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Service still makes Rotary turn

With its social media reaching thousands every week, "This is not your grandfather's Rotary Club"

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COVER STORY

'Not your grandfather's Rotary'

Local chapter embraces change, social media

By Val Prevish

Enquirer contributor

When Linda Muth became executive director of the Rotary Club of Cincinnati 18 months ago, the organization didn't have a Facebook page.

Today, its page is one of the most active of any Rotary in the country, Muth says. Social media messages reach more than 10,000 people every week.

"We've made a lot of changes," Muth, 49, says. "This is not your grandfather's Rotary Club anymore."

Formed more than 100 years ago as an all-male business group, the Rotary has admitted women for 25 years. About one-third of the local group's 300 members today are women, and the club actively recruits young professionals.

The one thing that hasn't changed is the Rotary's commitment to service, especially helping handicapped and disadvantaged children grow and succeed.

More than 350 people attended the Rotary's recent Believe 2 Achieve event that raised more than \$91,000 for Camp Allyn in Batavia Township, the Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati and the Autism Society of Greater Cincinnati.

"We have always been committed to helping handicapped children and that mission hasn't changed," Muth says. "We are doing things every month to meet that mission."



Cincinnati's Rotary Club raised more than \$91,000 at a recent event. In attendance: Levi Isaacs, from left, Becca Williams, Linda Muth and Caroline Muth. PROVIDED

The local Rotary is known as Club 17 – so named because it was the 17th Rotary in the U.S. when three businessmen founded it in 1910. Since 1921, the Rotary has leased Camp Allyn, which it owns, to Stepping Stones Center for Handicapped.

The local Rotary also was instrumental in forming the Condon School, originally a school for children with disabilities and now a Cincinnati public school. More recently, the group raised funds to build Everybody's Tree House in Mount Airy Forest, the first universally accessible tree house in Ohio.

Muth was named executive director in February 2012. Prior to joining Rotary, she owned her own training company, Muth Consulting, which

specialized in developing and delivering computer courses in Internet and graphic design.

She also was a consultant with software company Siebel Systems and has more than 10 years of experience in the banking industry. She has a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Cincinnati.

Rotary women, she says, are "extremely active." The club recently elected a female president, Susan Wilkinson, and a female president of the Rotary Foundation, Debora Caley.

Maria Ledwin, 33, a human resources director at HGC Construction in Walnut Hills, says she joined the group three years ago at the urging of her boss.

"I had heard of it at the time, but I

WHAT DOES ROTARY DO?

The 34,000 Rotary chapters around the world have raised more than \$1.2 billion since 1988 to help end the spread of the polio virus, and the organization is widely credited with helping to eradicate the disease. Locally, the group of business, professional and community leaders has supported charities for handicapped and disadvantaged children since its founding in 1910.

» **Membership:** More than 300, about one-third women. Technically membership is by invitation only, but those interested are encouraged to contact Rotary, and invitation details can be arranged.

» **Costs:** Vary, available for corporate and individual members, as well as young professionals age 30-39.

» **More details:** Go to cincinnatirotary.org or call 513-421-1080.

» **About the name:** "Rotary" derives from the club's early days, when meetings rotated among businessmen's offices.

frankly thought it was a group for older men," she says with a laugh. "I did a little research, and I went to some meetings. ... It was much more than I thought it would be."

Ledwin especially enjoys the hands-on volunteer work. "No one's in it just for the networking," she says. "They are truly interested in helping others." ■