



ROTARY DISTRICT 7170

RYLA 2022

Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) is Rotary's leadership training program for young people. It emphasizes leadership, citizenship and personal growth for the exceptional young men and women who are selected to participate.

RYLA is one of the best and most effective programs run by Rotary clubs around the world. The first **RYLA** session was held in 1959 in Queensland, Australia. Planned around Queensland's centennial, it proved to be an extraordinarily successful event. Annual sessions took place in following years. And then the good news about the program spread throughout the worldwide Rotary Community.

RYLA came to District 7170 in the early 1980s, and a week-long conference was held at Golden Valley Sports Camp in Sidney, NY in the early years. Now it's based on the SUNY Oneonta College campus in Oneonta. **This coming summer's program will be District 7170's 39th program.**

District 7170's **RYLA** program is limited to high school students with leadership potential who are moving from their junior to senior years. Our program goes beyond other "junior experiences" like Boys State, Girls State with a host of specialty seminars and presentations for promising students. Each individual club within the District uses its own criteria for selecting the students – many enlist the help of their high school guidance counselors.

The 2019 **RYLA** Conference in Oneonta had 110 participants. In all, 42 of the 45 Rotary clubs in District 7170 provided **RYLA** scholarships to students. The cost of tuition and lodging is currently \$350 per attendee and is paid by the individual clubs. Clubs like Endwell and Norwich send five students. Other clubs send fewer students depending on the club's finances and by the number of high schools served by that particular Rotary club.

Most members of the **RYLA** staff are area high school teachers. Many of the guest speakers have direct ties with Rotary. Several were former Rotary exchange students. One of the most popular speakers is Duke Fisher of Bainbridge who presents a unit on Managing Conflict. He starts his presentation by explaining that he reserves the date of his **RYLA** presentation each year as his way of "paying back" for the Exchange Student opportunity that Rotary gave to him a number of years ago. Other presentations are made on such varied topics as school violence, motivation, decision making, and career exploration. In addition, the students produce a newspaper, have a public speaking contest, create band and chorus shows, and take such electives as photography, scrapbooking and computers.

Director Julie Lambiaso says a community volunteerism component was added to the **RYLA** program five years ago. This past year, students collected noon-perishable food items and distributed them through local charitable organizations.

For many of the students, **RYLA** is their first experience on a college campus. The students live in dorms with roommates purposely not from their home schools, eat in the cafeteria, and use other SUNY Oneonta facilities such as the library, computer and technology rooms, fitness center and large meeting rooms.

The RYLA experience concludes with an awards banquet for parents and friends. This event is open to all district Rotarians, but reservations are limited, must be made in advance and cost \$25.00 per person. "The entire Friday evening program is prepared by the students," says Lambiaso. "It's a great way for everyone to see some outstanding student work and for Rotarians to see the value coming from their club's investment."