

## **Club innovation: E-club of nomads builds connections**

**Club Innovation:** Spread out across thousands of square miles in the eastern states of Australia, Rotarians fire up laptops, tablets, and smartphones and log on to weekly club meetings from their RVs using a teleconferencing app. Members map routes for the jamborees, service projects, and fundraising they plan to do with their club and with the clubs they'll visit on their journeys.

**Campers roll with Rotary:** Every day, about 135,000 recreational vehicles roll down Australia's highways. For Rotarians who have answered the call of the open road, the vagabond nature of an RV lifestyle can conflict with the duties of traditional clubs. For them, the Rotary E-Club of Australia Nomads, a concept hatched in mid-2014 by members of the Rotary Club of Jindalee in Queensland, builds connections for service and fellowship.

After the death of his wife in 2011, "I decided to buy a large touring RV," a 22-footer, says Wayne Kemmis, a past president of two Rotary clubs in New South Wales. As he pondered whether Rotary could fit into his new lifestyle, a notice in Rotary Down Under magazine about a new club caught his eye, and Kemmis signed on as a charter member of the E-Club of Australia Nomads. (The group stresses that members need not be Australian, just driven to service; one member of the Nomads is an American.) "Most members spend a fair amount of time traveling," notes Kemmis, a retired newspaper manager.

Geoff St Clair, past president of a club in Lockyer Valley, Queensland, had left Rotary to take up the traveling life when the new club came along. "I was a Rotarian for seven years but left for four years until returning with the Nomads in June 2014, when it was a satellite club," he says. He rejoined Rotary with his wife, Lorelle, a new recruit, because "the club would allow you to continue traveling but still uphold the ideals of Rotary." For several months each year, the retired educators roam Australia in their 19-foot trailer with their dog, Josie, a Maltese mix.

Wherever the club members may be, a constant is the Wednesday evening session to chart progress on trips and projects. "The theme of our meetings is having fun," says Kemmis. "Members come online with

their glass of wine or other beverage. They wear casual clothing. Two members usually come in their pajamas. There are no dress regulations.”

St Clair notes the challenges of developing service opportunities for people who may reside hundreds or thousands of miles from one another. Other obstacles are maintaining a sense of togetherness across distance and teaching computer skills to older members, he says.

Twice-annual musters, some lasting a week, kindle conviviality and rev up good deeds: During their most recent social gathering over four days at Bribie Island, Queensland, club members planted more than 400 trees to stabilize dunes.

The Nomads adapt their fundraising to their lifestyle. Many club members do crafts such as knitting and crocheting on the road, and when the club holds gatherings, they set up a booth and sell items to the public. And every March they hold a crafts exposition with workshops, speakers, and shopping. The proceeds from these efforts benefit various charities, such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Lending manpower to Rotary-sponsored fun runs, concerts, regattas, and festivals across eastern Australia is the peripatetic club’s hallmark. Last September, it assisted the Rotary Club of Carindale with the Brisbane billycart championships. (The event, with engineless carts racing downhill, is similar to American soapbox derbies.)

“Clubs appreciate us as we often assist them in their projects,” says St Clair, harking to the club motto, Helping Hands Across the Land. —Brad Webber

What is your club doing to reinvent itself? Email [club.innovations@rotary.org](mailto:club.innovations@rotary.org)