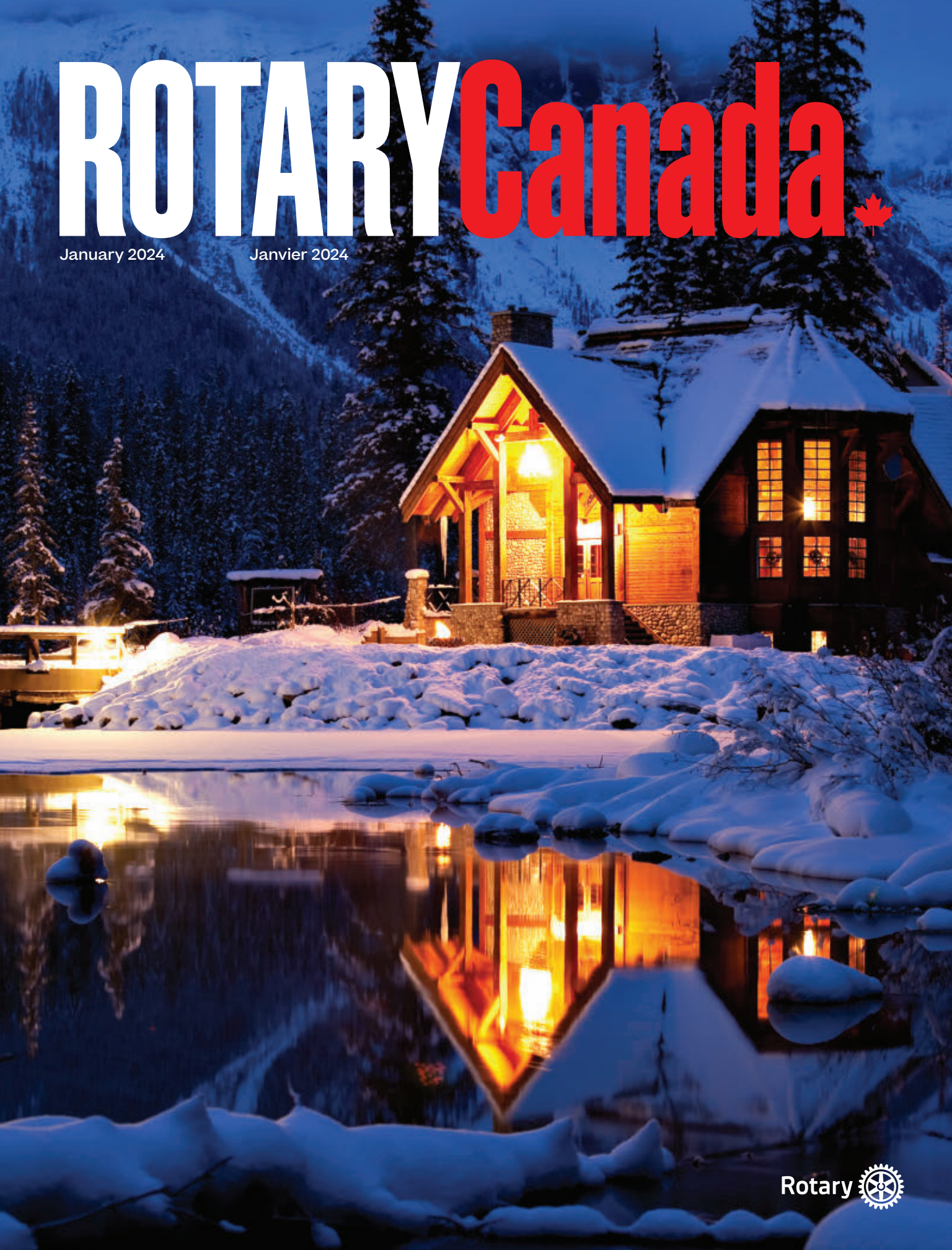


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VIEW FROM THE NORTH

The world we know

In late October I spent a snowy afternoon exploring the Canadian Music Hall of Fame in Calgary. There I encountered the melodies and memorabilia of myriad musicians, including the incomparable singer, songwriter, and guitarist Bruce Cockburn.

At 78, Cockburn remains as powerful a performer and artist as he's ever been. I learned that firsthand in early November when I heard him at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago. Cockburn sang several songs from his most recent album, *O Sun O Moon*, including "To Keep the World We Know," the environmental lament he wrote with the Inuit musician Susan Aglukark. "Haze hangs over hills," it begins, "bright in the morning breeze," and goes on to conjure the "smoke of a thousand fires filling up the sky all around the great wide world."

Sadly, the song makes the perfect soundtrack to "The Summer of Our Discontent," Paul Engleman's story about the wildfires that devastated Canada last summer. Nor were those fires confined to Canada, as the Aglukark-Cockburn song attests: "From the tundra to the tropics, our world's gone up in flames."

But wait, it's not too late. "There's a drive to live at the heart of things," the songwriters insist, and we must tap "that spring and let it water everything to keep the world we know."

This looks like a job for — well, you know. See you on the front lines.

Geoffrey Johnson

Executive editor, *Rotary Canada*



PHOTO OF THE MONTH

In Ottawa, people ice skate along the Rideau Canal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, during the annual Winterlude festival, which begins this year on 2 February.

On the cover:
A brightly lit lodge
on Emerald Lake in
Yoho National Park,
British Columbia

FIELD NOTES

A transcendent vision

Dave Hamilton's legacy of forging peace and understanding lives on after his death

After he was selected to be the 2020-21 governor of District 5040 (part of British Columbia), Dave Hamilton began planning an ambitious agenda for his district conference. He wanted to gather Rotary members and members of the Indigenous Nisga'a Nation and, with an assist from Mediators Beyond Borders International (a Rotary partner), get them to know and learn from one another.

The hope was that participants would facilitate discussions about difficult topics in their clubs and communities. "Dave's focus was 'the family of Rotary,'" says John Anderson, a member of the Rotary Club of Tsawwassen (Delta), "and he wanted to expand that to the whole community."

On 29 March 2021, Hamilton died of prostate cancer. But before his death, he had begun building relationships with the Nisga'a Nation. Leslie Robinson, the nation's youth engagement coordinator, says she will never forget Hamilton's dedication, strength, and courage. "He was so gentle, but his vision was vast," Robinson says. "When he was going through that personal crisis, but still coming in to do the work — that was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen anyone do."

Because COVID-19 made it impossible to hold the conference in person, the planners moved it online. The multiple-session program, designed and led by Lorelei Higgins and Scott Martin — two Rotary Peace Fellows now with Mediators Beyond Borders — blended Rotary tenets, such as The Four-Way Test, with Nisga'a ideas, especially that

of sayt-k'il'im-goot: "one heart, one path, one nation."

"The metaphor is a common bowl," says Higgins. "The Nisga'a elders spent a lot of time teaching us about that. Because if you don't act in your life as if we eat from one common bowl, you will never keep the bigger whole in mind."

Another concept the program explored was that of neutrality as an alternative to empathy. "I can't always have empathy, because my lived experience is different," says Shirley-Pat Chamberlain, a member of the Rotary Club of Steveston-Richmond. "Instead of relating based on a common feeling, this was more about staying neutral. It creates a different kind of conversation than one where you're trying to read [people's] expressions or tap into an emotional connection. It can create a safe space."

The facilitators-in-training also practiced what's known as deep listening. For two minutes, one person would tell another what they thought about a topic. The second person

would then "reflect back" what they had heard. For Ardath Paxton Mann, a member of the Rotary Club of West Vancouver Sunrise, the exercise was a major reason why the program was so transformative. "It's probably one of the most valuable experiences I've had in my many years in Rotary," she says.

About 50 Rotary members and Nisga'a community members took part in two online sessions per week for three months. Robinson appreciated meeting new people in the program as well as acquiring new skills. "It really brought me to a new comfort level as a facilitator and co-facilitator."

Paxton Mann hopes the collaborative mediation program is just the beginning. In line with the program's long-range goal, she'd like to see Rotary members facilitating discussions with other groups in the area. She says, "We want the community to see Rotary as a hub for peace" — Dave Hamilton's fitting and enduring legacy.

— ETELKA LEHOCZKY

Before his death in 2021, District Governor Dave Hamilton forged a relationship between Rotary members, members of the Nisga'a Nation, and Mediators Beyond Borders International.



FEATURE

‘The summer of our discontent’

Canadian Rotarians recall an unprecedented season of wildfires — and the generous gestures that softened the blow

As the goaltender for an over-60 women’s hockey team and a former emergency room nurse in Nova Scotia, Wanda White is no stranger to making saves and saving lives. So late last May, when her brother-in-law phoned with a frantic message — “There’s a fire out near here, and it’s moving really fast” — White was ready to roll into action.

She and her husband, Graham, hopped into a couple of trucks and headed to her brother-in-law’s house. They returned home with a boat, a trailer, and some other items, which they dropped off in their yard. They then turned around and headed back towards her brother-in-law’s house.

“We returned to his place and then went a little farther to see where the fire was,” says White, a member of the Rotary Club of Sackville and Area, which is based about 20 kilometres northwest of Halifax. “I’ve never witnessed anything like it in my life. Every time a new plume of smoke went up, we knew that meant another house was gone.” One of them, she was sure, belonged to another relative, her sister-in-law Annie.

NEARLY TWO MONTHS LATER, another wildfire — one of the more than 6,500 wildfires to hit Canada in 2023 — began burning west of Kelowna, British Columbia. Lisa Wakefield, president of the Rotary Club of Kelowna Ogoogo, says that, at the time, she knew there was a “ferocious fire” across the lake from her home. But she was skeptical when she first heard reports that the fire had spread to her side of the lake.



“How is that even possible?” Wakefield recalls thinking. “But it was true. The fire literally jumped the lake!”

Wakefield’s house survived the fire. Others were not so fortunate. “With 35,000 residents in and around Kelowna forced to evacuate and nearly 200 homes lost in a matter of hours, everyone in the community was affected in some way,” says Marjolein Lloyd, the governor of District 5060 and a member of the Rotary Club of Kelowna Sunrise. “My family was not evacuated, but we had friends staying with us who lost their home.”

Sandy Wightman, a member of the Rotary Club of Lake Country, was on vacation when he got word that his home, along with thousands of others, was under a mandatory evacuation order. Upon his return, he learned that the blaze had come within 200 metres of his residence. “Firefighters in many cases stopped the fires within several feet of people’s homes,” he says. “They were superb in protecting our area.” To thank them, the Lake Country club later hosted a lobster dinner for firefighters, first responders, and their families.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES



SHORTLY AFTER RETURNING HOME, Wanda and Graham White got word that they had to evacuate from their house. They also had to relocate Graham's father from his house next door. They took him to the home of Wanda's sister-in-law, Debbie Gascoigne, also a member of the Sackville and Area club. But the next day, fire forced Gascoigne to evacuate to the home of relatives. "My poor 93-year-old father-in-law had to move twice in 24 hours," White says.

She also learned that the home of her sister-in-law Annie had been destroyed in the fire, though she and her two sons were safe. The five of them resettled in two oceanside cottages that the Whites own. Wanda and Graham were able to return to their home after a week; Annie and her sons stayed at the cottages for two months.

The fires may have been overwhelming, White says, but so was the generosity and support of people who came together to assist one another. "Rotarians had my back," she says. "All of them called to see if I was OK and ask how they could help.

"But it went far beyond Rotary. It was the entire community: friends and friends of friends; cousins and cousins of cousins;



Flames ravage a heavily forested hillside in British Columbia in July.



Forest fires light up the night sky near Kelowna, British Columbia.





people bringing food and clothing and supplies to people they had never met. Maritimers embody the spirit of Rotary.”

In British Columbia, Marjolein Lloyd had similar words of praise for the firefighters, residents, and Rotary members in Kelowna. “We are very fortunate to have a wonderful emergency response team in the area,” she says. “The online community response was also incredible, with people offering space for displaced residents, pets, and livestock.

“We have nine Rotary clubs in Kelowna, West Kelowna, and the neighbouring towns of Peachland and Lake Country. Rotarians immediately reached out to ensure that people who were forced to evacuate had somewhere to stay. Members of the Rotary Club of West Kelowna Daybreak, including the club’s president, Frank Busch, were volunteering wherever they could. They provided midnight meals

to firefighters and other emergency workers. At the evacuation centre, you could find Rotarians serving meals, handing out vouchers — or simply offering a hug.”

CLIMATE CHANGE MORE THAN DOUBLED the likelihood of fire-conducive weather conditions in eastern Canada last summer, according to one study.

At a United Nations conference on climate change last fall, Halifax Assistant Fire Chief Sherry Dean and West Kelowna Fire Chief Jason Brolund addressed the issue. “Environmental impacts from climate change have plagued our city in each season and challenged our firefighters, residents, government officials, and busi-

↑ A helicopter fights a wildfire in British Columbia; in 2023, the province had its most destructive and costly wildfire season on record.

nesses,” Dean said. “The people of Nova Scotia have no question that we are experiencing climate change affecting our communities and our livelihoods.”

Brolund echoed those words in his presentation. “Climate change became very real for West Kelowna on August 16,” he said. Fires, he added, are now “on a scope and scale that’s nearly impossible for us to be successful against. Over \$20 million was spent reacting to my fire, not to mention the insurance losses, which could be triple that. What could we have accomplished if we used that same amount of money proactively? We’re spending the money on the wrong end of the problem.”

DESPITE THE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGE of having to look after her father, who was very ill at the time of the fire — and died just four weeks after it — Wanda White considers herself lucky. Although she and her husband were forced to relocate for a week, they had a convenient place to stay and a home to return to once the fires were subdued. The real tragedy, in her view, befell “the hundreds of people who lost their homes.”

Just before White’s father passed away, he paraphrased a line from Shakespeare. “He said, ‘This was the summer of our discontent,’” White recalls. “My father was a smart man, and he was with it to the end. This really was the summer of our discontent.” — PAUL ENGLEMAN

By the numbers

9%

Percentage of the world’s total forest area that is in Canada

45.7

Millions of acres burned in Canada’s 2023 wildfires by mid-November; the annual average is 5.2 million acres

410

Megatons of carbon released by the Canadian wildfires in 2023 (as of mid-September)

27%

Percentage of 2023 global wildfire emissions (as of mid-September) produced by the Canadian wildfires

NOTES DE TERRAIN

Changer des vies, un livre à la fois

par Jacinthe Paillé, club
Rotary D7040 Passport

Dans un de mes albums, on peut trouver une photo de moi à l'âge de 15 mois environ assise sur une balançoire. Dans mes petites mains je tiens le livre *Babies*, un ouvrage cartonné que je traînais partout avec moi. Dès mon plus jeune âge, j'ai été entourée de livres. Encore aujourd'hui, je me sens complètement dans mon élément dans une bibliothèque ou une librairie remplie de tomes de toutes sortes.

Au cours des 10 dernières années, j'ai réalisé que ma mission personnelle dans la vie était de partager mon amour pour les livres et la lecture et ce, de toutes les façons possibles. Je me rappelle avoir lu les bandes dessinées de Tintin pour ensuite les partager avec mon frère, de cinq ans mon cadet. Adolescente, j'ai inspiré plus d'une amie à se mettre à la lecture — et je le fais toujours aujourd'hui.

En tant qu'enseignante en anglais au niveau collégial, j'ai toujours fait lire mes étudiants(es), que ce soit des classiques comme *Frankenstein* ou des ouvrages plus modernes, tels que *The Hunger Games* ou encore *An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth* de Chris Hadfield. J'ai invité des auteurs et autrices à venir parler de leur processus d'écriture à la communauté étudiante. En mars 2020, alors que les nouvelles ne parlaient que d'un virus qui allait changer nos vies, l'autrice canadienne Geneviève Graham est venue faire une conférence au collège et a signé ses livres sur place. Trois jours plus tard, nous étions envoyés à la maison.

En tant que rotarienne, j'adore partager ma passion pour la lecture et le pouvoir



des mots. En juillet 2021, je suis devenue responsable de l'alphabétisation pour le District 7040, rôle que j'occupe encore aujourd'hui. J'ai eu l'occasion de donner des conférences à différents clubs du district sur le sujet. J'en ai aussi profité pour lancer un club de lecture diversifié, en ligne, qui se réunissait quatre fois par année pour discuter d'un bouquin. Grâce au support de mon club, j'ai installé une petite boîte à livres devant chez moi. Aujourd'hui, j'en compte quatre dont je suis responsable, à Montréal et Laval. Les petites boîtes sont l'occasion parfaite pour discuter lecture, faire circuler des ouvrages qu'on a déjà lus, et en découvrir de nouveaux. Ils sont une belle façon de créer des liens avec la communauté. Enfin, en mai 2023, en tant que responsable de la Maison de l'amitié à la conférence de district 7040, je me suis assurée que les livres

écrits par les conférenciers invités aient une place de choix sur la table réservée à l'alphabétisation.

Alors que je viens de célébrer 25 années au sein du Rotary, je suis encore plus motivée à continuer ma mission. Une rencontre sur Zoom pour souligner cette étape de ma vie rotarienne, dans laquelle des amis ont partagé des souvenirs, a aussi été l'occasion de sensibiliser les participants à quatre organismes dédiés à l'alphabétisation, dont la Bibliothèque des jeunes de Montréal et StoryBook Ottawa. Depuis l'été 2022 j'anime un balado sur la lecture et les livres (Jackie's Reading Room, en anglais) et je suis en train de monter un festival de polars et romans de suspense, le festival Montréal Mystère, pour mai 2024. La lecture, les livres — une passion que je compte partager partout... et encore longtemps! ■



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