

Antoine Carter

Director Of Philanthropy, Milwaukee Public Library Foundation
Member Since July 2022

Rotarians looking at reports from our 110-year history take pride in the past. But one of our newest and youngest member's thoughts are about Rotary's future—one he wants to help shape.



It's not that Antoine Carter, 37, is disrespectful. On the contrary, at each meeting he sees tables filled Rotary "giants," whose wisdom, purpose and deeds he respects. But his thoughts center on how his generation can stand on those shoulders to be effective in a much different city.

A graduate of Rotary partner organizations, the African American Leadership Program and Forward 48, Antoine is a place-maker with a purpose and one of his proudest achievements is the mural on the Dye Building. "The Unsung Hero," a faceless woman honoring the anonymous women workers who toiled here daily, is controversial. But how different is it from a 1920s Rotary message from Mayor Daniel Hoan, who talked about regular people who toiled anonymously in the world's gritty machine shops?

Regular people doing remarkable things. These are the people Antoine has been serving since 2011 as an organizer for Groundwork Milwaukee, Milwaukee Urban Gardens, the Frank P. Zeidler Center and Imagine MKE. A Milwaukee Business Journal 40 under 40 Award winner and recipient of the African American Environmental Pioneer Award, Antoine sees connections between his Rotary membership and his role as Director of Philanthropy for the Milwaukee Public Library Foundation.

"I am new in both places and ask, 'What's my role? How can I help people do remarkable things through Rotary and through the library?'"

Antoine see an organizing principle coming into focus: Rotary's culture of the Four-Way Test and doing good.



"We need to fuse the standing and wisdom of the giants, present examples of people doing good, with those who are younger with energy but have yet to make their marks," he said. This fusion has to take into account differences in age, culture and race between the majority of Rotary members and himself, he said.

"There are not a lot of people like me in the room."

Antoine noted that other organizations may have new-generation social sizzle, others focus on helping those who are on the climb and some serve special audiences, but Rotary's core purpose is different and powerful: Do good. He cites projects like Guatemala and Ukraine, the eradication of polio, MKE Urban Stables, scholarships and mentoring and good deeds like trash pickup along the river and boxing food at Feeding America.

"I see Rotary as totally dedicated to good," Antoine said. "I am not demeaning any other group. That's the heart of Rotary and that's what we have to leverage."

He sees it as a recruiting strategy with his generational peers.

“I think I can be a force multiplier for Rotary by helping engage neighborhoods and young professionals to make a difference for this city and bring new members to the club.”

Antoine said Rotarians knowing more about the city would be good for everyone.

“People on the outside don’t know the real Milwaukee,” he said. “The real Milwaukee is our neighborhoods and they need to be highlighted. Rotary can help.”



Highlighting neighborhoods for the good they do and the good people in them is something Antoine believes would create a buzz for Rotary—and could lead to new members.

“There’s a lot of deep stuff out there that people want to do,” he said. “It’s about the work, about the impact. When I go to Rotary, I sense members have a real feel for people and are eager to listen and learn. That means we could listen to messages from neighborhoods just like distinguished speakers. We can learn a lot from neighborhoods.”

Good listening is something Antoine practiced as an organizer, the first step in finding where his goals could mesh with neighborhood goals. He found that doing good things and addressing huge issues begins with listening and building trust.



Antoine’s childhood goes back to the Harambee and 53206 neighborhoods. His fluency in Spanish, fostered at Milwaukee Spanish Immersion School, has helped him build connections. He credits his mother with introducing him to gardening, which eventually lead to managing a network of 100 at Milwaukee Urban Gardens, as well as an interest in healthy eating and an awareness of environmental justice issues—lead in drinking water and waterways—and the role they play in segregation. As the original employee of Imagine MKE, he fostered public art projects, community celebrations and the complex process of place-making. Evidence of his successes reach from the Moody Park Basketball Court renovation, to Metcalfe Park Painted, to Gallery Nights in Amani and Metcalfe Park.

“The relationship between a city and its art and culture is deeper than aesthetic beauty,” he said. “Public safety, workforce development, youth development and civic engagement all are connected to the arts and a place-making culture.”

Antoine, a Riverside High School alum, has a Bachelor’s degree in Leadership from Alverno College and certificates from Cardinal Stritch University’s African American leadership program.

Editor’s Note: *Rotary People of Action is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Jeff Smoller.*