



Building peace through Rotary

by David Wick, February 10th, 2020

Being invited to speak at the Rotary World Peace Conference in Ontario, California, Jan. 17-18, was an energizing and thought-provoking way to begin the new year.

I am aware of the many challenges we all face in 2020, and I found participating in a room with 1,000 other people who are focused on peace and peacebuilding to be a real boost and reassurance that we are on the right track.

The mission of the Rotary World Peace Conference 2020, with 19 general session speakers, 153 breakout sessions, and 67 information and product booths, is to bring together experts with solutions to major issues that are occurring in our personal lives, homes, schools, businesses and communities around the world. The focus on peace in Rotary is growing significantly. This is contributing to the culture of peace evolution.

My presentation about the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission's community engagement and our assistance with sheltering unhoused people in our community was well received. Throughout the conference I found a great deal of interest from participants in how ACPC is educating our community about the ideals and actions of the culture of peace. I was also asked how we work with Rotary and whether we have similar goals. The short answer is yes.

My return flight home to Ashland had a layover in Portland. Before I left, Al Jubitz, a Rotarian for 43 years and founder of the international Rotarian Action Group For Peace, asked me to stay on for several days in Portland to meet Fergal McCarthy, Rotary International Peace Programs manager from Evanston, Illinois, and to attend several Rotary Club meetings, including a special dinner celebration of the Portland area Rotary Peacebuilder Clubs led by Mike Caruso. I learned a great deal about the

many ways and many levels Rotary can use its significant infrastructure and local-global reach for peacebuilding and developing the culture of peace.

Jubitz believes that Rotary is uniquely capable of turning the world toward nonviolent conflict resolution, ultimately leading to a world beyond war.

I have learned that one of the guiding principles of Rotary is the Four-Way Test, which is a nonpartisan and nonsectarian ethical guide for Rotarians to use for the things we think, say or do:

Is it the truth?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better friendships?

Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Al had heard about the closing ceremony of our Ashland Global Peace Conference (Sept. 21, 2019), where Irene Kai (ACPC co-founder) led a votive peace candle-lighting ceremony while reading the Peace Flame Invocation with John Lennon's "Imagine" playing in the background. He requested the same be done for the conclusion of the Rotary Peacebuilder Clubs dinner. I conducted this closing ceremony, and the experience was beautiful and inspiring. This will move on to other clubs and cities.

Inspired by Al, Barbara Gaughen-Muller, Rudy Westervelt, Derek Moore and other Rotarians, Irene and I have become members of the Rotary E-Club of World Peace, and we meet weekly online via Zoom with other members far and wide. We are thus official Rotarians with the privilege of visiting any other Rotary Club in the world.

After bringing ACPC and Rotary peace-building missions and practices together, I wanted to learn more about our two Ashland Rotary clubs and their peace-focused activities. I also wanted to bring to them the opportunity to become peace-builder clubs, with the possible accompanying benefits.

I met with Alan Harper, president of Rotary Club of Ashland, and Chris Chambers, president of Rotary Club of Ashland Lithia Springs, and member Dan Fowler to learn more. Both clubs participate in many activities to create greater well-being, such as international student exchange, Ashland literacy for youth, programs for the growth of Ashland High School students (Interact Clubs) and SOU students (Rotaract Clubs), shelter boxes for disaster relief, vocational scholarships, summer

camps, grants to community nonprofit organizations, and a student of the month ceremony. From the perspective of ACPC, these clubs are contributing to the culture of peace.

As Alan Harper said, "Rotary has been around for a long time and is still making positive change in the world. We are proud to work on both the local and global levels, especially as we engage with young people."

This is Peacebuilding through Rotary.

David Wick is executive director and co-founder of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, and a Rotarian.