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# Rotary

CANADA 

VIEW FROM THE NORTH

# Canada's commitment to ending polio

**O**n 20 September, in front of a large audience of Rotary members and civic leaders in Toronto, the Canadian government announced a \$151 million contribution to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. This new pledge, which brings Canada's cumulative contribution to more than \$1 billion, supports the GPEI's efforts to immunize 370 million children a year against polio.

As Canadians and Rotary members, we take great pride in Canada's ongoing leadership and commitment to global polio eradication. The Canadian government's long-standing and unwavering support historically transcends partisan politics, with each of Canada's political parties — and individuals and entities at every level of authority — helping the world reach significant polio-free milestones and bringing us ever closer to ending polio for good.

Despite significant achievements — including the certification of the World Health Organization's Africa region as wild polio-free in 2020 — there are still challenges to be met: in Pakistan, in Afghanistan, and in Gaza, which this summer reported its first polio case in 25 years. Clearly, funding eradication efforts must remain a priority.

Rotary, a founding member of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, has committed more than US\$2.7 billion to polio eradication efforts to date, including over US\$48 million from Canadian Rotary members and a recent US\$500,000 commitment to support a two-round polio vaccination campaign in Gaza. This funding, along with Canada's recent pledge, also helps sustain the GPEI's global health infrastructure that supports disease surveillance, laboratory networks, and trained health-care workers, all of which serve to provide additional health services and humanitarian aid to those in need.

As we walk the last kilometres of our shared journey to end polio, we again express our gratitude for Canada's commitment because it revitalizes our efforts. It inspires all of our partners to recommit to ending this disease through high-quality immunization campaigns and to continue to support the GPEI's global health infrastructure that responds to a multitude of concerns.

We remain steadfast in our efforts and advocacy and encourage others to join us. We must not let challenges deter us but rather use them to fuel our fight and propel us to seek the sustained political and financial support of other governments, nonprofits, and concerned citizens like you.

Ultimately, we have the tools and the strategy to ensure no child ever suffers again from this paralyzing disease. Each one of us is a stakeholder in achieving this vision.

**JENNIFER JONES**

*Rotary International President, 2022-23*

**RAMESH FERRIS**

*Polio survivor and Team End Polio member*

*A version of this article previously ran in the Windsor Star (Ontario).*

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**On the cover:**  
In Banff National Park, about 100 kilometres west of Calgary, Alberta, the stars shine brightly over Mount Rundle and Vermilion Lakes.

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**Rotary**

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## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Calgary, host city of the 2025 Rotary International Convention, lights up its skyline to welcome the new year.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (COVER, THIS PAGE) GETTY IMAGES

## FIELD NOTES

# Year of the dragon

It might have been an episode of *Game of Thrones*. Gathered here for an epic battle were the Raging Dragons and the Lively Dragons, the Blazing Dragons and the Avalon Dragons. But wait a minute: They were joined by the Hamilton Titans, the Woodstock Wave, the London Blades, the Waterloo Blazing Paddles, and a host of others.

This was no mythical contest between fire-breathing reptiles but the annual Dragon Boat Festival hosted by the Rotary Club of Stratford, Ontario. And when the boat races and ancillary festivities on and along Lake Victoria were complete, the club had surpassed a cumulative \$1 million in its fundraising efforts over the years. “It’s a fun and exciting day out for everyone,” club member Gary Wreford told *Stratford Today*. “And of course it all benefits people in our community. With the sponsorships and [100-plus] volunteers, it involves the whole community. It really doesn’t get any better than this.”

The event began in 1996, the brainchild of club member Kevin McCann, an avid paddler, who died in 2009. Packed into long, colourfully painted boats, teams including 20 paddlers, a helmsperson, and a pacesetter drummer compete in races of varying distances. That first festival, in 1996, attracted 37 teams; this year there were 44, travelling from as far away as Newfoundland for the race.

When this year’s fest concluded, the club had raised more than \$59,000, bringing its grand total to \$1,047,889. The money benefits a hospice, food centre, hospital, and other Stratford-area organizations.



In Ontario, the Rotary Club of Stratford’s annual Dragon Boat Festival has raised more than \$1 million since 1996.

But when the mist settled, who emerged victorious? While the Pendragons from London, Ontario, won the 2,000-metre championship race, Stratford’s Ritz Dragons won the A Division championship, giving them the honour to hold aloft the Kevin McCann Memorial Trophy. For brave paddlers don’t kill dragons: They ride them. ■

## What Canada can do

The Rotary Action Group Against Slavery in Canada is looking for ambassadors from each of Canada’s more than 700 Rotary clubs to champion the elimination of human trafficking in the country.

The national group is part of the international Rotary Action Group Against Slavery, which includes members from dozens of countries.

Rotary is a respected voice in Canada, says Barbara Lustgarten-Evoy, and bringing Rotary members from all over the country together to advocate on this issue

will make a demonstrable impact. “To effect real change, we have to work at changing the laws, work at changing the way things are done,” says Lustgarten-Evoy, a member of the Rotary E-Club of District 7080 and the Canadian coordinator for the human trafficking eradication project. To that end, the action group must “connect Rotarians to one another and to the people doing the work around the country. That’s how we get heard, and that’s how we make the change we need to make.”

An interactive map, which is scheduled to go live on the action group’s website after this issue’s publication date, will link Rotary members with vetted potential partners. The District 7080 e-club, the first antislavery cause-based e-club in the country, is working in alignment with the national action group.

In 2022, the Canadian government recorded about 530 instances of human

trafficking reported to police, and a nationwide organization that operates an anti-trafficking hotline tallied about 2,200 victims and survivors between 2019 and 2022. Because experts believe that trafficking is underreported, particularly among historically marginalized groups, these figures do not capture the full extent of the problem. The Canadian action group is working with Honouring Indigenous People and has a trafficking survivor on its board to help ensure that its work is inclusive and considers survivors’ perspectives, Lustgarten-Evoy says.

Supporters of the cause are encouraged to attend this year’s Rotary International Convention in Calgary. “We want as many people representing RAGAS as possible so we can show the rest of the globe what Canada can do,” Lustgarten-Evoy says. ■

Learn more and get involved at [ragas.ca](https://ragas.ca).







An Okanagan Valley apple orchard in British Columbia.



## FEATURE

# The food growers

*Rotary members support the farmworkers who help feed Canada and become their seasonal neighbours*

**In his early years of farming,** Jim Hughes had a hard time finding enough local help to grow fruits and vegetables on his land along Lake Ontario. For one thing, the seasonal work can be physically demanding — and most Canadians want yearlong employment.

In the 1970s, he turned to a government program that connected him with migrant workers. “We couldn’t have operated without it,” says Hughes, a past president and honorary member of the Rotary Club of Picton, Ontario, a distinction given for his many years of service.

Hughes, who is retiring after 60 years in the business, has employed as many as 16 migrant workers at a time from Mexico and the Caribbean, people who travel from their home countries each year to assist on the farm. Over the years, the farm has produced

crops including strawberries, tomatoes, apples, beans, peas, sweet potatoes, and most recently, blueberries and raspberries.

Hughes has seen firsthand the benefit his employees’ paycheques have had on their families. He has taken trips to their home countries in the offseason and been invited into their houses. “They update their homes. They update their appliances. They buy food,” he says. “And they also educate their children.” A 35-year employee of his farm is set to retire this year, his golden years funded by the Canadian pension he earned through his decades of work, Hughes says.

But the money doesn’t come easy for temporary farmworkers. In addition to their often strenuous job, they have to navigate a new country. While the farmers provide them housing and the migrants

have access to health care, language barriers can make it challenging for workers to ask for and get what they need.

The agriculture industry employed about 70,000 temporary foreign workers in 2023, a number that has been growing steadily, according to government statistics. Broader growth of temporary workers in a variety of businesses is one part of a larger debate in the country about overall immigration policies.

But outside of that political discourse, Rotary members in various clubs in agricultural areas have taken an interest in the well-being of the workers who join their communities for part of the year and have become essential to operating Canadian farms. In recent years, some clubs have brought in speakers to educate members about the obstacles migrants may face,

## The Four-Way Test helps a peace fellow who covers immigration

About a year before she became a Rotary Peace Fellow, journalist Sarah Champagne talks with a farmer in Guatemala during a reporting trip to learn more about the lives of men who worked in Canada in agriculture.



**While reporting on agricultural workers in Quebec**, journalist Sarah Champagne learned of a farm that was sending migrants back to their home countries as soon as they were injured or fell ill. That practice is illegal, she says, but workers often don't know how to defend their employment rights.

"So I travelled to Guatemala, and I met a lot of those workers who had been sent back," says Champagne, a 2018-20 Rotary Peace Fellow. The experience gave her a richer portrait of the workers' lives — and changed the way she reports on immigration.

She learned that years of dry weather in Guatemala made it difficult for farmers to feed their families. They had no surplus crops to sell. Travelling to work in Canada was a way they could make ends meet at home.

"From then on, I always try to show that migrants have a history before coming to Canada, and they are from somewhere, and this somewhere might have problems," says Champagne, 38, a reporter at *Le Devoir* newspaper in Montreal. She was also a researcher and screenwriter for the 2021 documentary *Essentiels* about the working conditions for people providing temporary or seasonal labour.

Canada's pool of temporary immigrants, also including international students and people seeking asylum, has grown to 2.8 million, or 6.8 per cent of the population, according to recent estimates from Statistics Canada. That is a sharp increase and has contributed to a widening debate about immigration in the country, Champagne says. Canada's historic norm has been permanent

residency for immigrants, she explains. The federal government plans to cap the number of people allowed into the country and the number granted permanent residency over concerns that rapid growth in recent years has strained social services and other resources.

Early in her career, Champagne wrote about a variety of issues but gravitated towards the topic of immigration. She speaks Spanish, which helped her communicate with many of the workers, and her rural upbringing made her comfortable in agricultural settings. Soon she was identified as a trusted journalist who would listen not only to farmers but also the seasonal workers, giving them an opportunity to have their voices heard.

That approach is not easy, she says. "It's harder to get immigrants to tell their stories. They don't want to look ungrateful to the country that's welcoming them. They don't want any trouble with their bosses."

Champagne's experience in Guatemala inspired her to apply for the Rotary Peace Fellowship, and she earned a journalism master's degree in 2020 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During her peace and conflict resolution studies through the Rotary Peace Center, co-hosted by UNC and nearby Duke University, she focused on the lives of Colombian coca farmers and their families, the policies that affect them, and how the profitability of the crop used to manufacture cocaine makes it difficult for countries, including Canada and the United States, to control sales of the drug within their borders.

The peace fellowship connected her with peers around the world whom she has leaned on to help understand global issues. The Four-Way Test, often fresh in her mind given her various Rotary club speaking engagements, is something she uses in her reporting too. "Is it the truth? Is it fair to all parties involved? Those are my first two questions," she says. "When I'm about to publish, I'm thinking: Did I give a fair chance to everyone to explain themselves?"

Champagne notes that her stories don't create peace on their own. In fact, sometimes a story she writes gives conflicting opinions more attention. "But then, if you try to humanize both sides, it also brings a perspective where peacebuilding can happen," she says.

And sometimes the main outcome of an article is to bring some peace of mind to a worker who feels unseen, she adds. "Just knowing that someone has heard your story and that other people are going to be able to read it — you can be at peace with it."

— AMY HOAK







← The Rotary Club of Fonthill in Ontario supports a health fair for seasonal workers who help in Niagara region vineyards and orchards.

while others have contributed to outreach programs — everything from volunteering at social gatherings to helping aid organizations provide essentials and comfort items like internet access and a space to hang out after work.

In another Lake Ontario farming community, the Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake has made commitments to help farmworkers because members count them as neighbours. “We are in the middle of fruit and grape growing and so are very much an agricultural base here,” club member Jeannie Manning says. “As a result, when the migrant workers do come seasonally, we see them. They’re in the grocery store. They’re riding their bikes everywhere.”

One of the initial ways the club helped was by volunteering during a peach festival, where workers enjoyed food and music from their cultures, Manning says. Then the club donated lights for workers to use on their bicycles, an important safety measure on rural roads at night, she says. The group paid for Wi-Fi spots so people could reliably communicate with their families at home.

And in recent years, the club has been a partner to the Farmworker Hub, which provides a central location for seasonal

agricultural workers to pick up free everyday items, such as boots, socks, and work pants. The effort started during the COVID-19 pandemic when workers couldn’t readily access stores, including Goodwill and Value Village. Volunteers used the local Buy Nothing Facebook group to gather items that the workers needed, Farmworker Hub founder Julia Buxton-Cox says.

The hub has grown to include an after-hours space where the workers socialize. “We have a social centre, so we have a pool table,” Buxton-Cox says. “We have snacks each week; we play music and have foosball. And the workers can all hang out somewhere other than in their bunkhouse.”

Over the years, the Niagara-on-the-Lake club has helped pay for the organization’s rent and a position that coordinates volunteers, with members also serving as volunteers themselves. “The support, the friendship, the advice, and the guidance they’ve provided has been invaluable,” Buxton-Cox says.

The Rotary Club of Fonthill, another in the Niagara region, has supported a health fair for migrant workers for the past two years that helps people access services. The event, run by the Niagara Migrant

Workers Interest Group, Positive Living Niagara, and the Welland-McMaster Family Health Team, creates a welcoming atmosphere to try to help workers feel a part of the larger community. “They don’t have the knowledge of the health care system here,” says Dave Schulz, public image director and executive secretary of the Fonthill club. “That’s the focus, making sure they know what services are available and making sure that they have resources.”

To increase awareness of the challenges for temporary migrant workers, the Rotary Club of Vancouver Sunrise brought in speaker Hugo Velázquez, who works for MOSAIC, an organization that advocates for the rights of immigrants and other people new to Canada, while also providing them settlement support services.

The club has encouraged members to volunteer through MOSAIC to assist the migrant workers in British Columbia who help in businesses, including peach orchards and wine grape vineyards.

Farmers value the work migrants do and often request that the same people return each year because they know how to do the job well, Velázquez says. “Like picking a strawberry: You can’t just grab it; you’ll squish it. Do you know the techniques? Apples? You have to be tall and strong to get those 20 kilos on your back,” he says. “It’s not low-skilled work. Not everyone can do it.”

When Rotary members ask how they can help migrant workers, he says that it’s important to embrace them in the community. “Tell them they’re welcome, potentially protect them, help them with English,” Velázquez says. “Language is the first barrier.”

— AMY HOAK

## By the numbers:

**70,000**

Temporary foreign workers employed by Canada’s agriculture industry in 2023

**1960s**

When the seasonal worker program became part of Canadian agriculture

**30,000**

Number of additional permanent immigrants the agricultural industry may need over the next decade as more farmers retire, according to an RBC Royal Bank estimate

## Une aventure transformatrice

par Camille Chalifour-Germain, participante à l'échange jeunesse en 2013-14

**J**e vais toujours me souvenir de la journée où j'ai reçu l'appel me demandant si je voulais aller faire mon échange en Roumanie. En 2013, j'ai eu la chance de participer à un échange étudiant à Timisoara, en Roumanie, grâce à l'échange jeunesse Rotary. Comme vous le constaterez, cette expérience a profondément marqué mon parcours scolaire et personnel, laissant une empreinte durable dans ma vie.

Après mon retour de cet échange en Roumanie, j'ai entamé mes études collégiales en Arts, Lettres et Langues. Cette décision a été influencée par les expériences et les perspectives nouvelles que j'ai acquises pendant mon séjour à l'étranger. En découvrant la culture roumaine et en étudiant dans un environnement international, j'ai réalisé l'importance des études internationales et des langues dans un monde de plus en plus connecté.

Après mes études collégiales, j'ai décidé de poursuivre en intégrant un programme universitaire en Études Internationales et Langues. Mon échange a eu un impact sur mon choix de programme, où j'ai pu mesurer l'importance de la compréhension interculturelle et de la diplomatie pour construire un monde plus harmonieux.

Après mes études universitaires, j'ai décidé de me lancer dans l'enseignement. Je voulais former les prochaines générations de citoyens. J'ai donc entamé des études en enseignement de l'éducation physique et de la santé à l'université. Après mes quatre années d'études, j'ai commencé à enseigner dans différents milieux de la ville de Québec.

En 2022, je me suis installée à Montréal, où j'ai trouvé une nouvelle opportunité d'enseigner. Cette transition m'a permis de mettre en pratique les langues que j'ai



appries tout en démontrant ma capacité d'adaptation à différents contextes scolaires. Grâce à mon échange jeunesse, j'ai acquis non seulement des compétences linguistiques, mais aussi une ouverture d'esprit et une aptitude à travailler efficacement dans des milieux diversifiés et multiethniques. Ces qualités continuent

de me guider dans ma mission d'enseigner et d'inspirer les élèves dans leur parcours éducatif malgré les barrières linguistiques et culturelles.

Au-delà de son influence sur mon parcours scolaire et professionnel, l'échange étudiant en Roumanie a profondément enrichi ma vie personnelle. Vivre dans un pays étranger, loin de ma famille et de mes amis, m'a permis de développer ma capacité d'adaptation et ma appréciation de la diversité culturelle. J'ai également noué des amitiés durables avec des étudiants roumains et des participants d'autres pays, élargissant ainsi mon réseau social à l'échelle internationale. Ces relations ont enrichi ma vie et m'ont donné une perspective mondiale plus profonde, me permettant de voir le monde à travers les yeux de personnes de différentes origines et cultures.

Mon échange étudiant en Roumanie avec le Rotary International a été une expérience transformatrice à bien des égards. Il a non seulement influencé mon parcours académique et professionnel, mais il a également enrichi ma vie personnelle. Il a été un tremplin en élargissant mes horizons et en me donnant une compréhension plus profonde du monde dans lequel nous vivons. ■

### **Voilà ! Plus d'articles pour nos lecteurs québécois**

Avec son numéro de juillet, *Rotary Canada* élargira son contenu en français avec des pages supplémentaires consacrées à des articles sur les membres du Rotary et les projets du Rotary au Canada et dans le monde. D'ici là, nos lecteurs francophones peuvent accéder à un large éventail d'articles sur [rotary.org/magazine](https://www.rotary.org/magazine) en sélectionnant « Français » dans le menu déroulant.





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