



Send in the clones

Rotary Club of Langhorne, Pennsylvania

Chartered: 1961
Original membership: 22
Membership: 40

SENSE OF COMMUNITY:

Since 2011, the Rotary Club of Langhorne has highlighted what's happening in its community in a big way: The club raised \$55,000 to install a 6-by-12-foot electronic reader sign at a busy intersection, a can't-miss display that updates residents on public safety announcements, news, and events. Those events include the club's Pet Fair and Family Day, which drew 3,000 attendees this year, and a community spaghetti dinner on Martin Luther King Jr. Day which raises money for End Polio Now. The club also devotes energy and funds to local public schools; one initiative, in cooperation with a community nonprofit called the Peace Center, brings anti-bullying programs to middle school students.

After deciding to move to the East Coast to be closer to his daughter's young family, Bill Kaufmann found Langhorne, a community about 25 miles northeast of Philadelphia. A long-time Rotarian who had been membership chair of two clubs in Tacoma, Washington, Kaufmann settled into his natural role fostering membership when he joined Langhorne's Rotarians. But the e-commerce consultant discovered that his branding skills would be put to the test here.

The club meets for lunch at a restaurant in a historic mansion, but at times attendance was at risk of falling below the minimum 20 meals required by the venue. "We were losing members because they couldn't make meetings," Kaufmann says.

Board discussions yielded ideas but no firm solutions. Then one member started sending his office manager to meetings in his place. "That was my 'aha' moment," says Kaufmann, now club president. The club decided to recognize the stand-ins, who must have a family or business relationship with the primary member and pay \$25 in annual dues to the club to cover the cost of name tags and mailings. The program was implemented at minimal cost and with little formality.

Kaufmann calls the concept "a hybrid of corporate and family memberships" and says much of the novelty is in the "clone" nomenclature.

CLUB INNOVATION:

When members blamed falling attendance on work responsibilities, the club rose to the challenge, deciding to let members designate a business associate or family member to attend meetings and participate in projects in their stead – or alongside them. Dubbed "clones," the stand-ins endure gentle jibes and occasional bleating sounds in imitation of Dolly the sheep. The clones, who share the Rotarian DNA of generosity, go along with the fun.

"We approached it tongue-in-cheek, and it really took off," says Joe Santy, who was president in 2017-18. "It gives the person the opportunity to see what Rotary does. Somebody sending us a clone also feels they're maximizing their membership. And if a clone decides to go to a project, well, they're like family to us."

The club's first official clone, Jaki Mason, was recognized in February. She fills in for her employer, Kevin Seifert, who operates a 50-person plumbing and heating services company. "I was always interested in the things Rotarians did," she says. "They're very warm and welcoming, and it's a way for me to bring information back."

Seifert, who feared he might have to give up his membership because he was so busy, likes the arrangement. "It keeps me in the loop without having to be there every week," he says.

Mason and two other clones helped run the petting zoos, pony rides, bounce houses, and food booths at the club's pet fair. Stephen Moyer, a clone who is an associate of member Lori Hoppmann, appreciates the club's "outside-the-box" thinking. "I'm really happy to play whatever role I can, clone or member or clone-to-member," he says. "I think people who are clones will ultimately start to become full members as this program continues to evolve." —BRAD WEBBER



From top: Rotarians prepare for the Martin Luther King Jr. Day spaghetti dinner; the Pet Fair and Family Day brings together the whole community.

What is your club doing to reinvent itself?
Email club.innovations@rotary.org.