

# ROTARY **Canada**

April 2023 / Avril 2023



## VIEW FROM THE NORTH

### The pervasiveness of nature

In 1965, the renowned critic Northrop Frye, a native of Quebec, a child of New Brunswick, and a professor at the University of Toronto, surveyed his country's literature and concluded, "Everything that is central in Canadian writing seems to be marked by the imminence of the natural world."

This month, the natural world takes center stage not just in Canada but around the world with the celebration of Earth Day on 22 April. This is also the month when the environment takes pride of place at Rotary International — though protecting the environment, an area of focus since 2020, has always been an integral part of Rotary's global mission.

In this issue, *Rotary Canada* checks in with two clubs — the Rotary Club of Canmore in Alberta's Bow Valley (pictured on this month's cover) and the Rotary Club of Parksville, a waterfront community on Vancouver Island — that are not only conducting impactful environmental projects but ensuring that local youths play a significant role in those endeavours. Young people *and* the environment? That's the Rotary daily double.

With the "pervasiveness of nature" (another Frye phrase) in mind, let's give the last word to a more recent Canadian writer, the Ojibwe novelist Richard Wagamese. In his 1994 novel, *Keeper'n Me*, Wagamese implores us to "... go to the land an' see where the real power is. Get humble and respectful in the middle of it" — and then determine what we can do to nurture the natural world.

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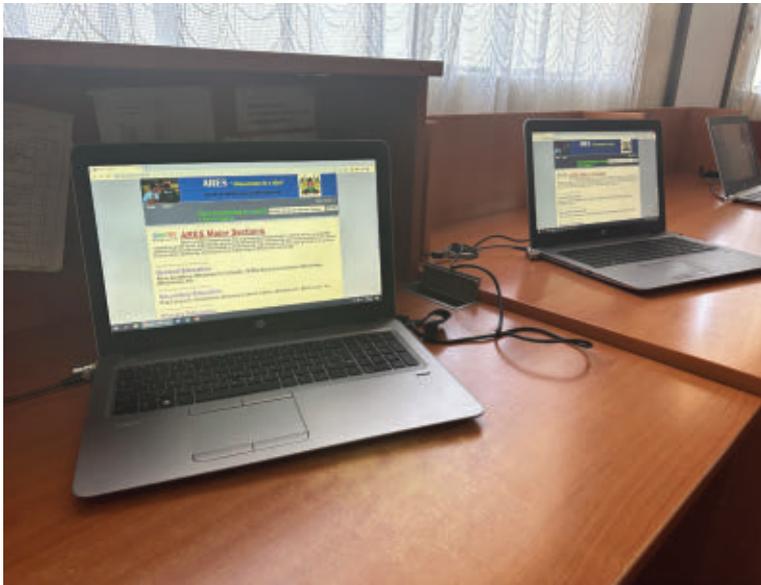
Rotary 



#### PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Sitting in a field of cabbage, RI President Jennifer Jones scans the sun-drenched Taiwanese countryside. The contemplative moment came in the midst of a busy December visit to the island, which included a stop at a sustainable farming project in Yilan that's supported by a global grant from The Rotary Foundation.

On the cover:  
Castle Mountain,  
Bow Valley, Alberta



FIELD NOTES

# Gratitude over grief

*A project in Kenya provides tools for schools  
— and life-affirming consolation*

I lost my wife, Carol, to cancer last June. It was unexpected and quick — two weeks from diagnosis to when she passed, the day before her 61st birthday. We had 42 wonderful years together and three children who grew into amazing adults.

Rotary had been a big part of our lives since I joined at age 27. It gave us friends and opportunities that we otherwise would never have had, including when I (we) served as governor of District 5050 (British Columbia and Washington state) in 2012-13. I'm currently the president of the Rotary Club of Pacific Northwest Passport.

Beginning in 2009, one of those opportunities was participating in Rotary projects in Kenya. Each of our children joined us on separate trips, and the experience was life-changing for all of us.

And then there are the friends. A member of the Rotary Club of North Delta in British Columbia, Bonnie Sutherland has been working on projects in Africa since 1992. Her Afretch Aid Society works with Rotary clubs and Rotary World Help to ship libraries, computers, medical equipment, and more to countries in Africa and Asia. It was Bonnie who invited Carol and me to join her on one of her Rotary projects. Called ARES, or the African Ruggedized Education System, it assists remote rural schools that often have limited access to educational materials. Our philosophy is that if you truly want to change the world, you begin by educating the children.

↑ The Afretch Aid Society collaborates with Rotary clubs and Rotary World Help on the ARES project, which provides high-tech educational resources for rural schools in Kenya.

Mark Knittel, a member of the Rotary Club of Bellingham, Washington, joined us on our second trip, in 2011. He created a small server with educational content, including thousands of video tutorials and books, textbooks, the Khan Academy, TED Talks, and resources for science, technology, engineering, and math. It's like a self-contained internet. When we install an ARES server in a school, we also provide 20 laptops, a projector, speakers, and mesh network units to share the wireless access throughout the school. Everything runs on rechargeable batteries, so if the school loses power, the system still operates. To ensure sustainability, the project provides training and support for teachers.

ARES has concentrated its efforts in the Laikipia region of central Kenya. With the completion of a district grant in January, the system is in 40 of 120 secondary schools in the region. The next phase will target 100 more schools.

In January, I returned to Kenya with our sons (our daughter was unable to join us). Until this year, we had only installed ARES computer labs in secondary schools, but we had been asked to install one in a community library. Carol and I were on the team that worked on the library when it opened in 2011; she was part of the team that provided shelving and 8,000 books. So when I heard of the request, I agreed to donate the cost of an ARES system to the library in Carol's name.

On 16 January, the ARES computer lab opened with a dedication ceremony, a plaque to Carol, and 10 newly planted trees. I returned to the library a few days later, and the computer stations were filled with young students. It was both a good and a difficult day for me, but it strengthened my appreciation for the opportunities and the life that Rotary has given to us.

Before she passed, Carol asked me to focus on gratitude over grief. Rotary, our ARES project, and our family and friends have been helping me to do just that. As they say in Swahili, asante sana. Thank you.

— SEAN HOGAN



In January, Sean Hogan travelled to Kenya with his sons, John (center) and Neil (right), for the dedication of an ARES computer lab installed in a library. Hogan donated the cost of the lab in the name of his late wife, Carol.



FEATURE

# Renewable energy

*Two clubs share a commitment to the environment — and to engaging its next generation of caretakers*

**T**wo clubs in western Canada, the Rotary Club of Canmore in Alberta and the Rotary Club of Parksville in British Columbia, have taken big steps towards supporting Rotary’s commitment to protecting the environment, while finding ways to involve local youths.

Luc Arvisais joined the Canmore club in 2021 at the invitation of environmental entrepreneur Joey O’Brien (see “How green is my valley,” page 7), and he has quickly made his mark, joining the Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group, writing a weekly environmental news bulletin for the club, and serving on its youth avenue of service committee.

Arvisais, who teaches STEM, or science, technology, engineering, and math, started an environmental club called Net Zer0 Heroes at Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Academy in Canmore. Last year, under his guidance, six seniors in the club designed a program that enabled Rotary members attending the District 5360 conference in Cochrane, about 20 miles northwest of Calgary, to offset the greenhouse gas emissions generated by their transportation for the event. The 300 Rotary members who registered for the conference filled out the students’ questionnaire about their modes of travel, the distance travelled between Cochrane and their homes, and other information. With that data, the students used a carbon calculator from nonprofit Tree Canada to estimate the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted during those travels (6.6 tons), along with the number of trees needed to offset those emissions (42).

With initial funding provided by the Canmore club, the students purchased 280 seedlings that they distributed to attendees at the conference. In addition, they encouraged Rotary members to make carbon-offset donations by choosing from a list of organizations involved in environ-

mental protection and renewable energy research, an option that raised \$2,500. The students transported the unclaimed seedlings back to Canmore for a tree-planting project.

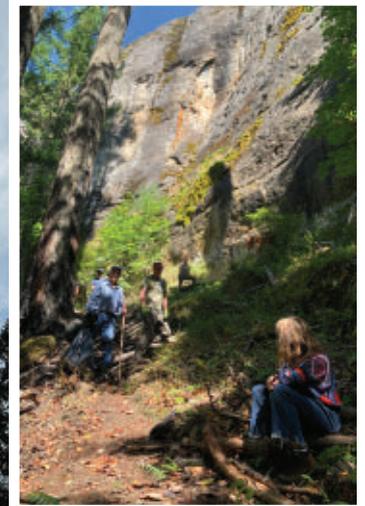
“We were able to offset the carbon footprint twice over,” Arvisais says. And the student group continues to plan future environmental sustainability projects with the Canmore club. For example, O’Brien formed a club committee to assess the viability of a local waste diversion project to sequester CO<sub>2</sub> in indoor container gardens.

In addition to supporting student projects, the Canmore Rotary club has funded the installation of a wind turbine at another local school. “Working with Rotary,” Arvisais adds, “we at Our Lady of the Snows have also helped the town of Canmore start a business composting program by sponsoring free waste pickup at participating businesses.”

About 1,000 kilometres to the west, the Rotary Club of Parksville has been doing its part to protect the environment, with

young people again playing a role. Four years ago, the club spearheaded a massive environmental cleanup project in a nature area called Little Mountain. The call to action on its website included this dismal description: “What should be a beautiful hike through a pristine forest has turned into a nasty trek past a vast eyesore of household appliances, couches, rusted bicycles, car parts, shopping carts, junked electronics and mouldy mattresses. Oh, and don’t forget the golf balls — there are hundreds of them!”

Diana Matsuda, a past club president and its public image chair, explains that the area affected by the illegal dumping was situated below a steep cliff and inaccessible to cars and trucks. An army of volunteers — which included, among others, Parksville Rotarians and members of a group called the Backcountry Hunters & Anglers — loaded the trash into nets and huge fertilizer bags, and Kestrel Helicopters donated its time and expertise to haul it away. (The Parksville club helped cover



↑ In Alberta, the steep terrain at Little Mountain made the Rotary Club of Parksville’s massive cleanup project especially challenging.

← A helicopter carries away some of the 25-plus tons of garbage collected at Little Mountain.

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF LUC ARVISAIS AND DIANA MATSUDA

Kestrel's fuel cost.) Launched in May 2019, the project was completed in November 2021, after removing 25.5 tons of trash.

One volunteer on the Little Mountain project, 15-year-old Ben Klein-Beekman, sought Rotary's help last year after he discovered a massive illegal dumpsite in a wilderness area near the Little Qualicum Hatchery for fish. Reprising the Little Mountain effort, volunteers from local businesses, community groups, and schools took part in three days of cleanup that removed more than 12 tons of garbage.

During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Matsuda says, club leaders realized that almost all of their fundraising to support local and international service projects came from events involving food and crowds. Borrowing a page from the fundraising playbook at the Rotary Club of Chemainus, about 70 kilometres to the southeast, the club decided to expand a modest recycling program that earned about \$7,500 a year.

The expansion began with a generous offer from Tim Andres, a member of the Rotary Club of Qualicum Beach who owns an auto glass repair business. Andres

made available his shop's large parking lot and service bays on Saturdays, and in October 2021, the Parksville club launched an aggressive bottle and can recycling program. "It's gotten to be a huge operation," Matsuda says. "Over the past two years, we've processed more than 2 million cans and bottles. We have really streamlined our procedures, building more sorting tables, improving the flow, and ensuring that our volunteers are trained." As many as 20 volunteers help each week, including members of the Model UN Club at the local high school, she says.

In addition to its environmental benefits, the Saturday pop-up recycling station, located on the main road through Parksville, has raised the visibility of Rotary locally and sent the club's fundraising soaring to a remarkable level, Matsuda says. In its first two years, the program raised \$185,000, enabling the club to dramatically expand its financial backing of other projects, including support for Ukrainians.

In a novel twist, the club provides a unique benefit for several organizations that supply recycling drive volunteers. They receive an honorarium for their work,



↑ The NetZero Heroes from Our Lady of the Snows school in Canmore, Alberta, go green at the District 5360 conference.

which goes back to the organization, not the individual. "This enables us to increase our volunteer base, which is increasingly needed as volumes grow," Matsuda says. "That permits us to expand our ability to support groups wishing to fundraise for worthy causes in our community."

What's more, Matsuda is convinced that the project's high visibility accounts for the club's membership growth. "It's been a win-win situation for everybody," she says.

Matsuda and Arvisais believe that engaging young people in environmental sustainability is critical to solving climate change challenges. Arvisais, a member of the Earth Prize Teacher Advisory Board for the Earth Foundation's \$200,000 global environmental sustainability teen competition, sees an opportunity for Rotary to have an impact by engaging young people through Rotaract.

"Youth are the key to enacting social change because they are the future," he says. "They need professional mentoring to guide them in taking impactful actions. We need to be intentional in providing opportunities for youth to complete authentic environmental sustainability projects. There is much work to be done and we can't give up, because there may not be anybody else to get the job done. Advocacy has its place, but the time for action is now." — PAUL ENGLEMAN



↑ With community support, the Parksville club's modest recycling program blossomed into a booming and benevolent enterprise.



← The indispensable Parksville Rotarian Bill Rawlins gathers trash near the Little Qualicum Hatchery, a project initiated by a 15-year-old volunteer.



#### NOTES DE TERRAIN

## Un refuge pour animaux à Rouyn-Noranda

par Réal Beauchamp, club Rotary de Rouyn-Noranda

**E**n 1950, dans l'ouest du Québec, un club Rotary s'implanta dans la ville de Rouyn-Noranda dans ce qui est aujourd'hui le District 7010. Après plus de 70 ans, des hommes et maintenant aussi des femmes continuent de s'impliquer dans une multitude d'activités aussi variées que la jeunesse avec les sports et la culture, la santé, les personnes démunies et les handicapés, les soins palliatifs, les échanges étudiants à l'étranger et les bourses d'étude. Des heures de bénévolat viennent se greffer à cette brochette pour différentes causes communautaires. Aujourd'hui composé de 13 membres et en recrutement actif, le club compte deux membres ayant été gouverneur du district : Clifford Gervais et Eric Neiminen.

Habituellement, le club distribue à même ses sources récurrentes de financement, tel l'important bingo hebdomadaire de la ville qui se tient quatre jours par semaine et qui profite aux organismes qui en assurent la tenue. Cet apport permet de répondre aux différentes demandes. Les projets sont évalués au mérite selon la mission et les valeurs défendues par le club.

À l'automne 2022, le Club de Rouyn-Noranda s'est un peu écarté de son créneau habituel de mécénat en

s'attardant à un nouveau type d'engagement. Le Refuge La Bonne Étoile multiplie les sources de financement pour secourir des animaux de compagnie qui ont besoin, pour des raisons multiples, d'être pris en charge par une nouvelle maison d'accueil. Des outils développés par cet organisme à but non lucratif, comme la production d'un calendrier présentant d'anciens pensionnaires (chats, chiens, etc.), publicise l'importance d'enregistrer nos animaux en leur procurant une médaille qui facilitera leur sauvetage. Ce permis assure ainsi au Refuge un fond permanent pour couvrir les frais d'hébergement et les services sanitaires requis de vaccination et de stérilisation.

Le club a donc procédé à l'impression de 680 calendriers. Tous les membres rotariens disponibles se sont impliqués dans la vente en kiosque lors de deux week-ends sous la forme d'un Noël des animaux de compagnie. L'exercice nous a permis de mettre en lumière notre action communautaire, de communiquer avec la population, de promouvoir l'excellent travail du Refuge et de défendre une cause que nous jugions d'intérêt public. De notre investissement initial de 2 200 \$, nous avons amassé la somme de 8 200 \$, ce qui constitue presque le quadruple du don.

Le choix de cet organisme s'est imposé de lui-même à la suite de la pandémie de 2020. Soumis au confinement et en quête d'activités, la présence animale s'est avérée une solution salvatrice pour les enfants, les personnes seules, les travailleurs en ligne, celles et ceux qui sont préoccupés par leur santé physique et psychologique. Malheureusement, au fur et à mesure que la pandémie s'estompait, plusieurs bêtes se sont vues exclues de leur foyer et remises à des sociétés d'aide aux animaux.

Nous comptons nous impliquer à nouveau dans les années futures dans ce type de projet, car nous avons constaté un réel engouement pour la cause animale, et ce, par l'ensemble des gens rencontrés dans nos osques de sollicitation.



Réal Beauchamp (gauche) et Lise Delisle (droite), membres du club Rotary de Rouyn-Noranda, remettent un chèque à Valérie Delisle du Le Refuge La Bonne Étoile; le club a collecté des fonds pour le refuge en vendant des calendriers (ci-dessus, gauche).

PROFILE

## How green is my valley

**E**nvironmental entrepreneur Joey O'Brien says that he had "a unique upbringing: bootstrapping ski resorts" that his father owned in Nova Scotia. "I was helping tally the daily deposits and employees' hours at 10, operating heavy machinery at 12, and I knew at a young age how to do a reverse leverage buyout," recalls the chair of the environmental sustainability committee for the Rotary Club of Canmore, Alberta.

In 1979, at the age of 19, O'Brien took over ownership of a ski resort in Martock, Nova Scotia, from his father. For the young ski instructor and hiking guide, the future looked like smooth skiing — until 2000, that is, when O'Brien had what he calls his "this-climate-change-thing-is-real moment." Weather data that he compiled for two decades showed that the average temperature of the coldest 800 hours of the year went from -6.8 C to -2.3 C. He resolved to use his business acumen and financial resources to focus on protecting the environment.

O'Brien sold the ski resort to his staff and moved with his wife and children to Canmore, with the intention of having "the western experience" for a year. He's been there ever since. "The incredible natural beauty is what brought us here, but it's the people and the community that keep us here," he says.

The Rotary Club of Canmore is a big part of that community. Although the town, situated in the Bow Valley, has a population of only about 14,000, its Rotary club has nearly 100 members. O'Brien says that he is impressed by "the horsepower of the club. Every time

someone does a classification talk, I think: Holy mackerel, I need to go for coffee with that person. They seem extraordinary."

That respect goes two ways. "Joey is energetic, optimistic, and pragmatic," says Canmore Rotarian Luc Arvisais, a high school science teacher who is a member of the Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group, for which O'Brien is a board member. "He orchestrates projects to completion and moves on to another without resting on his laurels. All I ask of my students is to leave everything as good as or better than they found it and, in terms of sustainability, for the same price or less. Joey lives this mission."

One of O'Brien's most notable volunteer projects was joining with civic and business leaders to bring the Alberta Winter Games to Canmore in 2014 and serving as a co-director of the event's environmental sustainability advisory committee. He devised and implemented a multitiered initiative called Toward Zero Waste, which O'Brien says may have "resulted in the greenest multisport games ever held anywhere in the world up to that time."

Shortly after, O'Brien launched SustainDriven, a consulting company that works with businesses and groups to sustainably and cost-effectively handle water, waste, energy, and greenhouse gas emissions at major events. "Our vision statement is that we wish to be able to explain to our grandchildren in 20 years how we had a material influence on the climate crisis," he says.

In 2019, through his association with the Banff Marathon, O'Brien attended the Green Sports Alliance conference in Philadelphia, and



A member of the Rotary Club of Canmore, Alberta, **Joey O'Brien** is known for his personal and professional dedication to the environment. "He orchestrates projects to completion and moves on to another without resting on his laurels," says one club member.

Banff Marathon became Canada's first signatory of the United Nations Sports for Climate Action initiative. He also is a founding board member of the Bow Valley Green Energy Cooperative and its subsidiary, Rocky Mountain Community Energy. His latest project is SustainAgro, a commercial enterprise that, once underway, will create renewable diesel fuel.

O'Brien firmly believes that many solutions to achieving carbon neutrality are known; they only need to be fully implemented — as, he says, many forward-looking companies and investors are already doing — and get the full support of political leaders. In the meantime, how can Rotary members best support environmental sustainability?

"Start with becoming aware," says O'Brien. "Look for opportunities to effect change" — and think big. "The changes," he insists, "must happen at a systemic level."

— PAUL ENGLEMAN





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