



May 2026

District 6960 Newsletter

MESSAGE FROM DISTRICT GOVERNOR GERARD SOLA

Fellow Rotarians,

As we enter the final two months of this Rotary year, there is a tremendous sense of excitement and pride across our district. This is always a special time, a chance to reflect on what we have accomplished together and to finish strong with the same passion and commitment that has defined our year.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to each and every Rotarian for your continued commitment to service. The work being done by our clubs, both locally in our communities and globally around the world, is truly making a difference. Whether it's supporting local families, strengthening our neighborhoods, or contributing to international initiatives, your dedication embodies the very best of Rotary.

There is also so much to celebrate. Our district is currently leading all districts in Zones 33 and 34 in net new member growth. That achievement is no accident, it is a direct testament to the outstanding work each of our clubs is doing to create welcoming environments and foster a fantastic culture of service, fellowship, and belonging. Growth like this reflects energy, relevance, and a bright future for Rotary in our district.

As we look ahead, one of the highlights of the year is right around the corner, our District Conference. This will be a fantastic opportunity for fun, fellowship, and celebration as we recognize the incredible accomplishments of this Rotary year. It promises to be a true end of year celebration that you will not want to miss.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to take a moment today to register on DACdb and secure your place. The District Conference is more than just an event, it is a time to reconnect with friends, celebrate service, and share in the pride of everything we have achieved together.

Thank you again for your dedication, your passion, and your service. Let's carry this momentum through the finish line and make these final two months some of the most impactful of the year.



Gerard Sola
Rotary 

ROTARY DISTRICT 6960
DISTRICT GOVERNOR
2025 - 2026

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DISTRICT 6960 2025-26 IMPORTANT DATES

DATE	EVENT
07/24/2025	Youth Summit (Zoom)
08/16/2025	Rotary Leadership Institute (RLI)
08/31/2025	RLYA Delegate Applications Due
09/6/2025	Reignite Rotary Fellowship Event
09/27/2025	District Leader Training 9:30—11:30 (Zoom)
10/29/2025—11/02/2025	Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA)
11/15/2025	District 6960 Governor Applications Due
12/2/2025	District 6960 Governor Nominating Committee Meeting 7 PM
12/6/2025	District 6960 Governor Interviews 9 AM-1 PM
12/13/2025	Pre-PETS 10:00-2:00 PM
01/10/2026	Mid-Year Meeting (Zoom)
2/21/2026	Rotary Leadership Institute (RLI)
3/5/2026—03/9/2026	President Elect Training Seminar (PETS)
4/18/2026	Rotary Leadership Institute (RLI)
5/9/2026	District Training Assembly 9AM-noon
6/13-17/2026	RI Convention, Taipei, Taiwan
6/27/2026	District Conference

NOTE: Updates noted in Blue. Visit DACdb for more information, times, locations and registration.

AG's are asked to attend all bolded events in person if at all possible.

ROTARY THIS MONTH

May 2026

May is Youth Service Month. Rotary's focus on youth includes fostering leadership and international connection through programs like [RYLA 2026](#), [Youth Exchange](#), and [Interact clubs](#)

[Click here](#) to learn more



ALL CLUBS CELEBRATION 2026 DISTRICT CONFERENCE

CHARLOTTE HARBOR EVENT &
CONFERENCE CENTER

JUNE 27TH, 2026

4:00-5:00
COCKTAIL RECEPTION

5:00-8:00
END OF YEAR CELEBRATION
AWARDS & INSTALLATION

[REGISTER NOW](#)



2025-26 District 6960 Membership Team

Donald Thomas

District Membership Chair

Mohit Pohani

District Membership New Clubs

David Barton Lowden

District Membership Engagement

Brad Corbett

District Membership Committee

Jim Henry, PDG

District Membership Committee

Bob Knight

District Membership Committee

Carol Peterson

District Membership Committee

Darryl Keys

District Membership Committee

ROTARY MEMBERSHIP

by PDG Don Thomas

FINDING PEOPLE TO INVITE: A PROSPECTIVE MEMBER EXERCISE

You can find new members by asking people you know, following up on your club's online membership leads, identifying who's missing from your club, cultivating new relationships, and leveraging social media. Encourage members to invite prospective members to service activities, club meetings, and events, so that they can learn how your club works with the community and provides opportunities for friendship and connection.

Each club should review its list of membership leads regularly and contact those people to keep making progress on making your club better reflect your community. To reach an even broader group of people, work with your public image committee to promote your club's service and social activities on social media. Tagging contacts who may be interested in an event, adding a "join" link on public documents or webpages, and using hashtags strategically are all ways to broaden your reach.

WHAT YOU'LL GAIN:

- Identifying prospective members and actively engaging them will help your club
- Develop a group of potential candidates for membership
- Determine how to introduce prospective members to your club
- Get to know people and what they're looking for so you can meet those needs.

Invite the prospective members to a club meeting, service activity, or social event. If you conducted the diversity assessment, refer to the list of groups you found to be underrepresented in your club and include people from those groups as well. Now you can develop a plan that specifies:

- Who you want to invite, and if you want to do so in small groups
- Who is responsible for inviting each person
- What event they'll be invited to
- How the person responsible will make the invitation
- How they'll follow up with the prospective member after the event.

Please help to congratulate the following clubs:

- The Rotary Club of SWFL District 6960 is still the largest club in the district with a growth of 112 new members
- The Rotary Club of Babcock Ranch is up plus 14
- The Rotary Club of Manatee River is plus 13 new members
- The Rotary Club of Lehigh Acres is plus 9
- The Rotary Club of Wellen Park is plus 9
- The Rotary Clubs of Bonita Springs is plus 8
- The Rotary Club of Lakewood Ranch is plus 8
- The Rotary Club of Punta Gorda plus 7

Rotary Club of Babcock Ranch Helps Launch Sharps Disposal at Fire Station 9

Residents of Babcock Ranch now have a convenient new option for safely disposing of used sharps, thanks to a collaborative effort between Charlotte County Fire & EMS and the Rotary Club of Babcock Ranch. Charlotte County Fire & EMS has announced that Fire Station 9 in Babcock Ranch (17785 Curry Preserve Drive) is now accepting sharps for safe disposal. At this time, it is the only fire station in Charlotte County offering this service.

The project highlights how local Rotary clubs can work with public safety partners to identify community needs and create practical solutions. Residents can drop off sharps seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., providing a convenient option for those living in southern Charlotte County and the Babcock Ranch area. The program allows residents to safely dispose of used hypodermic needles, helping reduce accidental injuries and environmental hazards.

The effort began when members of the Rotary Club of Babcock Ranch raised the need for a closer sharps disposal option for residents in the rapidly growing Babcock Ranch community. Working together with Charlotte County Fire & EMS, the idea developed into the new disposal location now available at Fire Station 9.

“What began as a community need raised by Rotarians became a collaborative solution that now helps protect residents and first responders alike.” “This is a great example of how community partnerships can improve public safety,” said Acting Fire Chief and Public Safety Director Matthew McElroy. “Providing this service at Fire Station 9 gives residents a safe and accessible way to dispose of sharps responsibly.”



Members of the Rotary Club of Babcock Ranch recently met with firefighters at Station 9 to help highlight the program and encourage community awareness. Pictured with Charlotte County firefighters are Babcock Ranch Rotarians Taylor Sawatzky and Laurie Widmark, who helped support the effort to bring this important service closer to local residents.

How to Use Your Sharps Container

- Do not clip the needle
- Do not recap the needle
- Place the needle directly into the red sharps container
- When the container is full, secure the lid — do not overfill
- Bring the full container to Fire Station 9 (or a listed recycling facility) to receive a free replacement container

This initiative reflects Rotary's ongoing commitment to improving community health, safety, and environmental stewardship in the Babcock Ranch area. Through projects like this, the Rotary Club of Babcock Ranch continues to live out Rotary's motto: Service Above Self.

SWFL Rotary Club Celebrates 1-Year Anniversary with a Day of Impact, Leadership & Celebration

The SWFL Rotary Club proudly marked its first anniversary on Sunday, April 19th with an inspiring and high-energy celebration at Cypress Lodge in Babcock Ranch—a day that truly reflected the club's mission of impact, innovation, and community.

The morning began with a dynamic **Rotary Leadership Express** session led by an outstanding group of District and Club leaders, including District Governor Gerard Sola, District Public Image Chair Alicia Oates, District Trainer Liz Roach, and SWFL Rotary co-founders Mohit Pohani and Priya Ahluwalia, alongside President-Elect Antonio Dominguez.



This interactive session provided members and attending community participants with a deeper understanding of Rotary's core pillars—structure, membership, public image, foundation, and leadership. Through immersive activities and a capstone application exercise, participants explored how these principles can be leveraged to scale impact within their communities and within SWFL Rotary itself.

At the same time, in a parallel session, District Governor Nominee-Designate Sue McConnell and SWFL Interact President Hailey Herren led engaging **"Stations of Impact"** focused on Rotary's Seven Areas of Focus. These hands-on service activities empowered young leaders while reinforcing the values and purpose behind Rotary's global initiatives.

1. Assembled 30 hygiene kits to support those in need
2. Planted 10 mini sunflower plants—spreading joy and sustainability
3. Wrote heartfelt thank-you letters for local businesses and community heroes
4. Reflected on and shared what peace means to them
5. Created a special new mom care kit for Larry from the Babcock maintenance team (a soon-to-be grandpa!)
6. Learned about the importance of clean drinking water and global access
7. Designed beautiful bookmarks to inspire others to read and grow



Following a group photo at the Innovation Tower and a catered lunch, the afternoon transitioned into a joyful celebration of SWFL Rotary's first year. The festivities began with the debut of the club's spirited theme song written by Past District Governor Gary Gunter from Tampa, "Fun, Flexible, For Everyone," setting the tone for a memorable program.

Club President Mohit Pohani reflected on the club's remarkable journey—from its humble beginnings to achieving meaningful local and international impact in just one year. The program also included heartfelt acknowledgments, a preview of future strategic priorities, and the introduction of the incoming leadership team, including the Board, Committee Chairs, and Interact leadership.

A powerful message on teamwork and leadership from President-Elect Antonio Dominguez, updates on upcoming initiatives, and closing remarks from District Governor Gerard Sola brought the celebration to a meaningful close. The energy and enthusiasm throughout the day truly showcased the spirit and momentum of SWFL Rotary.

The club extends its sincere gratitude to community partners and supporters who helped make the event a success, including M'Xuma Tacos - Mexican Grill, Pi Local, Publix, and Starbucks. Appreciation also goes to club members and volunteers who contributed their time, talent, and creativity, as well as the Babcock Ranch Operations team for their invaluable support.

Rotary Club of Fort Myers Raises \$50,000 for Literacy in Uganda

The Rotary Club of Fort Myers is proud to announce it raised \$50,000 to establish a Community Literacy & Skills Development Center in Buzibwera, Uganda. We are working with two organizations in Uganda who have an established presence, "10 18 Uganda" and "Touch the Slum".

The Center will include our Rotary logo and provide the following services:

1. Offer free literacy classes for young people who have never attended school or dropped out early.
2. Provide a safe and supportive learning environment to bridge the literacy gap.
3. Offer practical skills training and vocational opportunities to empower youth with income-generating abilities.
4. Create a lending library

Mark Vincent, who served as the Chair for this project, partnered with Bill de Deugd to include creating a means for all members of The Rotary Club of Fort Myers to achieve Paul Harris Fellow status, making the club once again a 100% PHF Club, for the second time in its history.

We are grateful to all members of our Club for their generous support.

Gary Dworkin Retires from District 6960 Wheelchair Foundation Committee

In July 2008 District 6960 designated The Wheelchair Foundation as one of their District committees. Since that time the District has raised over \$1.4 million dollars to provide 14,400 wheelchairs to the Bahamas, The Caribbean and Central America. Not only have these wheelchairs provided much needed mobility to the individuals, but also positively impacted the lives of their family members.

Gary was appointed to the District Wheelchair Committee by Neil Snyder in May of 2022. He has served diligently as Co-Chair of the committee since that time with fellow Co-Chair Jim Fabry. Both Gary and Jim are from the Bonita Naples Rotary club. He retired from the District Committee effective April 2026.

Bonita Springs Rotary Club member, Chris Riesen has agreed to take Gary's position as Co-Chair. Thank you Chris.

District 6960 and The Wheelchair Foundation thank Gary and his wife Lin, for all they have done for individuals in need locally and internationally. "Service above self"



SWFL Interact Club: Service, Smiles & Impact in Action! 🌟

The SWFL Interact Club brought energy, compassion, and purpose to life during a powerful day of service at Cypress Lodge in Babcock Ranch. Centered around Rotary's Seven Areas of Focus, students participated in immersive, hands-on activities that made a meaningful impact both locally and globally.

From the moment the session began, the room was filled with enthusiasm, creativity, and a genuine desire to give back. These young leaders demonstrated that service is not just an activity—it's a mindset.

🌟 Here's what they accomplished:

1. Assembled 30 hygiene kits to support those in need
2. Planted 10 mini sunflower plants—spreading joy and sustainability
3. Wrote heartfelt thank-you letters for local businesses and community heroes
4. Reflected on and shared what peace means to them
5. Created a special new mom care kit for Larry from the Babcock maintenance team (a soon-to-be grandpa!)
6. Learned about the importance of clean drinking water and global access
7. Designed beautiful bookmarks to inspire others to read and grow



This impactful experience was led by District Governor Nominee-Designate Sue McConnell, alongside outstanding youth leadership from Interact President Hailey Herren and Vice President Julia Della Porta. Their guidance and passion created an environment where service and leadership truly came alive.

Moments like these are a powerful reminder that the future of Rotary—and our communities—is in great hands. The SWFL Interact students exemplified what it means to lead with heart, take initiative, and create positive change.

Service isn't just something they do—it's something they live. And the future is incredibly bright.

A Century of Service for the Rotary Club of Sarasota

from the Herald-Tribune

For 100 years, the Rotary Club of Sarasota has quietly helped shape the fabric of our community. That's a remarkable statement when you consider what a century of Rotary's motto, 'Service Above Self,' actually represents.

One hundred years of meetings, fundraising efforts, community partnerships and individual hours given freely – all invested in the idea that leadership should first and foremost be about service. [READ MORE.](#)

Jacaranda EcoPark microforest

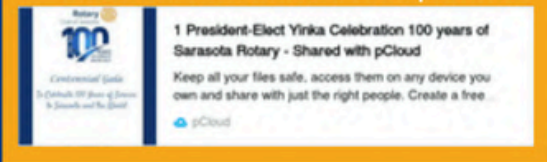
Awaiting arrival
International President-Elect Yinka Babalola



Maria Kaszewski
Association Project Manager

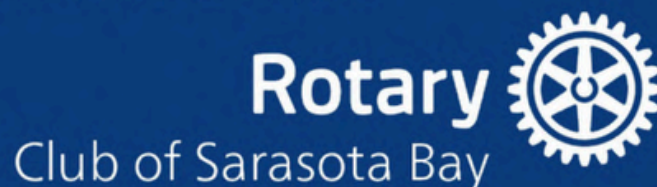
Charles Reith
Project Chair

Link to Presidential visit photos



"Change is only the beginning. Impact is what endures." — Olayinka (Yinka) Babalola, RI President-Elect 2026–27

The Jacaranda EcoPark microforest — championed by Charles Reith, Ph.D. of the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay — is the Suncoast's most ambitious urban reforestation project. The project is supported by the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay and by Sarasota Sunrise Rotary, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Cherrylake Growers, and two Interact clubs. It has grown from a single planting day in December 2023 into a 100-year forest taking root today. Visit the park: Jacaranda Blvd, ~1/3 mile south of Center Street, Venice, FL.



Jacaranda EcoPark microforest

A LANDMARK VISIT & Tree Planting

See Rotary in Action • April 11, 2026



President-Elect Charles Reith
Yinka Babalola



President-Elect Yinka Babalola
Precy Babalola



On April 11, 2026, Rotary International President-Elect Yinka Babalola visited the Jacaranda EcoPark microforest in Venice — seeing firsthand how the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay transformed a weedy lot into a thriving native microforest. Using the Miyawaki method, this living ecosystem features 400+ Bald Cypress trees, three distinct microforests, and trails open to the public. It combats red tide, filters stormwater, sequesters carbon, and educates youth — creating exactly the lasting impact Babalola envisions for Rotary's 2026-27 theme.

Rotary 
Club of Sarasota Bay

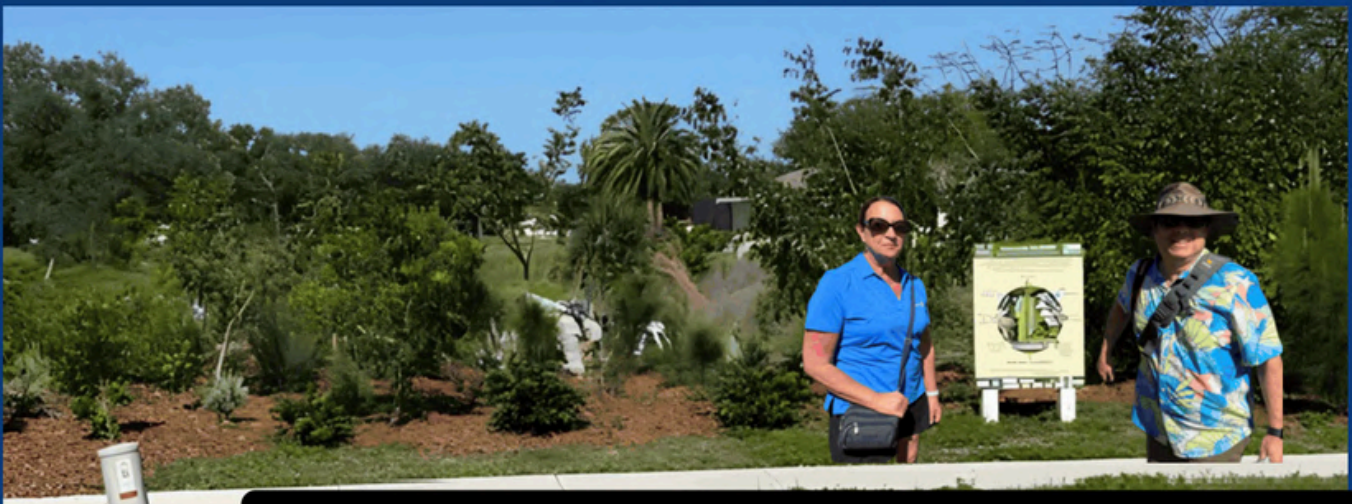
Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay • District 6960

Jacaranda EcoPark microforest

District Governor-Elect Dennis Wallace with RI President-Elect



I/r Rich Sisscors FL Ventrans for Common Sense, Janalee & Al Heinemann RCSB, Chalres Reith RCSB (Project Chair), Tim Ramage RCSB (District Envionmental Chair), Members of the Riverview High School Interact club



Sarasota Bay President Carol Mitchell and club Photgraher Bill Suliivan

Rotary Club of Venice Suncoast Honors Hometown Heroes at Annual Banquet

On May 25, The Rotary Club of Naples awarded Naples civic leader, Gary Price, with a Paul Harris Fellowship. While Gary has never been a Rotarian, he is aware of how important Rotary clubs are to the City of Naples. That understanding—and his deep commitment to community—was on full display earlier this year when Naples faced the unexpected cancellation of its beloved St. Patrick's Day parade.

The parade, a long-standing tradition that draws tens of thousands of residents and visitors each year, was abruptly called off after new safety requirements significantly increased the cost of necessary security barricades. With expenses rising beyond what organizers could absorb—and without public funding available—the future of the event appeared uncertain.

That's when Gary Price stepped in.

Motivated by both civic pride and a personal connection to the parade, Gary quickly mobilized a small group of local donors. Within hours, he secured the funding needed to cover the additional costs—raising more than \$40,000 and allowing the parade to move forward as planned. His swift action transformed what had been a disappointing cancellation into a powerful example of community collaboration.

For Gary, the effort carried special meaning. The parade had long been a favorite event of his late son, Garrett, who participated in and cherished the celebration for many years. Helping to restore the event became a way to honor his son's memory while giving back to a community they both loved.

Beyond the festivities, the parade also serves a greater purpose—supporting local students and charitable initiatives. By ensuring its continuation, Gary helped preserve not only a cherished tradition, but also an important source of community support.



The Rotary Club of Naples' decision to recognize Gary Price with a Paul Harris Fellowship reflects the very spirit of Rotary: "Service Above Self." His actions demonstrate how one individual, guided by generosity and determination, can make a lasting impact.

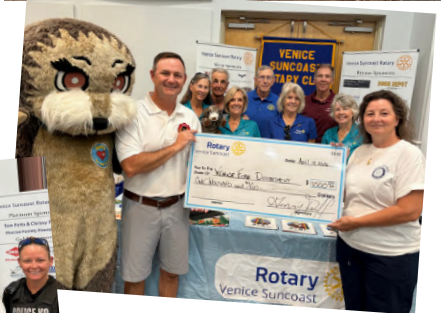
Gary's story is a reminder that leadership is not defined by titles or affiliations, but by a willingness to step forward when it matters most. In doing so, he exemplified the values Rotarians strive to uphold—and showed how strong communities are built through service, compassion, and decisive action.

Rotary Club of Venice Suncoast Honors Hometown Heroes at Annual Banquet

The 5th Annual Venice Fire & Police Public Safety Day was held Saturday, April 18, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Venice Community Center. This free, family-friendly event features emergency vehicles, live demonstrations, free food (hot dogs, popcorn, cotton candy), kids' activities, and safety info.

Event Highlights:

- Vehicles & Exhibits: Fire trucks, police vehicles, a crime scene van, and other, big trucks for kids to explore.
- Demonstrations: Live demonstrations (extrication and search-and-rescue) will occur every half hour.
- Family Activities: Face painting, balloon twisting, photo ID cards for children, and games.
- Food & Fun: Free snacks and food available.
- Venice Suncoast Rotary participated in this event by distributing "Josh the Otter" books, coloring books, crayons and stickers. This adorable baby otter promotes water safety and was a big hit with the children, parents and grandparents who attended.
- It was a great opportunity for community members to meet local police officers, firefighters, and EMS personnel, and learn more about Rotary's contributions, not just locally, but globally!



Each year we use proceeds from our Hometown Heroes Banquet to help fund their various community programs. Along with our club and Josh the Otter are Fire Chief Frank Giddens and Police Chief Andy Leisenring. Rotary giving back to the community makes Venice great!

Calling Club Presidents: Nominate an Outstanding Rotarian



Every Rotary club has exceptional Rotarians—now let's honor them. Club presidents are encouraged to nominate outstanding members in Club, Vocational, Community, International, and Youth Service for recognition at the June 27 celebration. Submit by May 15: https://rotary.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4V0rQ6ijj6qu9pj

Questions? rotarymccconnell@gmail.com | 808-430-7733

Rotary Club of Bonita Naples A Month Packed with Service, Safety, and New Leadership



There is lots going on every week at the Bonita Naples Rotary Club, including exciting speakers and the Tuesday Food Packing sessions to benefit Cafe of Life's community outreach program. Additionally, a total of 4 Josh the Baby Otter Water Safety sessions are being held at the Fun Time Early Childhood Academy in Naples, and the middle school Interact Club at the Bonita Springs Charter School packed food for the Bonita Springs Assistance Office. But one of the highlights of the month of May will be the new officer induction. Thank you to current officers and welcome new officers. Thank you for your service.

Experience Sarasota Like a Local — The Sarasota DGE Homestay Program Returns January 15–22, 2027



For 51 years, the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay (District 6960) has been opening its homes and hearts to Rotary District Governors-Elect and their partners from around the world. What began in 1976 as a warm welcome to DGEs attending the Rotary International Assembly has grown into one of Rotary's most cherished traditions — a week of fellowship, cultural exchange, and lifelong friendships set against the beautiful backdrop of Florida's Gulf Coast. This exclusive program is designed for international DGEs traveling from districts outside the United States, and is a perfect way to extend your stay after the Rotary International Assembly in Orlando.

From January 15–22, 2027, an intimate group of 15–20 international participants will be hosted in the homes of Sarasota-area Rotarians, who generously provide accommodations, many meals, and local transportation throughout the week. A typical week blends Rotary and leisure: club meetings and project visits with Sarasota Bay area clubs, a hands-on service activity, cultural outings to downtown Sarasota, St. Armands Circle, local museums, and the world-famous Gulf beaches, plus fellowship dinners with host families and plenty of free time to relax and explore. The smaller group size — down from as many as 80 in the program's early years — means deeper personal connections and a true "home away from home" experience before your service year begins.

If you're a DGE or partner who values international understanding, meaningful fellowship, and sharing ideas about Rotary service, we'd love to welcome you to Sarasota. Applications are opening soon — stay tuned for details, and come discover why, for more than five decades, DGEs from every continent have left Sarasota with renewed passion for Rotary and friendships that last well beyond their term as governor.

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\$150 PER PLAYER \$560 FOURSOME

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE!

August
28th, 2026

All funds raised from the tournament will go directly toward supporting our club's ongoing efforts to make a positive difference in the community and assist local charities that rely on these contributions. Your participation helps provide vital resources, support important programs, and strengthen the organizations that serve those in need right here in our area.

Scan To Register



7:00 AM - Registration, Breakfast, Range
8:00 AM - Shotgun Start
12:30 PM - Lunch, Awards, Raffles



For more information and sponsorship opportunities, contact Anthony LaPorta at rotaryclubatwellenpark@gmail.com