



Eden Prairie Noon Rotary uses its annual Pong Fest to raise money for service projects.

## Fundraising Fun

Eden Prairie Noon Rotary hosts 2016 Pong Fest.

IN THE YEARS HIS CHILDREN WERE GROWING UP, Eden Prairie resident Mike Thomas was a hands-on dad, involved in everything from youth sports to church activities. As his kids moved toward independence, Thomas found he missed the opportunity to participate and grow his community. "Rotary became a great tool for me to do that," Thomas says.

As chief marketing officer at Clear Peak, a boutique consulting firm focusing on business analytics, Thomas splits his time between offices in Denver and Minneapolis and was looking for a commitment that would provide flexibility. He joined the Eden Prairie Noon Rotary, a chapter of the oldest service club in the world.

The rotary, with its motto of "service above self," has numerous chapters in the southwest metro, including the Eden Prairie AM Rotary, Chanhassen Rotary, Rotary Club of Chaska and Waconia-West Carver Rotary. "I knew members of the Thursday Noon Rotary and

respected them for their business sense," Thomas says. "It is more casual than the Tuesday morning group, and purposefully flexible in terms of time commitments and meetings. We have snowbirds, people who go up north in the summer time, and those that travel a lot like I do. Yet we still expect people to be very engaged and involved, and fortunately everyone is."

To fulfill its service mission, the rotary has annual events, such as My Book Day. For the past decade, the group has given a book to every first grader in the Eden Prairie school district. "You'd be surprised at the number of kids that don't have a book at home," Thomas says. "It's absolutely delightful to see them get their book and a library card. Literacy is one of the core functions of Rotary in general."

The Noon Rotary raises money for My Book Day through annual fundraising events, including Pong Fest in January and Ribfest in June.

Unofficially touted as "the biggest pong festival this



Pong Fest is 6 p.m. Jan. 30 at the Eden Prairie Community Center. Tickets are \$20. Visit [epnoonrotary.org](http://epnoonrotary.org) for details.

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## Making Rotary Connections

Want information about other local rotary clubs? Visit the sites below.

**EDEN PRAIRIE AM ROTARY:**  
[epamrotary.org](http://epamrotary.org)

**ROTARY CLUB OF CHASKA:**  
[rotaryclubofchaska.org](http://rotaryclubofchaska.org)

**CHANHASSEN ROTARY:**  
[chanhassenrotary.org](http://chanhassenrotary.org)

**WACONIA-WEST CARVER ROTARY:**  
[portal.clubrunner.ca/6749](http://portal.clubrunner.ca/6749)

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side of the Mississippi,” Pong Fest is a beer pong tournament complete with silent auction, a DJ, delicious food and beer. “It started out two years ago as Twisted Winter Wonderfest,” Thomas says. “The idea was to have something in the winter for people after the Super Bowl. We ended up moving the date and focused on the Pong Fest, as we found people generally weren’t interested in the outdoor activities.”

Pong Fest has become a must-do event, with 64 teams and a dramatic finish closing out the 2015 event.

The other major event is Rib Fest, held in conjunction with Eden Prairie’s Jazz in the Prairie Festival on June 12. In 2015, the club went through 900 pounds of ribs in a single Sunday afternoon.

The group also coordinates other service projects, such the Eden Prairie High School Ethics Workshop, an opportunity to teach 60 high school students about business ethics; Donuts for Disaster; Let’s Go Fishing; and Nigerian Water Project, to name a few. The goal is to have programs in which every member can contribute in a way that works for them.

While Thomas says Pong Fest is “a heck of a lot of fun,” it also serves two core purposes: to raise money for Rotary projects, and, perhaps even more important, it attracts a new generation of Rotary members, which is key to growing the club in the future. “Our club is relatively young and we’re constantly evolving and figuring out ways to make a bigger impact in our community,” Thomas says. //