donated an additional \$10,000—which is to be funded by a Rotary District grant--toward the Arlington Dream Park, a park in downtown Arlington which will feature an art installation that Jen Lynn, a noted artist, created consisting of two lighted Rotary wheels, one of which rests on the ground and the other of which rises above it perpendicular to the ground. It will sit beside the large “Dream” sculpture the City of Arlington commissioned some years ago. During the day the Rotary sculpture looks like glass, although it is resistance tested and will not break easily. At night it is interactive. It lights in interesting ways when you walk on it. The total cost of the installation is \$205,000 but the Arlington Parks Department has agreed to provide the additional \$45,000 necessary to pay the total cost of the installation. A hundred years from now, when this club celebrates its bicentennial, the Arlington Dream Park and Meadowbrook Park as well as Senter Park, a sports facility this club also created and donated during its early years, will remain points of pride for our club as well as tangible evidence that we were here and doing what Rotarians do from 1923 on.

However, the recent downturn in the stock market hit our foundation particularly hard, reducing the balance of our funds from about \$2.2 million to about \$1.763 million, a loss of about \$400,000. The funds our foundation generates from its investments are the primary source of our Webb scholarships and other contributions we make to the community. But don't panic. We've been through this before and the stock market—or at least the part of it in which our very able investment advisor, Joe Way, invests our money—always comes back. We invested \$609,000 with Edward Jones, the company with which Joe is connected, in 2009 and even taking account of the recent downturn these funds have grown at an annualized rate of 9.55 percent. Not bad. Not bad at all. And in the meantime, with Covid abating it is beginning to look like we will be able to resume holding more fundraisers like our annual golf tournament.

And speaking of Webb, one accomplishment our club has enjoyed this Rotary year is expanding and strengthening our relationship with Webb Elementary School and Nichols Junior High School, the junior high into which Webb feeds. With the help of President Kurt, who wrote the grant

application, Youth Services Chair Jill Regina obtained a Rotary District Grant of \$8,650 to provide uniforms for Webb and Nichols students whose parents could not provide them. Jill and her committee searched the internet for bargains and made those dollars go as far as possible. The uniforms purchased were distributed at Webb and Nichols to more than 300 kids. And to further improve our relationship with Nichols, Jill passed the hat at a club meeting and with the \$270 the club generously donated purchased baby gifts for the pregnant family liaison at Nichols, who is not a teacher but a paraprofessional and who is not compensated like a teacher. Jill then presented these gifts to the family liaison, provoking evident delight.

Jill and other Rotarians also attended the Nichols Halloween event known as “Trunk or Treat” to distribute candy and written reminders to Webb graduates and their parents that we have scholarships waiting for them when they graduate from high school and providing them with the website the foundation maintains so that they might learn of the details.

We also sent the sixth graders at Webb to Camp Thurman, a local day camp, with backpacks containing pens, notebooks, Chapstick and all manner of other goodies that the club provided. We also provided lunch each day that they attended camp. And, as usual, we conducted our annual Lisann Peters Read With Rotary program at Webb, during which each student chose a book, which we provided free of charge, together with a little adult attention. The kids loved both. We have named the event for former club president Lisann Peters, who sadly departed this life a few years ago, because she so loved the event, in which she participated for many years, and because Lisann was so taken with it that she left \$50,000 to the Arlington Rotary Foundation in her will with which to fund it. Even now, I feel confident that Lisann is looking down at us and smiling...at most of us, anyway. Lisann’s departure was a sad reminder that even supermen—and superwomen—pass away, making what we do when we are here ever more important.

And speaking of Youth Service, we sent four Arlington High School students to Tarleton University to attend Camp RYLA this year. For those

of you not familiar with RYLA, it's an acronym that stands for Rotary Youth Leadership Award. We interview promising high school juniors—supermen and women in training--and choose all we can fund with the hope that what they learn at the camp might help them develop leadership skills they can use during their senior year in high school and beyond. The idea is to help develop our future leaders. Interestingly, the only Arlington High School students who completed applications this year were women. Accordingly, all four of those we sponsored and the additional Arlington High student sponsored by another Arlington Rotary club were all women—or should I say--superwomen.

And, as usual, members of this club presented Rotary Awards to a male and a female student at 59 of the sixty Arlington ISD schools his year during a period of two weeks. The 60th school gave us the wrong time and so the students at that school had to accept their Rotary Awards from a school administrator. But this is an amazing feat that this club has carried off for decades in superhuman fashion. And this year was no exception. And if that were not enough, Valerie Landry handed out flyers as well as Rotary Awards at Nichols during its awards assembly to remind every Webb graduate there that we have scholarships waiting for them when they graduate high school and to consult our foundation website for the details. And if *that* weren't enough, Tommy Thompson had the availability of these scholarships—and the full amount available to each scholarship recipient — announced when he presented Rotary awards to Lamar High School's superman and superwoman in training. I'm pretty sure that the students who attended the event heard and made note of these scholarships. But whether they did or did not, I feel certain that the parents present did.

But I wouldn't want this dry recitation of our accomplishments this year to suggest to you that nothing funny ever happens at Rotary. There were many laughable events this year, one of which took place at the May 19 meeting of the Arlington Rotary Foundation Board of Directors. The board president, Scott Hendricks, announced that the vice president of the foundation during the coming Rotary year will be Chris McMurrough and explained that when club President-Elect Victoria learned that he—Scott—would remain foundation president for the coming Rotary year she insisted

that he find a young vice president. Chris then protested that he is not *that* young and pointed out that his hair is starting to turn grey. Another board member commented that Chris is young at heart, having arrived at the board meeting wearing blue jeans and carrying a backpack. Then another board member, apparently concerned, asked Chris if he can read cursive handwriting. In the course of the resulting laughter Victoria demanded that we stop reverse age-shaming poor Chris. This brought another board member to point out that if reverse age-shaming is appropriate anywhere it's at the Rotary Club of Arlington.

But this Rotary year was not all fun and games. To the surprise of no one, past club president Derrick Kinney led us on the yearly sprint he originally dubbed Rotary's Sixty Days of Service. This now annual event began when Derrick was club president and, reaching the Spring of his Rotary year, realized that his time as president was coming to an end without our having completed all of the service projects necessary for our Rotary district to award us the recognitions our club earns most years. Then, like a college student who suddenly realizes that a paper is due a short time later, we began sixty days of feverish activity. Not surprisingly, this pattern has repeated itself as club presidents and committee chairs have trotted through each Rotary year since with only the occasional service project, only to get within a few months of the end. We then shift into the Rotary equivalent of college all-nighters: Rotary's Sixty Days of Service. This year it included the Fish Creek Clean-up; Rotarians cleaning out a large closet at Webb School so there was room to store the uniforms the club contributed; the club's donation of boxes and boxes of toothbrushes, toothpaste and dental floss to Dental Health For Arlington during its annual Toothbrush Rush; and the club's donation of nonperishable goods to the Arlington Life Shelter during its annual "Stock The Shelves" event. Many Rotarians also volunteered with the Miracle League, making it possible for 246 young people with special needs to experience the joy that is baseball. These projects, in turn, allowed Rotarians the joy of actually getting out in the community and experiencing the thrill of hands-on projects rather than just raising money and presenting checks.

But lest you think that Rotary was all work and no play this year, I ask you to remember with me the many social events our director of fun, Diane Patrick, and her committee of supermen and superwomen planned and executed this Rotary year. We began with last year's installation dinner. We followed up with an orientation event at Kurt and Catherine Bartley's house for new members and their mentors, complete with food and cocktails. We celebrated the holiday season at Mojoy and Julia Haddad's house and enjoyed music, food and the good company of our fellow Rotarians as well as the adult equivalent of goody bags. And, although each of us purchased tickets for ourselves and our spouses, thanks to the Haddads' generosity every penny of the money paid for tickets went to the Arlington Rotary Foundation to fund our scholarships for Webb graduates. During our Pints For Polio event we enjoyed the excellent beer that was, until recently, available at Legal Draft, the now defunct Arlington brewery, and simultaneously raised money for Polio Plus, Rotary's worldwide program to eliminate polio and four other deadly diseases. We watched the Tony-award winning play "Sister Act" at Theatre Arlington. And let's not forget that Diane and her committee also put together tonight's festivities, which I dare say have impressed the club.

But there was more. Far more. President-elect Victoria put together an amazing array of programs this year and was not afraid to tackle controversial subjects. We recently learned about the Taliban's systematic murder of prominent women in Afghanistan, their torture and imprisonment of other Afghani women who dared protest their oppressive policies and their imposition of laws intended to keep women away from school, jobs and public life. We heard about an experimental program that uses virtual reality in drug treatment. We learned about a free clinic that offers medical care to those unable to afford it in Southwest Arlington and discovered that one of our newest super-Rotarians, Richard Urso, is the primary doctor there. We heard from a man convicted of drug crimes who emerged from prison determined to change and who now leads a program for students at alternative education facilities designed to lead them down the correct path.

And we enjoyed what I would argue was the top program this year from Matthew Loh, who told us of his family's escape from Vietnam after its communist takeover; the punishments they endured when their first attempt to leave failed; their traumatic journey to the United States as boat people and then as refugees; their early efforts to survive in Texas, which at the time was a foreign land; to navigate an unfamiliar culture, to learn a foreign language and to make something of themselves in North Texas; and finally about their successful efforts to transform former Sams Club and Walmart buildings into Asia Time Square, a dazzling collection of buildings and businesses that celebrate Asian culture and offer a taste of it to all of us. In exchange for this amazing series of presentations we can only thank Victoria for the time, effort and commitment that went into finding the speakers who so informed and entertained us this year.

But you have heard me speak of our programs, and to tell you of our best, many times before. This year, I would like to create a new category for a "best" recognition: the best introduction. I would submit to you that the best introduction of this Rotary year took place at the meeting held on May 19, 2022. At that meeting Don Mebus led us in what still somehow passes for song and did his best to teach the club to sing "Roll, Rotary". It's a challenging song featuring unfamiliar lyrics and a tricky tune never heard in any other context. And yet, Don somehow managed – in his characteristic way -- to get excited about this thankless task. "Roll, Rotary, roll along, roll along" he sang while most of the club ate lunch and waited for our so-called singing to be over, as we do most weeks. But Don's enthusiasm, always contagious, somehow drew us in, got us humming and then singing even that old Rotary standard, until the entire club was belting it out. Then it struck me: I wish I could get as excited about anything as Don seems to be about everything.

Another of our accomplishments this year involves our membership. Eighteen new Rotarians have joined our club during the current Rotary year, owing largely to the efforts of our membership chair, Randy Hendricks, and past president, district governor and recruiter extraordinaire Peter Scott. Sadly, we lost thirteen members during the same period owing largely to career-related moves and, regrettably, four

deaths, resulting in a net gain of five members. This is perhaps the greatest testament to our success as a club: there is no end to the number of people who want to join us for our weekly meetings, service projects and social events. And, frankly, I don't blame the people beating down the door to join our club. Hanging out with you guys is fun!

But we *should* take a moment to remember those Rotarians who passed away this Rotary year. The first was Gary Dye, who belonged to our club for 43 years. Gary was a veterinarian who founded the North Arlington Animal Clinic in 1971 and practiced there until his retirement in 1996 due to a stroke. You may remember Gary as an outspoken advocate for Rotary's wheelchair program, in which Rotarians collect, refurbish and even build wheelchairs, donate them to local handicapped people who need them and transport the remainder to third world countries, there to distribute them to those who local Rotary clubs have concluded are in need.

Most of the wheelchairs that Gary and his group of supermen and women distributed were donated to people in Arlington and various communities in Mexico. What most people do not know about Gary is that he developed his passion for the handicapped generally and wheelchairs in particular after he woke up from his stroke and experienced the anger and frustration one naturally feels upon discovering that they can do almost nothing without assistance. Of course, Gary worked hard to develop the muscles, the coordination and the new neural pathways that made it possible for him to walk, feed himself and do the other things that most of us take for granted once more. But after his stroke Gary never took those things for granted again. And he realized the extent of the problems suffered by others who are handicapped but simply do not have the means necessary to acquire the therapy and hardware required to overcome their handicaps.

Gary was a proud husband, father and grandfather. Over his lifetime Gary received many honors from the North Davis Church of Christ, where he was a deacon, and from various veterinary organizations, many of which he led. But he was most proud of his achievements in Rotary. He conducted orientations for new members, was awarded a Paul Harris

Fellowship, and was chosen the Distinguished Rotarian of the Year for 2007-2008. He also received the Rotary Wheelchair Foundation Hope, Mobility, and Freedom Award in 2012. We shall miss him.

Another outstanding Rotarian we lost this year was Jim Orr. Alzheimer's Disease has prevented Jim from attending Rotary meetings for some years now. However, when he was able to attend he rarely missed a meeting, having had near perfect attendance for most of his 31 years as a Rotarian. And Jim was a born salesman. In fact, Rotary board members commented more than once that all anyone had to do to be inspired to join Rotary was to sit down near Jim Orr. Astonishingly, Jim recruited no less than 33 members of our club during his Rotary career.

We also lost Mike Jarrett, a gregarious, extroverted Rotarian and bank president this Rotary year after six years of service to the club and Patsy Jenkins after three. It should be noted, however, that although Patsy was only an official member of the club for three years she served both the club and the community for many more years as the wife of Ray Jenkins, a longtime, active member of this club, and the mother of Rick Jenkins, also a longtime and active member and former president of this club. She and Ray often dressed as Santa and Mrs. Clause and distributed gifts to students at Webb Elementary School during the Christmas season. In this fashion, the Jenkins, Mike Jarrett, Jim Orr and Gary Dye all showed us how service above self made them supermen and superwomen. And how we might do the same.

It is said that three workmen once perched atop a girder on the building we now call the Empire State Building in New York City after work, sharing cocktails. One of the workmen said to the others: you know, the wind currents up here are so crazy, you can jump off this girder and the winds will blow you around until they return you to the precise place where you were sitting. Another workman replied: that's ridiculous. If you jump off this girder, you'll fall to the ground and die. Just to prove him wrong the first workman jumped off the girder, flew around a bit, and after a few moments was returned to the very spot on the girder where he had sat earlier. The second workman, impressed, said: wow, I never would have

believed that if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. I think I'll give it a try. He then took a final drink from his cocktail, jumped from the girder and promptly fell to his death, making a terrible sound when he hit. This prompted the third workman to say to the first: you know something, you're a real jerk when you drink, Superman.

That said, I have no idea whether any or all of you are jerks when you drink. But I know that you are all supermen and superwomen. And given that tonight's event includes a cash bar, I suggest that you stick around a little after tonight's event and find out. I hope that Covid does not prevent me from joining you at next year's installation dinner. But until then, that was the year that was. I hope that all of you enjoy the next one.