

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**I**N JANUARY 2020, when I announced my presidential theme, *Rotary Opens Opportunities*, and spoke of the changes that Rotary needed to embrace, none of us had any idea how quickly change would arrive. But I am a longtime believer in seeing challenges as opportunities. This year, we seized new opportunities to reimagine what Rotary could be. For years, we had discussed ways to make Rotary flexible and adaptable, and we had tried a few experiments. This year, we all experimented — and succeeded! Online meetings are a regular fixture now as clubs invite guests from across the globe.

Susanne and I love to meet members of the family of Rotary around the world, and we've missed seeing you in person over the past year. But for me, it was a new way of experiencing Rotary. We traveled the world virtually. I definitely met thousands more of you than I would have otherwise. I never set foot in my office in Evanston as president, yet we found new ways to get the job done while cutting travel costs.

This is the Rotary we experienced in 2020-21: nimble, adaptable, and creative. The next step is not to go back to the way things were before the pandemic. We must move forward. Let's apply what we have learned in order to offer new experiences and opportunities for our members, such as online attendance as a regular option.

We need a younger, more diverse Rotary at every level to keep our clubs strong. What diversity means is different from region to region, but I encourage you to welcome people from all backgrounds. Another step we can all take is to increase the number of women and amplify their role everywhere.

I am glad that many now see Rotary and Rotaract clubs as equals. Let's keep going in this direction by

inviting Rotaract clubs to be a part of everything we do. Let's not squander any opportunity to reach young leaders, but partner with Rotaract and invest in our many new approaches.

I am very proud of the work Rotary is doing to fight COVID-19 by supporting vaccination campaigns through advocating for fair distribution and combating misinformation. But we must also continue to do everything we can to end polio. And we now have opportunities to work in a new area of focus: the environment.

The world is a different place today from when I first announced that *Rotary Opens Opportunities*. We can all be proud of how we updated what Rotary can be this year. Let's continue on this path, always taking care of our clubs and of our friends in those clubs. They are precious, and they keep Rotary alive and thriving.

Susanne and I are thankful for all the opportunities to serve the organization during this special year, a year of finding new meaning in Service Above Self. We see Rotary as a community of people who live their values by putting them into action. In these extraordinary times, there is no doubt that we must place increased emphasis on service. This is our opportunity to show the world what Service Above Self means for Rotarians.

There are so many opportunities waiting for us that will help us change the world. Let's seize them together and get ready to open doors to achieving greater things. And as we open these doors to new ideas, our minds and our hearts also open. Remember that everything we do in Rotary opens another opportunity for someone, somewhere.

**HOLGER KNAACK**

President, Rotary International