

ROTARYCanada

October 2023 / Octobre 2023



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VIEW FROM THE NORTH

Canada's epoch-defining lake

In July, a group of scientists identified Crawford Lake in Milton, Ontario, as a site that likely shows the beginning of a new epoch in the Earth's 4.6-billion-year history. Called the Anthropocene, the geological time period would designate the interval during which humans have left an indelible imprint on the planet.

"The record at Crawford Lake is representative of the changes that make the time since the mid-20th century geologically different from before," said Francine McCarthy, a professor of earth sciences at Brock University in Ontario and a member of the Anthropocene Working Group, which conducted research at the lake and 11 other sites around the world. Over the next few months, other scientific committees will vote on the proposal to recognize the beginning of the Anthropocene Epoch.

According to *The Washington Post*, McCarthy hopes that the evidence of nuclear detonations and the heightened use of fossil fuels and fertilizers collected at the Canadian lake would "'nudge' people to confront climate change, biodiversity loss, and other environmental upheavals." She added that the group's research demonstrates "how irrevocably our actions can change big things that people would not have thought could change."

But that observation cuts both ways. As scientists look to the past, Rotary looks to the future to determine where the unalterable can indeed be altered so as to make the present era, Anthropocene or otherwise, better for every human who inhabits our planet.

GEOFFREY JOHNSON

Executive editor, *Rotary Canada*



PHOTO OF THE MONTH

A so-called "golden spike" extracted from the sediment at the bottom of Crawford Lake in Milton, Ontario, may be the best evidence of the beginning of Earth's Anthropocene Epoch.

On the cover:
Canada's national
bird is the gray jay?
Try telling that to
Branta canadensis
— the Canada goose.



FIELD NOTES

In full bloom

*With a gift from “a friend of Rotary,”
a Quebec club used sunflowers to assist
children in Ukraine*

As a longtime Rotarian — 53 years, all as a member of the Rotary Club of Montreal-Lakeshore — Knud Petersen knows the importance of persistence and the value of connections and collaboration when it comes to conceiving and implementing projects.

Last winter, Petersen, who has been a club leader in the area of international service for the last 25 years, was looking for a way that club members could provide financial support to children affected by the war in Ukraine. Knowing that the sunflower is a symbol of peace and the national flower of Ukraine — where it's called *soniashnyk* — Petersen concocted the idea of raising funds through the sale of sunflower seeds.

“We approached a Canadian seed company,” he says, “but after repeated requests over three weeks and no response from the person in charge, we thought the idea was dead.”

The project may have withered on the vine if Petersen hadn't planted the idea with his friend Bill Gray, a past governor of District 7040 (parts of Ontario, Nunavut, Quebec, and New York) and a member

of the Rotary Club of Cataraqui-Kingston in Ontario. Gray shared the notion with his fellow club member Ana Sutherland, who happens to have a friend, Wayne Gale, who is the president of Stokes Seeds.

Sutherland contacted Gale, whom Petersen describes as “a friend of Rotary” and Sutherland as “a supergenerous person.” “Lo and behold, he offered us 2,000 packs of mammoth sunflower seeds,” says Petersen. “The project was back on track, and together we developed artwork for the seeds’ package.”

The project's goal was to raise \$10,000 by selling each package of seeds for \$5, Petersen says. Montreal-Lakeshore contacted other clubs throughout the district, and donations soon came in for more than 1,000 packets of seeds. Despite that outpouring of generosity, Petersen understood that the project was barely past the germination stage, though he acknowledges that many of the district's clubs had already exhausted their budgets in support of a recent blankets for Ukraine project.

So he was elated when Sutherland and Gray rallied members of the Cataraqui-Kingston club, who submitted what Petersen calls “a bumper crop of orders” for 764 packages of the mammoth-variety seeds. “We were almost home,” he says, “and a couple of days later we had sold all of our 2,000 seed packs.” What's more, the \$10,000 collected by the Montreal-Lakeshore club during its fundraiser was boosted by another \$440 in additional donations from individual Rotarians.

The project's last stage involved working with the Canadian office of Save the Children, the 104-year-old humanitarian nonprofit active in more than 100 countries. Petersen says that the organization forwarded the club's donation to its branch in Ukraine, where Save the Children has been working since 2014. In 2022 alone, the organization supported nearly 1.1 million people, including 614,000 children, in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, providing hygiene supplies, mental health and psychosocial support, educational assistance, and cash transfers.

“Rotary is sometimes shy to speak about what we do,” Petersen says. “But those sunflower seed packs ‘talk’ about helping Ukrainian children in need — and about Rotary! And those 8-foot-tall sunflowers, helped along by some growing tips on our club's website, were beautiful reminders of Rotary in many peoples' gardens throughout the summer.”





FEATURE

A bicycle built for 10,000

An Ontario club's Wheels for Learning project expands to include more clubs — and provide other necessities

It started, like many successful international projects, with a relatively simple proposal made by an individual Rotary member. A dozen years later, the project has expanded remarkably in scope and gained the active participation of more than 10 Rotary clubs in three districts in Ontario.

In 2011, while visiting Cambodia, Lisa McCoy, a member of the Rotary Club of Gravenhurst, took note of how difficult it was for children to attend school because they lacked transportation. Upon returning home, she shared that observation with club members and began a fundrais-

ing campaign to purchase and distribute used bicycles. The following year, McCoy led a team of 30 volunteers to Cambodia, where they purchased and distributed more than 1,000 bicycles in what would become the club's annual Wheels for Learning project.

In 2015, John Gordon, a past governor of District 7010, invited his friend Mike Cole to join the Wheels for Learning team. "I was in the military at the time," recalls Cole, "and I had served in operations in Namibia, Cyprus, Croatia, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. I have always believed in the importance of service to others, and Cambodia seemed like a nice fit for me." (By his own admission, Cole also possessed some traits well suited to the task at hand: "I am highly organized and a team player.") The following year, after McCoy had to step down for personal reasons, Cole served as co-leader of the project, and in 2017, the same year he joined the Gravenhurst club, he became the sole leader — and, you might say, the soul — of the Wheels for Learning initiative.

"Many of the children in Cambodia have to walk more than 3 kilometres to school," Cole says. "Shortcuts through fields and jungle offer the prospect of encountering long forgotten land mines, unexploded ordinance, or poisonous snakes. They simply cannot attend school without the aid of a bicycle.

"After a couple of trips to Cambodia," he adds, "I soon learned that getting the children to school wasn't enough. The infrastructure at the rural schools was either very old, in a state of disrepair, or nonexistent. Without wells, latrines, and wash areas, the children have no way of using the washroom, cleaning their hands, or having water to drink. This lack of critical infrastructure further disadvantages adolescent girls, who generally drop out of school once they start to menstruate."

This realization, Cole says, prompted him to expand the focus of the project in 2018 by hiring a local contractor to build a three-stall latrine, a wash area, and a well with a storage tank as a pilot project at a school in Kampong Speu province. He

← Members of the Wheels for Learning team assemble bicycles during their 2023 visit to Cambodia.

also decided to take steps to improve the quality of the bikes being provided.

“We have been buying ‘gently used’ bikes from a dealer in Phnom Penh,”

Cole says. “But what is considered serviceable in Cambodia is different from what Canadians would consider serviceable. Our approach changed from simply distributing bikes to conducting detailed repairs on them before they are distributed. I buy about \$800 in spare parts to use when we assemble them. Our intent is to provide the child with a ‘like new’ bicycle. Because I’m a technical person and I bring technical people along, we are able to do that.”

In addition to the bicycle distribution endeavour, Wheels for Learning became a water, sanitation, and hygiene project. In 2019, the program provided funds for local contractors to build and install five latrines, three wells and storage tanks, three wash areas, 32 water filters, and two playgrounds in rural schools. That same year, a 22-member team of volunteers repaired and distributed 944 bicycles, along with 70 pounds of school supplies, 200 books for a school library, a year’s supply of soap and towels, and a ton of rice.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the trip to be cancelled in 2021, but the project still funded components of the sanitation construction initiative and the delivery of 20 tons of rice. Cole reports that over the last two years, the program has funded the building and installation of 148 latrines, three wells, four wash areas, 34 water filters, and two playgrounds. In keeping with the program’s original mission, 32 volunteers repaired and delivered more than 1,300 bicycles, bringing the total to nearly 10,700 bikes since Wheels for Learning first got rolling — which occasioned a jubilant celebration at the Gravenhurst Opera House in June 2022 as the project reached the 10,000-bike milestone. Distributing school supplies, personal hygiene products, and books has also become a project staple.

Cole says that the initiative has an annual budget of “upwards of \$80,000,” with financial support coming from two district grants and donations from individual Rotary members and Rotary clubs throughout Ontario. The clubs include Bracebridge,

Collingwood-South Georgian Bay, Huntsville, Kirkland Lake, Minden, Niagara Falls, North Bay-Nipissing, Orillia, Parry Sound, Toronto, and Toronto West. Members of the Rotary clubs of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh in Cambodia also volunteer with bicycle assembly and distribution and donate to the project.

But, Cole says, the largest portion of the funding is raised by the team members who take part in the project. “We generally never have an issue of not reaching our goals,” he explains. “It just takes a lot of work getting there.”

Cole finds it gratifying that half of the 15 to 20 people who volunteer on the annual service trip sign up to participate again, noting that the project is “not like a vacation,” but a labor-intensive gig that runs from the last week of January through mid-February. As of July, he says,



17 volunteers have committed to participating next year.

“This project involves nine full days of working in the hot sun,” he says. “The men and women who go are people who really believe in Service Above Self. That holds true, but once you get over there, you get to meet so many amazing Canadians. When you work with people for three weeks, you build lifelong friendships. Every year, that’s the takeaway. By the end of those three weeks, we are all like family.”

The annual trip has become a literal family affair for Cole. His 31-year-old daughter, Lia, has joined the group four times, and his wife, Julia, has accompanied them once. Next year, Cole says, he and Julia plan to bring their 5-year-old son, William. “We want him to get a bit of an understanding of what we’re doing over there,” he says. Until then, William will have to settle for watching a video about the project produced by Cole’s cousin Mikayla Bruder that appears on the Wheels for Learning website.

Cole says that he has “an aha moment” every year. “It comes during the first bicycle distribution, when I see the excitement and smiles on the faces of not only the children receiving the bikes but on the faces of the parents as well,” he says. “It’s a smile of hope, of dreams, and of the future.”

— PAUL ENGLEMAN



Top: During their 2017 visit to Cambodia, members of the Wheels for Learning team led a presentation about dental hygiene. **Bottom:** In Cambodia in 2022, the Wheels for Learning team celebrated its 10th anniversary and the delivery of its 10,000th bicycle.





Les membres du club Rotary de Trois-Rivières participent à la guignolée du Centre de pédiatrie sociale de Trois-Rivières.

NOTES DE TERRAIN

Un club du cœur du Québec qui fait des actions locales et internationales

par Jean-Marc Vanasse, club Rotary de Trois-Rivières

Lorsque le club Rotary de Trois-Rivières reçu sa charte en 1942, son premier président, Rock Hébert, fixe dès lors la ligne directrice pour venir en aide à différents organismes communautaires et aux gens les plus démunis de la région. Quelques décennies plus tard, le club parraine le club Rotary de Cap-de-la-Madeleine, qui a reçu sa charte en 1997. Ensemble, les deux organismes ont collaboré à plusieurs projets, localement et à l'international. En 2019, les deux clubs fusionnent sous le nom de Trois-Rivières.

Le club apporte de nombreuses contributions à la communauté chaque année. En mars, il a donné un chèque de 26 102 \$

à Moisson Mauricie / Centre-du-Québec. Cela se traduit par une valeur approximative de 678 652 \$ en nourriture aux personnes dans le besoin. Cet organisme a pour mission « d'améliorer la qualité de vie de la personne au cœur de ses actions par l'aide alimentaire et la création d'un réseau social autour d'elle, en partenariat avec des acteurs de différents milieux. »

De plus, afin d'aider les femmes et les enfants victimes de violence, à l'occasion de la Journée internationale des droits des femmes, le club a remis 32 cartes cadeaux de 50 \$ aux maisons d'hébergement Maison Le Far et Maison de Connivence. Parmi les autres dons, nommons entre autres l'achat de 500 oursons Policœur. Les

oursons sont remis lors d'interventions policières aux enfants impliqués ou témoins de situations délicates. Le projet est concrétisé par la contribution d'une somme de 3 147,44 \$ versée par le Club, et d'un montant équivalent du service de police de Trois-Rivières.

À l'international, le doyen du club, Daniel Thibeault, âgé de 93 ans, se montre toujours actif pour soutenir et piloter avec le membre du club Benoit Gauthier de nombreux projets humanitaires au Pérou. Un éducateur et travailleur social, Thibeault a passé 45 années en Amérique latine, plus spécifiquement au Pérou.

À son retour au Québec en 2007, il se joint au club du Cap-de-la-Madeleine. Il suggère au club de mettre sur pied un volet international d'actions à vocation bien rotarienne. C'est ainsi que débute une série de projets, allant de l'alphabétisation au financement de nombreuses conférences sur la prévention de certaines maladies. S'ajoutera ensuite la fourniture d'équipements médicaux aux hôpitaux et aux petits dispensaires des populations isolées du Pérou, puis, d'appréciables quantités de médicaments, de vêtements et de matériel scolaire. Ces actions se concrétisent par l'intermédiaire de Collaboration Santé Internationale avec l'envoi de conteneurs au Pérou.

Une action qui fait la fierté de notre club est spécifiquement dirigée vers l'autonomie des femmes. Elle est, et continue d'être après huit années de mise en service, la création de coopératives uniquement dirigées par des femmes. Celles-ci, plus de 70 bénéficiaires, auront obtenu leur indépendance économique et une étonnante amélioration de leur qualité de vie grâce à des activités commerciales des plus variées.

Bien sûr, il ne faut pas oublier le soutien que le Rotary Trois-Rivières apporte annuellement au projet du District 7790 et à la mission du Rotary International : combattre la polio. En tant que source de paix et de bonheur, c'est comme ça que nous, les Rotariens du Rotary Trois-Rivières, *Créons de l'Espoir dans le Monde*.

PROFILE

Destination Rotary

Nnamdi Ndubuka exemplifies a life dedicated to service above and beyond self

There are some people who seem destined to become a member of Rotary. Consider Dr. Nnamdi Ndubuka, who earlier this year received a Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal for his many contributions to his Prairie Province community, revolving, in part, around his work with young people, immigrants, and First Nations people.

A past president of the Rotary Club of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Ndubuka began his relationship with Rotary as an undergraduate student when he was a Rotaractor in Nigeria. “I was actively involved in several initiatives, including the Kick Polio Out of Nigeria campaign,” he recalls. “I admired Rotary’s programs related to youth empowerment, and I looked forward to joining a Rotary club after I graduated.”

After completing his medical training at the University of South Africa, Ndubuka immigrated to Canada in 2011 with his wife, Justina, and their children. “We felt very welcome,” he says. “The community [of Melfort, Saskatchewan, where they first lived] was very supportive. Canada is a multicultural society; that’s one of the main reasons we chose to live in Canada.”

In 2014, after he and his family moved to Prince Albert, Ndubuka fulfilled his dream of joining a Rotary club — and in 2017 he became president of the Prince Albert club. “Rotary was founded on fellowship,” he says. “I love to meet people, especially like-minded people who have a shared vision of community service. I wanted to experience the fulfillment that comes from giving back to the community.”

As medical health officer and public health specialist for the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority, Ndubuka directs the implementation of public health programs in 33 First Nation communities across Northern Saskatchewan. Ndubuka says that responding to the

COVID-19 pandemic through his work at the organization was the biggest challenge of his career. “Helping Indigenous communities navigate the pandemic was a very stressful experience,” he says. “But we learned quite a lot about the value of relationships and the importance of communication.”

An associate professor at the University of Saskatchewan, where he teaches in the College of Medicine and School of Public Health, Ndubuka served for the past two years as president of the Canadian Association of Nigerian Physicians and Dentists, an organization started in 2001 to represent the interests of medical practitioners in Canada and support health initiatives in Nigeria. In 2020, he founded the organization’s mentorship program, which supports personal and professional development among Nigerian medical graduates. “Our mentors who are already practising provide guidance to mentees,” he says. “We help them address challenges that they may face related to their prospective career decisions. The program has really helped quite a number of individuals become successful.”

But wait, there’s more: A licensed soccer coach, Ndubuka has served as president of the Prince Albert Youth Soccer Association since 2018. “I love soccer,” he says. “I see it as a tool for youth development in terms of gaining self-confidence and learning about teamwork and disci-



pline.” He also volunteers in social service at the Saskatchewan Federal Penitentiary.

While Ndubuka is grateful for the plaudits that his service has earned for him inside and outside of Rotary, he says his work is its own reward. “I derive satisfaction when health policies we put in place influence positive changes at the population level,” he explains. “And I have a strong sense of fulfillment when my students achieve success in their academic endeavours.”

“Bringing people together is something that I love doing,” he adds. “I try to provide opportunities for people to come together for networking and building community, especially for those who require help.” Spoken like a person born to the blue and gold.

— PAUL ENGLEMAN



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