



## Everyday Heroes

by Deborah Daugherty, Past President, Rotary Club of Kingsport

A little background: the first conversations had about this art sculpture and who it would honor started almost five years ago, as four of us began making a strategic plan for how Rotary Club of Kingsport should celebrate their centennial year with the 100th celebration planned for November of 2023.

In a nutshell, we decided to begin two years prior to the centennial year. In our club's 98th year, we recognized our past and installed a kiosk at the Veterans Memorial Park so that residents could more easily find their veteran's marker. In our 99th year, we recognized our present by honoring Everyday Heroes at each weekly meeting and collaborated with Kingsport's Office of Cultural Arts to send out a national call and commission this art sculpture you see today. And in our centennial year, we recognized our future by hosting youth speakers at our meetings, forming the Kindness Club at Kennedy Elementary School in Lynn Garden, and by writing a children's book about the Rotary International motto of Service Above Self and published 5,000 copies to give to local children through Kingsport City Schools and Ballad Health.

For a plethora of reasons well beyond anyone's control here, the art sculpture to honor our community's current Everyday Heroes in the present experienced roadblock after roadblock after curveball after detour. What I anticipated taking 18 months, ended up taking 3.5 years. But sometimes, we're reminded that it's not always about the destination but the journey.





one-and-done. They continue to show up and risk their safety for our own every. single. day. And when we first think of an Everyday Hero, these are who jump to mind, which is why this location seemed the perfect fit.

A few years into my role with the Sheriff's Office, I was reminded that sometimes God gives us a little nudge to get us where He wants us to be and found myself interviewing for a teaching position after being out of the classroom for 9.5 years. And throughout this transition of the decade, I was reminded again and again, in the biggest of ways, that not all heroes wear capes.

You see, by the extended delays, I was forced to slow down and continue life. However, the only thing certain about life is change. When this project began, I was working for Sheriff Cassidy as the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office Community Relations Liaison. Having the opportunity to serve in a small civilian capacity to schedule events, organize classes, and facilitate presentations allowed me to catch a glimpse first hand of how much our first responders shield us from — the dangers and chaos that take place even in our precious small town USA. The drugs taken off the streets, the crime we are protected of, ... what we don't know and never hear... truly is a testament to how well we are protected and served.

When we run to seek shelter and safety, our first responders shoot past us, running in to slay the modern day dragons we're unable to defeat on our own. But it's not a







Because for all of the danger our first responders are shielding us from,— the faculty, staff, and administrators of each of our schools are playing a huge role to help raise the children who come from those homes, while simultaneously creating an environment for your children to grow and flourish, too.

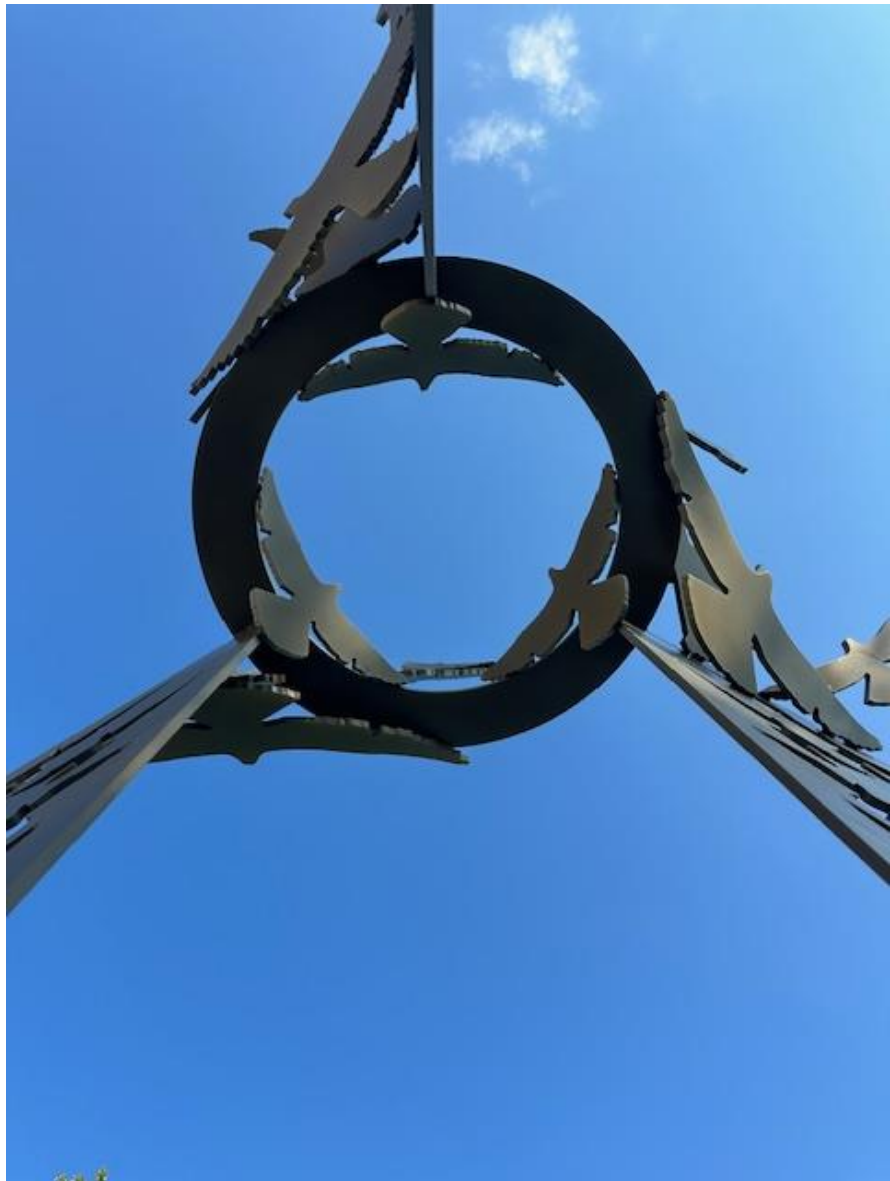
It's easy for me to shout from the mountaintops (and parking lots of Fun Fest) that our first responders and educators are the unsung heroes of our community because I've seen it with my own eyes time and time and time again. But oh, how fast these past five years have flown. Five years ago when the phrase "essential worker" was so quickly branded into our vocabulary and we realized the value of ALL. Every cog in our community's wheel is necessary, although not always quick to be remembered. Let's not forget that every barber chair and salon chair serve a dual purpose, as they listen to us navigate family dynamics, health scares, plans we're uncertain about.

Let's not forget those who keep our shelves stocked, our water clean, our debris collected, our streets clear and traffic lights running smoothly, ... our triage

nurses, dispatchers, mechanics, and repairmen who keep calm and level headed while paving the way to meet our emergent needs. Let's not forget our veterinarian who provides care to ALL of our K-9 Officers. The nurse who delivered a baby unexpectedly in the jail. The dental assistant who comfort the anxious patient. The providers who volunteer services at our indigent clinics. Let's not forget those in our community who care for our loved ones (and us) when we're navigating long-term care, hospice. Let's not forget those who help us figure out what to do next when the changes that come along our journey are part of a new chapter. Where do you turn?

Well, I'm reminded of my fellow Rotarian and friend, who fought insurance companies and traveled the country to get his wife the medical care to overcome cancer, and I'm reminded that we can do hard things. I'm reminded of another fellow Rotarian who's mentor kept a verse from the book of Luke on his desk to remind him, "of whom much is given, much is required." Because I'm reminded from the Baptist minister on Church Circle that the paradox of generosity, is that when our hands are open to give, they're also open to receive. And I'm reminded from Methodist minister on Sullivan Street that we are here to serve the Least, the Last, the Lost, and the Lonely, even when that means downsizing my sock drawer and getting them in the right hands on a rainy day.

And I'm reminded that when a hurricane comes barreling through the Appalachian Mountains, all hands are on deck. Closets are cleaned out for those whose clothes and linens were flooded, pantries and shelves are scanned for





essentials, and people go... to search, to clear, to comfort, and to guide when the journey is overwhelming. Because not all heroes wear capes. Some send a text to say, "I have a bunch of laundry detergent for you to take to school for kids who need it." Or "I cleaned out my son's closet and have clothes for you to take to the school." Or the call from a friend I haven't spoken to in a year: Hello? "Deborah! Do you have any girls who need prom dresses?! We're in Asheville and found the best sale!!"

Some heroes come in the form of a mother of three, who doesn't raise daughters; she raises warriors and coaches the Unified team and will always remind you that she's wildly proud of your scary bold life decisions.

Some heroes come in the form of a Marine veteran who reminds those now under his charge to embrace the day, spread positivity, ready yourself for victories, and remember who you are and whose you are.

Some heroes come in the form of a guidance counselor from Erwin who grew up to be a school superintendent, and his grandparents are SO proud.

Some heroes come in the form of the mom and dad of a local Staff Sergeant who passed away, so they went to Congress, shared his story, and received enough funding to share nationwide to prevent the loss of other veterans too soon.

Other heroes come in the form of answering your wild evening texts when you're looking for someone to provide 150 cans of cranberry sauce or 150 boxes of stuffing so that families who otherwise wouldn't, will have a Thanksgiving meal. Still other heroes are the ones who show up on the hardest days, when the light is most dim, when there are no words and a portion of our community feels the grief of a sudden loss. They are there.

Because along this journey those who stand up to do the hard things time and time again know that a candle loses nothing of its light by lighting another candle. But only by the absence of light are we reminded how very important it is to keep shining our own, so that others may see the way. And sometimes, an Everyday Hero, is that colleague, that neighbor, that friend who sends a simple text to say, "Just checking on you and hoping today is a better day."

And to those colleagues who embrace the most difficult students and push to plant seeds of value and worth— When those students are skeptical of her drive and compassion and ask her, "but, what if I fall." She doesn't hesitate, "oh, kid. You're gonna fly." If you saw a rendering of this sculpture before today, it likely appeared gold in the photo. But for the final curveball of this project, that wasn't meant to be either (long story!).

But how fitting is it that none of us necessarily look by appearances of what's expected of a hero, but at our core, we shine brightest, our resilience glows beyond any physical changes or imperfections. And just like the birds on this piece, may we continue to be reminded not to be afraid of a challenge but to soar ahead in spite of turbulence and ever changing winds on our journeys.

Everyday Heroes know that it isn't always easy. In fact, it rarely is. There's ALWAYS a curveball. There's ALWAYS a detour. There's always an unexpected bump in the road. But we learned from the generations before us, from our parents and grandparents, what to do in the face of adversity: keep going. Keep. Going. ...

(At this point in the speech, a call came in and fire fighters had to leave us where we were gathered to answer a call.)

What's that? But they don't make 'em like they used to? Oh, my friends. Please. Look to your left. Look to your right. They DO still make 'em like they used to. The Hero's magic, so that no cape is required, is inside of YOU. YOU are the heroes of our community being celebrated.

So in closing, there will always be an extenuating circumstance for which we are provided the opportunity to demonstrate what it means to live by the Four Way Test of Rotary International. Of the things we think, say, and do: first, is it the truth? Second, is it fair to all concerned? Third, will it build goodwill and better friendships? And fourth, will it be beneficial to all concerned?

NOTE: All of the examples of Everyday Heroes in this passage are real from our community, although names were intentionally left out.

The sculpture is located at Fire Station 2, visible from Fort Henry Drive near Dobyns-Bennett High School.