

President's Farewell Address

As my year as President of the Rotary Club of Akron comes to a close, I've spent some time reflecting on what this experience has meant to me.

When Thane was President-Elect, Tom was Vice President, and I agreed to step into the leadership pipeline, we made a collective decision. We agreed that we would all row in the same direction. We would establish a vision for this club and resist the temptation to chase every shiny object or wander off on wild tangents.

I believe we have navigated that successfully.

More importantly, I believe the leadership team coming behind me—Michael, Cyndi, and eventually Conner—will continue that approach. The future of this club is bright because of the people who are willing to step forward and serve when leadership calls.

I didn't accidentally fall into being President of Rotary.

I've served as president of many organizations over the years because I've always believed in leadership. I've experienced firsthand the confidence, growth, and sense of purpose that comes from serving others in that way.

The truth is, I've wanted to be President of this club for quite a while. I had my eye on this role long before I ever stepped into it.

But looking back, I'm grateful it happened on Rotary's timeline and not my own.

Because when the opportunity finally came, I was ready. Ready for the responsibility. Ready for the challenges. Ready to appreciate the privilege that comes with leading a club that means so much to me.

So if I'm being honest, I'm a little sad tonight. For a long time, I looked forward to this experience, and now it has come and gone much faster than I expected.

And now I find myself asking, "What's next?"

The answer, of course, is simple. I keep showing up. I keep participating. I keep supporting. And most importantly, I make room for the leaders who come next.

Serving as your President has been a complete honor.

To have something on my calendar every Tuesday to look forward to has become a touchstone in my life. You are my friends. You are my Rotary family.

You have celebrated life's joys with me. And without even realizing it, many of you have also helped carry me through challenges in my other life when I was grappling with things outside these walls.

Tim knows that Tuesday happy hours are reserved for what we affectionately call my "Rotary data dump." Our Tuesday happy hours inevitably become a recap of everything Rotary. There is always a story to tell, whether he wants to hear me drone on about it or not.

But as much as tonight is about reflection, it is also about gratitude.

No one serves as President alone.

The success of this year belongs to a team of dedicated Board members, Directors, Committee Chairs, and volunteers who generously gave their time, talents, and energy to our club. While the President is often the most visible person in the room, the real work happens behind the scenes because of people who consistently step up when something needs to be done.

Before I recognize a few of those people tonight, I'd like to ask them to come forward as I call their names.

Each of them will be receiving a small token of my appreciation—not because it could ever fully repay what they've done, but because I want them to know how grateful I am for their partnership, support, and friendship throughout this year.

I want to thank Jalani and Steven who have been our steady servers for our luncheons.

So, when I call your name, please come forward.

I'd like to begin by recognizing our officers.

Cyndi Kane, our President-Elect, thank you for stepping into the role. You accepted this responsibility despite having many reasons not to. Beyond that, your leadership of our Service Committee has been extraordinary. Since you'll soon have to "fire yourself" from that role, I hope others in this room will consider stepping forward. Don't worry—Cyndi will happily train you.

Terry Dalton, our Secretary, thank you for the countless hours you spend behind the scenes preparing documentation, board materials, and making sure everything stays organized.

I also want to recognize your many years of leadership as Chair of our Scholarship Committee. Because of your dedication, countless Akron students have had opportunities to pursue their education. Thank you for your faithful service and for building a program that has made such a lasting impact.

And to **Amber**, thank you for stepping forward to take on this important responsibility. I know our Scholarship Committee is in wonderful hands. Many thanks to both of you for your commitment to one of the most meaningful things our club does.

Conner, our Sergeant-at-Arms, thank you for arranging speakers, greeters, invocators, and handling so much of our audiovisual setup. You have also stepped into leadership while balancing a thriving career and soon-to-be four children. That's impressive no matter how you measure it.

Brian Kosarko, our Treasurer, thank you for keeping me in line financially and for teaching me how to build a budget. Financial wizardry is not one of my gifts, but thankfully it is one of yours. Your work as Membership Chair has also streamlined our processes and made membership engagement stronger than ever.

Thank you to our Directors and Committee Chairs, whose leadership helps guide this club and move our mission forward.

Doug Kohl, not only as President of the Akron Rotary Foundation, but also as a valued member of our Board, you bring thoughtful insight to our discussions and a steady perspective to our decision-making. Your willingness to step up, share your perspective, and support the club whenever needed has meant a great deal to me. Thank you.

Cheryl Warren, as our Administrator, you possess more institutional knowledge about this club than anyone else. You keep us connected and compliant with Rotary International, manage our newsletter, process dues, support our committees, and handle countless details that most of us never even see. Quite simply, this club would not function as smoothly as it does without you. Thank you.

I would also be remiss if I didn't recognize the Camp and its staff, especially Executive Director **Mella** and **Kelly**.

Many people may not realize just how much they do for our club. The Camp receives our mail, deposits our checks, supports our administrative needs, helps us execute our largest service project, and assists us in countless ways throughout the year.

Quite frankly, they help keep us organized and moving forward.

Mella and Kelly, thank you for all you do to support the Rotary Club of Akron. We are grateful for your partnership and all the work you do behind the scenes on our behalf.

Karen Hrdlka, our Bylaws Chair, thank you for making sure both I and our Board stay compliant and accountable. You also lead Rotary Cares, making sure members receive cards and support when life's moments call for it.

Liv Pilon, thank you for being a true team player and for bringing thoughtful perspectives to our board discussions. We were thrilled to welcome you back.

Angie Claypool, thank you for stepping into a vacant Board seat when your plate was already full. Your willingness to assist with prospective member outreach and help people understand what Rotary membership means has been invaluable.

Fred Carter, I am so glad you joined our club. You were a missing piece we needed. From the very beginning, you've been willing to jump in, raise your hand, and help wherever needed. Whether it's RYLA or any number of other projects, you consistently say yes.

Your energy, commitment, and heart for service have made our club better. Thank you.

Hugh, thank you for leading our mentorship efforts and helping ensure that new members feel welcomed, connected, and supported from the moment they join.

David Hall, thank you for being both a valued Board member and a champion of our service efforts at the Food Bank.

Dav Miller, our Social Chair, thank you for helping create opportunities for fellowship and for always being a thoughtful contributor to Board discussions—even if you're skipping today's meeting.

Marissa, you joined the Board admitting you were still learning how everything worked. Since then, you've become a sponge, absorbing every lesson and becoming an active participant. Mark my words—you'll be in leadership before another decade passes.

Sandy Naragon, thank you for shepherding our grant efforts for many years. Throughout that time, you have worked to streamline and improve the process, and today we have a strong and sustainable system because of your dedication.

Michael Wilson, thank you for stepping into that role. I know you will continue building on the strong foundation Sandy has established.

Julie Brandle- thank you for coordinating our speakers throughout the year. Julie, you graciously agreed to help despite already serving on countless boards and running a business. We are grateful. More importantly, when you first asked me to be your social chair and I became a member of your committee chairs, I got to see first hand how you lead with organization, humor but still direct. You showed me how your style of leadership works.

Thank you as well for helping share our speakers and activities through Facebook and LinkedIn, and to Cheryl for creating such outstanding graphics that help tell our story.

Dr. Rob, thank you for carrying the torch for Rotary International and Paul Harris recognition. I know you got a little derailed this year, but I am confident you'll continue building engagement and helping our members understand the impact of Rotary's global work.

Susan Coville Hall, thank you for your passion for Rotary Youth Exchange. Because of your dedication, we had the privilege of welcoming Lou to our Rotary family this year.

I'd also like to recognize two Past Presidents whose guidance has meant a great deal to me this year.

Thane, Thank you for your leadership of our Youth Protection and Risk Committee. Thankfully, there were few issues requiring attention this year, which is exactly how we like it. But your steady judgment and calm perspective have been invaluable. As Past President, you've also been a trusted sounding board for me throughout this journey.

Tom Knauer, thank you for your friendship and your leadership. I have often found myself trying to emulate the way you lead—with calmness, thoughtfulness, and grace. You have a remarkable ability to ask the question no one else has considered and to see a situation from an entirely different perspective. More than once you've picked up the crystal ball, turned it around, and said, "Have you thought about it this way?"

I am grateful for that wisdom.

And finally, **Michael Gladysz.**

Michael, thank you for saying yes when you were asked to serve. There is always a reason to say no, and you chose yes.

You have been an outstanding partner this year. You have helped me navigate decisions and brought logic and perspective when my enthusiasm—or occasionally my irritation—got the best of me.

More importantly, you've spent this year preparing to lead this club. I've had a front-row seat to your thoughtfulness, your commitment, and your genuine care for our members and our mission.

I know firsthand the responsibility that comes with this role, and I can think of no one better prepared to take it on.

Rotary is fortunate to have leaders who continue to answer the call to serve. Because of leaders like Michael, I am confident that the vision we set years ago—to row together, to move forward together, and to keep building a stronger Rotary Club of Akron—will continue.

Please join me in thanking Michael for his partnership this year and for his willingness to lead us into the future.

Before I close, there is one more person I need to thank.

Tim, you have put up with a lot of Rotary this year.

You have listened to countless Tuesday happy hour "data dumps," offered sage advice when I needed perspective, celebrated every success, and patiently listened when I needed to talk through a challenge.

Years ago, Rotary spouses were often affectionately called Rotary Anns. Well, somewhere along the way, you declared yourself my Rotary Andy, and the title stuck.

While you may not be a member of this club, you are every bit as much an ambassador for Rotary as I am—or any member sitting in this room.

In fact, you're often the one who reminds me of one of the things that makes Rotary so special: no matter where life takes you, no matter where you move or find yourself in the world, you can always find a Rotary club and instantly be among friends.

Thank you for supporting me, encouraging me, and sharing this journey with me. I could not have done this without you.

Thank you for being my Rotary Andy, my sounding board, my biggest cheerleader, my best friend, and the person I most look forward to sharing Tuesday's Rotary stories with.

To all of you, thank you.

Thank you for trusting me with this role.

Thank you for supporting me, challenging me, encouraging me, and making this year one that I will never forget.

I said earlier that I had my eye on this job for a long time. Looking back, I'm grateful it happened on Rotary's timeline and not my own, because when the opportunity came, I was ready.

What I wasn't prepared for was just how much it would mean to me.

You are my friends. You are my Rotary family. And I feel incredibly lucky that our paths crossed when they did.

Of all the leadership positions I have held over the years, serving as President of the Rotary Club of Akron will always hold a special place in my heart.

Thank you for allowing me that privilege.

And now, before I start crying, let's get on with the reason we're all here.

When Thane, Tom, and I talked years ago about rowing in the same direction, we couldn't have imagined how quickly this day would come.

Michael, it's your turn to take the oars.

I know you'll keep us rowing together.

It is my honor and privilege to pass the gavel to the next President of the Rotary Club of Akron, Michael Gladysz.