

Local Rotary Clubs' New Projects Range From Here to South America

By *Debbi Mack*,
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From area high schools to as far away as Peru, local Rotary clubs are starting new projects that fulfill three aspects of the group's mission: vocational, community and international.

Sunrise Club 'Interacts' With Long Reach Students

Ron Carlson is feeling upbeat about the new Interact club - a Rotary club for high school students - that his group, the Ellicott City Sunrise Rotary Club, started at Long Reach High School.

"If the principal is excited, the chances are the project will succeed," said Carlson, a past president of the Sunrise Club. And Long Reach's principal, Edmund Evans, was intrigued by the possibility of starting an Interact club after he and Carlson discussed it last spring.

Long Reach is a school "with particular challenges," Carlson said. Academically, it has lagged behind schools like Centennial and River Hill.

Interact clubs are intended to promote leadership skills, academic achievement and community service. School officials saw the club as a way to improve academic performance and provide "a more thoughtful, better planned approach" to meeting students' community service requirements, Carlson said.

In early September, after several meetings with the Long Reach National Honor Society's faculty adviser and executive committee, Evans and Ceecee Paizs, the Sunrise club's president, signed an agreement to establish the Interact club, which then applied for official status from Rotary International.

The club includes all 60 of the school's National Honor Society

members and will recruit more students over time. Carlson said students' initial response to the club has been enthusiastic. Among the club's first duties are the selection of officers and projects.

Carlson said one possible project for the new club is the six-week Summer Enrichment Program for children from low-income families, emphasizing academics and the arts, among other things.

Interact clubs also help place students with mentors. These mentorships benefit both students and school officials, Carlson said.

"The principal and leadership are always looking for adult participation," he said. "To have somebody ... make himself or herself available to a student is just very, very valuable."

Carlson said Interact clubs teach students essential team-building, networking and relationship skills. "There's a very strong emphasis on the understanding that you both receive and give back."

Columbia Club Starts Remembrance Run

When the Columbia Rotary club decided to add a third fundraiser to its annual golf tournament and NCAA Final Four potluck dinner, Dr. Ty Saini thought a run might be just the thing.

"As a member, I was charged with [developing] that, and being a runner, I thought it could work," Saini said. He began organizing the first annual Remembrance Run, a 5K run and one-mile walk, after checking with other Rotary clubs to see if they'd had successful runs and learning there were no competing local runs the weekend he had in mind.

The run/walk, held in Columbia Gateway Business Park last Memorial Day, attracted 150 runners and 80 walkers. "We exceeded our goal by about \$6,000,"

Saini said, to gross \$16,000 and net \$11,000.

Most of that money will go to Howard County charities, Saini said. Some may go to international projects.

He attributes much of the run's success to well-coordinated planning and execution by the Howard County Striders, a premier local running club that provided valuable assistance with event planning and marketing, and his fellow Rotarians, who "answered the call" by drumming up donations and getting access to facilities.

Saini said the planners got compliments for spending extra on race T-shirts of mesh-like, breathable fabric, rather than plain cotton. The race also featured food, drink and "upbeat" musical entertainment afterward.

"What I hope to have next year are some activities for the children," Saini said, such as moon bounces, a popcorn vendor and some simple games and activities.

"We tried to cover all the bases of a good event," he said, in the hopes of establishing a good reputation for next year.

Crofton Club Has a 'Sister' in Lima

To Lela Cote, the "international" part of Rotary is more than an organizational mission: It's a personal commitment. She has arranged for a Rotary club in Lima, Peru, to become a sister club to her own in Crofton.

Cote, originally from Lima, has been with Rotary for 14 years. She joined at the urging of her brother, Augusto Gil, a member of the Monterrico Rotary club in suburban Lima. After Gil died in a terrorist bombing in Lima in March 2002, Cote "took over his projects."

Since 2003, Cote has raised money through annual homemade

cake sales that goes to the Monterrico club. Last year, she sent \$1,200. This year, she hopes to get a \$2,000 grant for the club from Rotary International. The money has gone toward Christmas meals and breakfasts for poor families.

The Monterrico club attained official "sister" status in September. Cote, who is president of the Crofton Rotary club, took the opportunity during a visit with family in Peru to sign the agreement establishing that relationship, along with the Monterrico club's president, Judy Carlin.

As sister clubs, Monterrico and Crofton will work jointly on projects. Many of Monterrico's projects are geared toward the underprivileged of Lima and the surrounding area, especially children and senior citizens. Among the programs are a Christmas breakfast for children, where each receives a present, and a luncheon/dance for seniors in nursing homes. The chapter also has projects in one of the shantytowns located around Lima, including a school construction project.

Currently, Cote is helping to implement the Safe Blood project underway in a few Latin American countries. Because blood in Latin America is obtained by private sale, rather than donation, the resulting lack of quality control increases patient infection risk. While in Peru, Cote is visiting Argentina and Uruguay to educate people in all three countries about donating blood and screening it for use.

Cote feels a personal stake in her Rotary activities due to her brother's death.

"I felt obligated to carry out his projects to provide a legacy," she said. Having been born and raised in Peru, Cote is also "very aware of the poverty that exists. I feel an obligation to do what I can to alleviate the situation."