



## *be a millennial in Rotary*

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**ROTARY IS WEIRD.** Rotarians are old, mostly. They sing songs and say the Pledge of Allegiance before meetings. They tell lame jokes.

But they also organize highway trash cleanups, blood drives, and literacy fairs. They raise money for students to study abroad, and they open their homes to foreign students studying here. They are fixated on eradicating polio. Yes, polio is still a thing.

I'm 32. I joined Rotary three years ago when Earl Tilly, a leader I respect in our community, invited me. At my first meeting, I didn't see a lot of faces my age, but I found that I fit in well with the Rotary mindset of Service Above Self. I remember thinking, "Oh, wow. I'm home." Earl has since become a mentor to me. He's 83 and still plays tennis and bikes regularly. He was mayor of our town, then our state representative. I admire him and the way he has

lived his life. I find that people in Rotary do a lot of good, but not for self-promotion. I really respect and want to emulate that.

I run a social media and marketing company. I manage web pages for our local newspaper, three school districts, and other organizations. Part of my job is to monitor comments from the public, which means I'm in a quagmire of social media trolls every day. People are just terrible to one another online. They say awful, malicious things. It's a downer. For me, Rotary is a way to unplug from that. I think the path back to a more civil society is through our clubs. While social media is good for a lot of things, it's not good for breaking down the walls we build between us. Rotary offers a neutral space where I can gather with other people, even those I may not see eye-to-eye with on every issue, and focus on what really matters – making the world a better place.

Being in Rotary hasn't been a total honeymoon. I went through a period when I wondered if it was for me. After I joined, I took over running our social media and built a new website for our club. I also started promoting Rotary to my network, but it didn't feel as though we were making any progress or any other young people were going to join. But I had made a commitment to show up, so I stuck with it. To volunteer for stuff. I'm glad I did. Our club is almost half younger people now. It has added a bit of urgency to our lunch meetings, since not everyone is retired anymore.

So what's it like to be a millennial in Rotary? To most young people, Rotary is old-fashioned. For me, that's what makes it cool. People in my peer group tend to isolate themselves. We are connected by technology, but not truly connected. Rotary is my antidote to that.

*As told to Vanessa Glavinskas*