

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



ROTARY YOUTH EXCHANGE — one of the many programs for youths and young adults that we celebrate this month — was my path into true engagement in Rotary. My wife, Susanne, and I began hosting exchange students soon after I joined, and the experience helped me go from simply being a member of my Rotary club to being a true Rotarian. Now Rotary Youth Exchange is a family tradition, and a strong one: Over the past 24 years, we have hosted 43 students!

From the start, we loved it so much that, in addition to hosting students in our home, we became involved with the program by helping to organize student summer camps. During one such camp, I met Christine Lichtin, who was a German high school student at the time and whose father is a past president of my Rotary club. To try something new during this year of embracing change, I am turning this space, normally reserved for the president of Rotary, over to Christine so she can share her story.

My first contact with Rotaract was about 13 years ago, when I was with Susanne and Holger at a barbecue for the summer youth camp. Holger turned to me and said: "Why don't you visit a Rotaract club? You'll meet a lot of great young people who come together to have fun and to make a difference."

A few years later, when I was at Trier University, his words came back to me and I decided to give it a try. That was more than eight years ago, and I'm still at it. Once you are in Rotaract, you just don't want to get out. Rotaract has accompanied me everywhere, starting with the Trier club and then on to a club in Bologna, Italy, during the year I studied there. When I was in Kiel for my master's

degree, I got involved with Rotaract there before landing at the Rotaract Club of Hamburg-Alstertal as I began my career. Each of those clubs has its own identity and focus, but all have the same intrinsic motivation.

I am now taking on a senior advisory role in my Rotaract club, which I really enjoy. I carry Rotaract in my heart, and it shapes my values, even as my interests evolve. One day, as if she had sensed this evolution, Susanne knocked on my door, wanting to introduce me to a young, modern Rotary club located between Hamburg and Mölln, my hometown. The E-Club of Hamburg-Connect, which Susanne helped charter, holds e-meetings, all of them very relaxed and personal. With members of different ages, everything just seemed to fit, so I thought, why not try it out? After all, time is precious and should be filled with fun whenever possible; the rest happens by itself.

Now I am in both worlds — a proud member of Rotaract and a Rotarian. And my small personal goal is to build a bridge between these two parallel worlds. All of us have very similar reasons for being part of the Rotary family.

It took some persistence to persuade Christine to become a member of Rotary, but it was well worth the effort. It is our duty to put in this kind of effort with youth program participants and Rotaractors so we can keep them in the family of Rotary. I hope you were inspired by her story. It's up to each of us to ensure that more young people like Christine can experience the many ways *Rotary Opens Opportunities* for us and for the people we serve.

HOLGER KNAACK

President, Rotary International



Christine Lichtin
Rotaract Club of Hamburg-Alstertal, Rotary E-Club of Hamburg-Connect