

NEIGHBORHOOD

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2023 | journalstar.com | SECTION D

EXTRA

Rotarians celebrate community service



COURTESY PHOTOS BY JESS KINSER

During the Rotary District 5650 annual convention, Dr. Sylvia Whitlock of California was given a standing ovation for being the first woman to join Rotary.

Nearly 300 Rotary members from the 38 clubs across eastern Nebraska and western Iowa turned the spotlight on their communities as they gathered for the annual Rotary District 5650 Convention April 1.

Members from each club in the district selected someone in their community who was not part of Rotary to recognize for their service to the citizens of the city. The recognition culminated in a dinner celebration at the Nebraska Innovation Campus Conference Center.

“I wanted our clubs to look beyond their walls for examples of service to their communities,” said District Governor Barbara Bartle. “Rotary’s motto is service above self, and this new award for our district, the Golden Wheel, was designed to exemplify not only that motto, but to highlight all that Rotary does around the world by helping education, women and children, community development, our environment and so much more.”

Award recipients ranged from a young teen from Red Oak, Iowa, who has raised thousands of dollars for the local food pantry, to a senior citizen in Fillmore County, Nebraska, who has opened her arms to those experiencing the loss of a loved one.

As members from across the two states gathered in Lincoln for the banquet, one by one the 38 recipients walked in and received a Golden Wheel medallion from Bartle. Those medallions, designed and produced by

TMCO in Lincoln, were given to a former Marine from Iowa who is reaching out to help fellow veterans as they return home, and to a guy who manages a giant pumpkin patch for a festival in Crete. Also among the honorees were an Omaha woman who volunteers to help incarcerated people return to society and a Lincoln woman who provides a caring Christmas celebration for families impacted by cancer.

As each recipient was introduced, you could hear chatter from the Rotarians who had nominated them. Once all 38 recipients had been recognized, the room erupted in thunderous applause as the recipients stood at their tables to receive one final recognition. Their profiles are all shared online by the Lincoln Journal Star, one of the corporate sponsors of the event.

The convention, an annual event for the nearly 2,000 Rotary club members in District 5650 from across the region, included a number of other special events and guests. The morning focused on the work Rotary does with and for youth. Current and former participants in the Rotary Youth Exchange shared their experiences. Each year, high school students from across the district are selected to travel to another country and spend a year attending school, and as they do, they are hosted by Rotarians. In exchange, youth from districts in those countries come to Nebraska and Iowa to spend a year. It's a life-changing experience.

Rotary International also sponsors an Ambassadorial Scholar program for college-age students. Dr. Brady Beecham, a physician originally from Lincoln who now works in Lexington, shared her experiences both as a youth exchange participant in Spain and later as an Ambassadorial Scholar in India.

The noon luncheon featured two very special people. Robert Simmons, a member of Rotary in Glenwood, Iowa, was presented with the district's Cadwallader Award. Simmons has been very active in his club and served clubs throughout the district in a variety of ways. The Cadwallader Award is named for Charles Cadwallader, who served as president of Lincoln Club 14, as district governor and as a director of Rotary International in the 1930s.

Also during the noon celebration, the very first woman to become a member of a Rotary club, Dr. Sylvia Whitlock of California, shared her experience not only as a person who changed the face of Rotary, but as someone who has helped Rotary build schools in poverty-stricken areas of other countries.

Two afternoon panel discussions focused on community involvement and the impact that can result. Jessie Rasmussen of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Thomas Judds from the Lincoln Housing Authority and Tony Goins, director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, each shared how Rotarians could get involved in their communities to make a positive impact. That was followed by discussion of examples of involvement by Roger McQueen, mayor, and Greg Connell, director of Economic Development,



Dr. Mike Wortman, former Principal of Lincoln High School, honors Dr. Brady Beecham of Lexington for her work with the Latino population in Lexington, Nebraska. As a Lincoln High student, Beecham participated in a Rotary Youth Exchange program in Spain, and then as a college student she was a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar in India.

both of Shenandoah, Iowa; as well as Randy Bretz, representing Rotary 14 on the task force to develop a convention center for Lincoln.



Nebraska National Guard Adjutant General Daryl Bohac (left) presents a certificate of appreciation to Steve Glenn of Executive Travel. Glenn was given the District 5650 Humanitarian Award for establishing Operation Safe Harbor, a place for Ukrainian refugees to stay in Poland.

The evening celebration culminated by recognizing Steve Glenn, a member of Lincoln's Rotary 14, for his extraordinary effort to help Ukrainian refugees as they fled the invasion of their country. Hardly a dry eye could be found in the audience as Glenn stepped to the podium to receive the Rotary District 5650 Distinguished Humanitarian Award from Past District Governor Carol Horner of Council Bluffs, and recognition including a certificate from Nebraska National Guard Adjutant General Daryl Bohac.

Glenn, through the resources of his Executive Travel company, his personal financial support and over \$1 million

donated, rented rooms in a hotel in Warsaw, Poland, for nearly a year and gave free housing to Ukrainian women and children who left their homes and families behind as they fled. Many Rotary members and others from the area traveled to Poland to offer a warm welcome to the refugees. It was a touching conclusion to the conference, which focused on the theme of "Peace – Love – and Understanding."

To see the complete list of Golden Wheel recipients, go to <https://bit.ly/40VKIz9>.