

DEAR FELLOW ROTARIANS,

**F**orty years ago, the Rotary Club of Duarte, Calif., admitted three women members, in violation of the Rotary International Constitution. As a result, the club's charter was terminated by RI.

Undeterred, the club's members continued to meet. They put an X over their Rotary insignia, made themselves new pins, and dubbed themselves the Ex-Rotary Club of Duarte as they continued to fight for the right of women to serve as Rotarians. Ten years later, a restored Rotary Club of Duarte sent Sylvia Whitlock, Rotary's first female club president, to a presidents-elect training seminar. Not long after that, in 1989, Rotary's Council on Legislation permanently ended Rotary's status as a men-only organization.

Today, with more than 240,000 women in our clubs, Rotary is stronger than ever. We are women and men from nearly every country of the world, serving our communities in more than 35,000 clubs. At the club level, we need men and women of all backgrounds, ages, cultures, and professions; internationally, we need clubs in every city, country, and region of the world. The better our clubs reflect their communities, the better we can serve them. Our diversity is our strength.

It is difficult for most of us to imagine today why anyone argued so strongly against the idea of women in Rotary. Looking back, I think that opposition came from a simple resistance to change. Rotarians loved Rotary the way it was and couldn't imagine it any other way.

We still love Rotary as much as we ever did. We love the friendships and connections we make there, and the ability Rotary provides us to serve humanity. We believe Rotary has tremendous value in our own lives and in the world at large. And we recognize, more than ever, that for Rotary to continue to grow, it needs to embrace the world it serves – in all of its diversity, all of its variety, and all of its evolving needs for service.

The Rotarians of today owe a debt of gratitude to the Rotarians of Duarte 40 years ago. Their determination, persistence, and enduring goodwill set the stage for the organization we have become: *Rotary Serving Humanity*.



**JOHN F. GERM**  
President, Rotary International



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