COMMUNITY

KIWANIS HAS ALWAYS FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY. BUT THESE DAYS COMMUNITY CAN
CENTERED

MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. STORY BY JACK BROCKLEY
What is a **Kiwanis community**?

It may be defined by a city’s limits. Or not.
It may be confined to a nation’s boundaries.
But not necessarily.
A neighborhood? Possibly.
A school or a specific cause? Certainly, but not exclusively.

The word *community* has been tied to Kiwanis from its very beginning, and it is the foundation of our future. Our 91-year-old Kiwanis Objects direct us to “provide, through Kiwanis clubs, a practical means … to build better communities.”

Our 10-year-old defining statement says we’re “dedicated to improving the world … one community at a time.” The Kiwanis I-Plan—adopted in 2015—uses the word community repeatedly as it sets Kiwanis’ strategy for a rich second century of service and fellowship.

Some Kiwanis clubs already have identified the communities they serve. Others have even founded communities. The I-Plan calls each club to take an additional step and be the most inspiring, most impactful, most recognizable, most valuable service asset within its chosen community.

Following are examples of four very different Kiwanis communities. What is your Kiwanis club’s community?
CITY LIMITS
Redmond, Oregon

Ask anyone you meet in Redmond, Oregon, about Kiwanis, and you’re certain to get an earful.

They’re the ones who built the swimming pool … the football stadium … Sam Johnson Park … a new roof on the Boys and Girls Club.

At Christmastime, they ring the Salvation Army bell with Key Club members to raise funds for the Salvation Army.

They and other local groups line city streets with about 1,400 flags on national holidays. That’s why Redmond is called “Flag City, USA.” Look it up in the Congressional Record.

There’s a lot more: US$13,000 this past year in scholarships, backpacks to provide weekend meals for children on the schools’ subsidized program, an annual prayer breakfast each May.

Established in 1937, the Kiwanis Club of Redmond has forged its high-profile reputation by developing strategic partnerships. The club works with the Redmond Ministerial Association on several programs to support homeless persons. A fish fair, organized with the fire department, attracts up to 1,000 kids hoping to reel in the largest catch. The sheriff’s department relies on the club for support of its Shop with a Cop project.

This past year, as Kiwanis celebrated its 100th anniversary, the Redmond Kiwanis Club hosted one of the Centennial Tour stops to break ground for a new Landscape Structures playground at Sam Johnson Park. The project fulfilled a dream of a group of mothers who wanted a place where children of all abilities could play.

NEIGHBORHOOD
Orlando, Florida

Much like the Kiwanis Club of Redmond, the Orlando, Florida, Kiwanis Club is a visible agent of service within their city’s 110-square-mile limits—and beyond. But its presence is most notable west of Interstate 4 in neighborhoods such as Washington Shores and Parramore, which record the highest poverty rates in the city.

Orlando Kiwanians have been serving there for nearly 100 years as the benefactor of the Orlando Day Nursery. Founded as a day-care center for mothers widowed by World War I, its first building was a house donated by the Kiwanis club. Now in its fourth location, the nursery’s arrangements remain virtually the same.

“Without Kiwanis, Orlando Day Nursery would not be here,” says Executive Director Mata Malaina Dennis. “They’ve always owned the building, and we pay US$1 a year for rent.”

The relationship has also benefited the club in an unexpected way.

“Every building before the current one has been taken for road-widening projects,” says Steve Johnson, past president of the club’s foundation. “The monies from this last purchase allowed us to buy another property, build a US$1 million building and put the rest in the foundation.”

Those funds were put to good use, generating grants to support more programs for the
nursery, its surrounding neighborhoods and the City of Orlando.

“We try to engage on the macro and micro level,” says club Secretary Robert Bates, “with major grants of US$100,000 or so and mini-grants of a couple thousand.”

A contribution to the Dr. Phillips Arts Centre allows children of low-income families to pursue interests in music, theater and other creative careers. Another grant supported an annual Youth of the Year awards dinner, an important event for the Boys and Girls Club of Central Florida, because it helps the BGC build community relations.

Meanwhile, members are active volunteers. Once a month, they cook dinner at the Ronald McDonald House. Year-round, they help the Orlando Repertory Theatre stage family-focused performances from classic and contemporary children’s literature. Their annual Christmas party treats more than 100 kids to lunch and a visit with Santa.

GLOBAL COMMUNITY
Switzerland-Liechtenstein District
Near or far, Kiwanis clubs serve wherever there is a need. The entire Kiwanis family has supported The Eliminate Project to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus worldwide. The Federal Way, Washington, Kiwanis Club and the Kiwanis International Foundation support the delivery of medical care into the Honduran cloud forest (August 2015 Kiwanis magazine). The Sentinel, Missoula, Montana, Kiwanis Club sends books, desks, chickens and more to a Ugandan orphanage (March 2015 Kiwanis magazine).

From Central Europe, Kiwanians are reaching across borders to help the people of a nation more than 1,000 miles away.

On September 1, 2007, a group of Swiss Kiwanians loaded three 18-wheeler trucks and two school buses with furniture, musical instruments, computers and building materials and drove southeast to Shkodër, Albania, on a mission to upgrade schools.

“Our contacts with Albania go back to around 2001, when Albania started to recover from its socialistic past and depended on every support it could get from the free world,” says Jürg Kreis of the Kiwanis Club of Rheintal, Switzerland.

Parallel to the delivery of donations, Swiss Kiwanians began opening clubs in Albania’s northern districts. Kiwanis fellowship flourished.

The support, the new clubs and the friendships came just in time. Between December 2009 and January 2010, a series of floods in northern Albania left more than 2,500 families homeless. Newly organized Kiwanis clubs were ready and able to organize shelter and food, while their European friends worked with the Kiwanis International Foundation and Kiwanis International-European Federation Foundation to send financial assistance. (Kiwanis Norway and Norwegian Aid sent relief teams and materials too.)

Why do Swiss, Norwegian and Liechtenstein Kiwanians serve the Albanian community?

“Albania does not make big headlines, and not much is known about Albania,” Kreis says. “It is still battling with a poor and slowly developing economy, including high unemployment, especially among its young people.”
A WORTHY CAUSE
Malaysia District

Communities are not always defined by geographic boundaries. Many Kiwanis clubs, through their involvement with Service Leadership Programs, have established their reputations in local education communities. In Canada, Kiwanis is recognized in the music and senior-care communities.

In seven Malaysian cities, the Kiwanis name is firmly attached to the Down syndrome community.

Prior to the opening of the first Kiwanis Down syndrome center in 1989, there were no organizations to assist children who have Down syndrome. Often, parents retreated from society and tried to raise their children on their own.

For the past 26 years, the Kiwanis Down Syndrome Foundation has built a network of families, doctors, educators, universities and supporters: a Down syndrome community.

“Once we knew our son was a DS child, the doctor told us, ‘Look for Kiwanis; they can help you,’” says Nicole Chan, mother of six-year-old Chin Sen Qin, who enrolled in the National Centre at five months of age. “My son could walk at 16 months. I think that is very good results.”

In recent months, the Kiwanis foundation has hosted delegations who are interested in the Malaysians’ success as models for founding Down syndrome centers—DS communities—in Mongolia and China.

Ask yourself and ask your club: What is our community? Then, ask yourself and your club: Are we making a major impact within our community? Here are four ways to help your club identify its community and initiate a signature project that ensures a positive impact within your community:

1. Develop a strategic plan that complements the Kiwanis International I-Plan. Resources: Kiwanis.org/iplan.
2. Apply The Formula so your club is strong, healthy and prepared to perform meaningful service. Resources: Kiwanis.org/theformula.
3. Conduct a survey to discover areas of need within your geographical area or beyond. Resources: Kiwanis.org/analysis.
4. Choose one of those needs—and its respective community—and develop a signature project that will have a significant impact within that community. Resources: Kiwanis.org/signatureproject.