



# THE ROTARY CLUB OF SARASOTA

Established 1926. Membership by invitation only.

[www.rotaryclubofsarasota.com](http://www.rotaryclubofsarasota.com)

## Bucking the Downward Trend

*David Pilston, Membership Committee Chair*

*June 28, 2013*

*(Jim Henry Note - The Rotary Club of Sarasota started this Rotary year with seventy-six (76) members. It has inducted eleven (11) new members and lost two, both for health reasons. The club has seven (7) in its membership pipeline. The club's Board of Directors has set a goal to reach one hundred (100) and, due to space limitations, sustain a waiting list.)*

Many Rotarians from other Clubs have wondered how the Rotary Club of Sarasota has continued to grow while their Clubs decline in numbers. This trend has not been accidental. We have a very active Membership Committee, including past Chair Tom Zahn, Jayne Cory, Sue Leavis, and Charlotte Ryan. Moreover, over the past year and a half, our Club has made a conscious effort to become more member-centric, with better structure and improved communications. The theory is: a great Club naturally attracts great members. To make our Club as attractive as possible to new and current members, we have pursued the following path.

### **Step 1 – Listen**

In late 2011, we paraphrased Socrates by asking if an unexamined club is really worth joining. We sought to answer that rhetorical question by holding a series of over 15 informal Member Roundtables in early 2012. These Roundtables gathered direct feedback from 80% of our members and generated many great suggestions, many of which have since been implemented. The most sweeping suggestions involved increasing the activities of the Club and improving communications about those activities, both internally and externally.

### **Step 2 – Organize**

In order to increase the breadth of activities offered to our members, we formalized our Committee structure and encouraged our Committees to meet regularly and become more active. Each major committee is now headed by a Board member, the committees meet regularly, and their activities are reported to the Board and to the Club.

### **Step 3 – Communicate**

Once we had restructured and re-energized our Committees, we strove to improve our communications to ensure that current and new members would be aware of all of the wonderful Club activities that are available to them. We see the results of those improved communications informally every week and more formally through our Club Assemblies and this new monthly newsletter. This enhanced communication has increased every member's awareness of what is going on in our Club, enabled new members to integrate more quickly, and ensured that every member is as involved as he or she wishes to be.

### **Step 4 – Select**

With our new structure and improved communications in place, we then re-examined our process for attracting new members. Note that we do not use the word "recruit." We believe that a great and active Club naturally attracts great and active new members. With that in mind, we have become more selective in choosing new members. We take great pains to "qualify" prospective

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new members to ensure that they have a full understanding of Rotary, what they can and cannot expect of us, and what we will expect of them. Only then do we propose them for membership. Several prospective new members have dropped out of the process once they realized that they would be unable to fulfill the responsibilities expected of an active Rotarian. That is preferable to inducting a new member only to lose him or her after a few months because of poorly managed expectations. By being more selective - without being elitist - we believe we will ultimately improve retention.

## Step 5 – Engage

Once proper expectations have been set, the key to retention is engagement. Some new members are pro-active and seek out opportunities to get involved in the Club's activities, even before they are formally inducted. Many are not. That's human nature. It is our responsibility as current members to reach out to ALL new members and ensure that they are engaged in our activities as much as they wish to be, and that their overall expectations are being met. If we offer a broad range of activities to new members and they choose not to participate, then they are failing as Rotarians. But if we do not offer that broad range of activities to our members, then we are failing as a Club.

Most Rotary Clubs can count on losing at least 7% of their membership every year, due to personal issues, financial issues, health issues, relocations, etc. That means that a Club must attract at least that many new members just to remain stable. Many Clubs lose even more members because, for one reason or another, Rotary simply has not met their needs. If Clubs set initial expectations correctly, maintain an active and organized Club, and engage members through regular communication, they can minimize the number of members who leave due to disenchantment with Rotary.

## ROTARY CLUB ESSENTIALS:

|                       |                                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| A Club's Customers    | Present and Future Members      |
| Rotary's Only Purpose | To Advance the Object of Rotary |
| Rotary Motto          | Service above Self              |
| Rotary Creed          | The Four Way Test               |

**Retention Central** <http://zone34retentioncentral.blogspot.com/>

### Rotary's Circle of Life

<http://zone34retentioncentral.blogspot.com/2013/04/rotarys-circle-of-life.html>

### The Object of Rotary and Networking go Hand In Hand

<http://zone34retentioncentral.blogspot.com/2013/04/the-object-of-rotary-networking-go-hand.html>

**David Pilston** can be contacted by visiting the Rotary Club of Sarasota website [www.rotaryclubofsarasota.com](http://www.rotaryclubofsarasota.com) and selecting Contact Us.

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When emailing either, please put "Rotary Membership" in the topic/subject line.

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