By Arnold R. Grahl

*Rotary News*

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When you sit down to enjoy a beer, you probably don't spend a lot of time thinking about one of its main ingredients – water. Or the fact that 3,000 children die each day from diseases caused by unsafe water.

A group of innovative Rotarians aren't just thinking; they're doing something about it.

Their group, Beers Rotarians Enjoy Worldwide (BREW), has organized events around the world and is working to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for Rotary's global water, sanitation, and hygiene efforts.

"By drinking a beer, I can help bring fresh water to a village in Africa," says Steven Lack, a member of the Rotary Club of Pleasant Hill, California, USA. "If you can drink beer and some of the money goes to doing good in the world, that is something you can feel good about."

Fellowships like BREW are Rotary's way of bringing together members who share a particular passion. Rotarian Action Groups unite members who have expertise in a specific service area. The beer fellowship's leaders realized that joining forces with an action group dedicated to providing access to clean water would create a sum larger than the two parts.

"Beer and water have a natural affinity; you need water to brew beer" says Moses Aryee, past president of the Rotary Club of Accra-West, Ghana, and co-chair of the beer fellowship. "Our vision is a global approach to fresh water around the world, because beer is around the world."

The fellowship members are working with the Water and Sanitation Rotarian Action Group to identify specific water projects to support by funneling 25 percent of the fellowship's dues to those projects, says Lack, the fellowship's vice chair.

The members also plan to approach major brewers on each continent to seek financial support for water projects, much as the nonprofit Water.org is receiving $1.2 million from Stella Artois.

These projects have the potential to improve people's quality of life in several ways. Every day, 8,000 people die of waterborne disease. In addition, women in many parts of the world spend hours a day fetching water, time they could spend caring for their families, generating income, or making other contributions to society.

"We are very enthusiastic about the opportunities to work together," says F. Ronald Denham, a past chair of the Water and Sanitation Action Group and a member of the Rotary Club of Toronto Eglinton, in Ontario, Canada. "On our side, we can present and describe the projects. BREW will establish relationships with the breweries. And some of the members are senior executives in breweries. It's a wonderful synergy."

A BLUEPRINT FOR FUNDRAISING

Lack and Aryee founded the beer fellowship in 2014 after reaching the same conclusion at roughly the same time: Beer is fun and promotes fellowship, both of which make Rotary more appealing. And by bringing together people who share an interest in beer, you can unite them for the purpose of doing good.

"We're always talking about making Rotary fun," says Lack. "When people drink beer, they are socializing. It's one of those things that brings us together, that makes us equal."

In addition to working with the action group, the fellowship promotes the idea of good times and service by helping clubs organize beer festivals. These events appeal to younger people, raise money for club projects, and are easy to plan. According to Lack, all you need is to:

• Approach a microbrewery or two to donate beer

• Bring food or secure a food truck

• Line up a band

• Pitch a tent

"Microbrewing has become a huge industry, and this is definitely a way to capitalize on the popularity of that," notes Lack, who emphasizes that these fests aren't about getting drunk. The events typically last only a few hours and distribute small sampling cups that hold only four to six ounces. And standing in line limits the amount of time that people have to drink.

The State of Jefferson Brew Fest in Dunsmuir, California, attracts 1,500 people every August and last year netted $15,000 for club projects, says John Poston, a member of the Dunsmuir Rotary Club. It's been so successful, the club added a home-brew competition and cornhole tournament this year, and plans to expand the event to two days next year. Other growing festivals include the Weed Brew Fest in California and Brew on the Bay in Key Largo, Florida. The beer fellowship promotes a list of brew fests sponsored by Rotary clubs.

GOOD FOR CLUB MORALE

When Lenie Jordan, president of the Rotary Club of Franklin, North Carolina, and part owner of his town's microbrewery, heard about the fellowship, he got 20 members of the club to sign up.

"It has been a point of interest for many of our members, and an opportunity to come together in a more casual environment," says Jordan. "I would attribute at least one new member to the fellowship. She attended one of our field trips and said she wanted to join. It's had a positive effect both on membership, and on general morale."

The fellowship's interest in beer gives members an opportunity to share insights and to learn on an international scale. For instance, members recently heard how the composition of water can determine the type of beer an area is famous for. According to All About Beer magazine, Dublin became known for its darker beers because of its water's high alkaline content. Since yeast doesn't perform as well with high alkalinity, brewers gradually discovered they got better results by roasting the barley, which both lowers the alkaline level and makes a darker beer. Similarly, the soft water in the Czech town of Pilsen made it ideal for the world's first pilsners.

Another useful fact: Beer has historically provided a safe drinking alternative when clean water is in short supply, because of the boiling step in the brewing process.

"We've all been to places where we wouldn't drink the water," says Lack, but where "they make a heck of a beer."

In May, more than 60 members of the fellowship, including beer lovers from Russia, South America, Australia, Japan, India, Europe, Africa, and North America, gathered at the Devil's Door Brew Pub in Seoul during Rotary's annual convention, to sample what was on tap and to socialize. Lack says plans are in the works for a brewery tour every night in Atlanta, Georgia, during Rotary's 2017 convention.

"There are all kinds of microbreweries around the city, some owned by Rotary members," he says. "We're also looking to be able to pour beer in our booth (in the House of Friendship). You lose some credibility as a beer fellowship if you aren't pouring beer."

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