

Making a Difference with the Rotary Club of Whittier

BY GINNY CHUNG-FERREL, WORDS WITH JEFF NICKELL AND SIERRA ROBERTS

NONPROFIT:

Rotary Club of Whittier, California

How long has this organization been part of the community? The Rotary Club of Whittier began in 1922 when local professionals and business owners decided to unite their skills to serve the community. For over 100 years, we have been a pillar of the Whittier community, with our membership even including President Richard Nixon as an honorary member starting in 1948. Our club has prided itself as a place where local leaders can come together to solve problems, foster friendships, and give back.

What does the organization provide for the community? We provide much-needed services, including financial support to local nonprofits, hands-on volunteer labor, academic scholarships, and leadership training for high school students. Our operational goals include promoting basic education and literacy, providing resources to underserved youth, supporting wellness programs, and driving community economic development.

What makes being a part of this organization fun? Our Friday lunch meetings involve shared meals, guest speakers, and plenty of humor. Our work time is never rigid; it's powered by fellowship and shared passion of creating positive change. Being part of the club also makes us members of Rotary International, a fellowship of 1.2 million Rotarians across six continents. Members can visit clubs worldwide and be welcomed into local fellowship.



How did you become involved in this organization? I [Jeff] was invited to a meeting by a friend and business associate back in 2006. I was drawn by a desire to look beyond my daily business obligations and find a real tangible way to give back. Many of my best long-term relationships have come through Rotary. I [Sierra] participated in the Rotary Youth Exchange as a high school junior exchange student in Colombia. Thanks to Rotary, I can speak fluent Spanish, love to travel and dance salsa, and have met some of my closest friends. This life-changing experience led me back after college graduation. I joined to connect more deeply with the community.

Are any of your neighbors involved? One of the great things about the club is that we're all essentially neighbors! We love running into fellow Rotarians while walking around Uptown. Each member brings their own skill and background, which is essential for successful problem-solving. For example, Owen Newcomer (former mayor of Whittier) brings his political expertise while Monica Peters (incoming Rotary District 5320 Governor) brings her expertise as a general contractor.

Do you have any interesting stories or fun facts to share? Our club has installed several pollinator gardens in our local schools. One of my [Jeff] favorite memories is working with the students to pull weeds, prepare the soil, and locate the plants. Another fun fact is that we sponsored a short film about Whittier titled *City of Whittier, The Friendly Town - 1965-1968*, which you can find on the City of Whittier's YouTube channel. It gives a historical look at Whittier and our involvement in the community. One special memory I [Sierra] have is hosting the Student Speech Contest annually. Seeing high schoolers practice the skill of public speaking is truly rewarding.

What are the best 3-5 words you'd use to describe this organization? Service above self. Impactful. Welcoming. Genuine community.

Do you have a special message to share? Our city is only as vibrant as the service we pour back into it. If you've been looking for a place to connect with professionals, create lifelong friendships, and make a real difference in your own backyard, the Rotary Club of Whittier welcomes you with open arms.

How can others take part? Rotary welcomes everyone of all skills! The community can learn more by attending one of our weekly meetings as guest, joining our monthly evening social events, or volunteering with us at public fundraisers and health fairs. We're also hosting "Quartermania!" in November where you can bid with quarters, win prizes, and shop holiday vendors.

Please visit www.whittierrotary.org to more learn more about registration, volunteer opportunities, and special events.





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