

Rotary

District 6940 Newsletter



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Meet District 6940's Gift to Rotary's Peace Fellowship Program

By **KATHY SUERKEN**

District Peace Fellow Co-Ordinator

His name is Rafal Pankowski. He is from Poland and has been selected as our District nominee to receive one of only 40 Peace Fellowships worldwide for the 2024 Peace Certification Program.

Rafal has a PhD from Warsaw University and speaks eight languages. A noted speaker, he has given lectures in Oslo, Kyiv, Moscow, New Orleans, Bangkok, Oxford, Amsterdam, Geneva, and many other locations on behalf of his organization, 'NEVER AGAIN.' Rafal has devoted his life's work to the issue of peace, non-violence, and human rights.

Having witnessed instances of violence that began with hate speech that led to hate crimes against minorities, he became a co-founder of 'NEVER AGAIN' at the age of 20. From the beginning, non-violence has been a key principle in their activity.

Establishing cooperation with mass media and international organizations, Rafal has been able to mobilize support from outside resources to include sports figures and well known musicians who donate their time as role models for young fans during their awareness campaigns to address the roots of hate speech and violence.

In Rafal's words, "the backbone of our activity is the good will and dedication of selfless volunteers who devote their time and energy. 'NEVER AGAIN' has been and remains guided by the motto of 'service above self.'"

District 6940 should be very proud of our support of the Peace Fellow program that has resulted in an exceptional rate of successful candidates. Since formalizing a Peace Fellow coordinator position in 2016, our nominees have been selected for classes of 2017, 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2024.

We are encouraged to support worthy candidates from outside our district who otherwise would not have the required district sponsorship.

Some clubs and districts are either unaware of this wonderful program or do not realize that there is absolutely no cost for clubs or districts to participate.



Rafal Pankowski

Rafal will study at Makerere University (Uganda). The program there consists of:

- Online pre-departure course: September – October 2024
- Ten-week on-site program: October - December 2024
- Social change initiative implementation period: January 2025 - September 2025
- One-week capstone seminar: October 2025

In the meantime, Rafael continues to build his peace toolkit. A few months ago, he requested the Mid-Bay club's (donated) Pathways to Peace training for himself and several of his 'Never Again' colleagues and he has requested to continue our collaboration.

I very much appreciate and need to recognize our Peace Fellow interview committee: Dan Sulgar, Christine James, and John Suerken. I owe John an extra measure of gratitude for taking the Peace Fellowship endorser course and editing (and improving) copious versions of our district endorsement.

Although his selection was determined before current tumultuous world events, it is fortuitous Rafal's focus is on hate speech and where it leads. With this application so much needed worldwide, I consider Rafal to be a gift from our district to the Peace Fellow Program which strives to be a gift to humanity. Thank you, District 6940, for making this possible.