

New high school club seeks peace through service

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Interact group is branch of Rotary

Instead of interacting with friends over lunch in the high school cafeteria, a group of Gothenburg High School students carried trays into the gymnasium.

There, conversation centered around helping others.

Welcome to a meeting of GHS's newest organization—the Interact Club—an international organization of service and social groups for young people.

Last week, the group met in the south gymnasium for the third time to mull over service and fund-raising ideas.

Club secretary Morgan Kowalewski said students or “interactors” (a combination of “international” and “action”) were thinking about a Second Harvest project, where members would collect unused food for soup kitchens from local restaurants, and/or a fund-raiser to help fight polio, which is also a goal of Rotary International.

Kowalewski said she leans toward projects in the community where students help instead of asking for money.



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Two local organizations—the Rotary Club and After-Hours Rotary Club—provide adult guidance and inspiration to the group.

The new club must also have a sponsor from a local Rotary organization.

Dudley Elementary principal and special education director Teresa Messersmith, who is also a member of the After-Hours Rotary Club, advises the Interact Club.

She said she isn't surprised that the club has so far attracted 52 members, grades 9-12.

"I think it's cool how this club is high-school run and organized," Messersmith said.

The idea for forming an Interact Club traveled home from a Rotary Youth Leadership Awards camp in Halsey last summer.

Seniors Maddy Costello and Morgan Kowalewski attended the camp where they heard about such a club and were excited to bring the idea back home.

"Gothenburg is a good community and it's a good school," Kowalewski said.

Costello said she appreciates the support offered by both local Rotary clubs.

To be a member of the local Interact Club, students must submit a form and the club votes on membership—just like adult Rotary groups, Kowalewski said.

Dues are \$10 a year.

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With students involved in so many activities, Kowalewski said time for the club and projects is a big obstacle.

“But I think enough people are committed and know the value to the community that they can prioritize and make a commitment,” she said.

Helping local and global communities is a priority supported by Rotary International’s motto which is peace through service, Kowalewski said.

So far five committees have been organized within the Gothenburg club. They include: community service, membership, public relations, finance and programs.

The first Interact Club was started in 1962 by the Rotary Club of Melbourne, FL.

Today, there are more 7,780 Interact Clubs throughout the world, according to an Internet article.

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