

The Louisville Rotary Promise Scholarship

Annual Report to the Club – February 19, 2026

The 100th Anniversary Signature Project

The Rotary Promise Scholarship is the product of the Rotary Club of Louisville's 100th Anniversary Signature Project, the most ambitious fundraising and service initiative in the history of our Club.

The story of this groundbreaking initiative began in August of 2009 when President John Bush asked President-elect Henry Heuser Jr. to lead a distinguished committee of past presidents in planning for the Club's centennial celebration, already scheduled for July 2012. The planning group met for the first time on September 10th and over the next eight months explored several bold ideas, including a project which Mr. Heuser believed had the potential to impact generations of students in the Jefferson County Public Schools. The concept, presented by past president Lelan Woodmansee to the Board on June 21, 2010, was "the College Promise Scholarship Challenge," the creation of a multi-million dollar endowment whose proceeds would guarantee full-tuition scholarships to graduates of select high schools with large percentages of disadvantaged students.



At a recent meeting for new Rotary presidents, President-elect Henry had been intrigued by reports of Rotary-funded scholarships that built bridges to community colleges and universities for low-income high school students. With improvements in the design, he believed a targeted scholarship program of this kind could be transformative in Louisville. As Henry and Lelan explained to the Board, the project would:

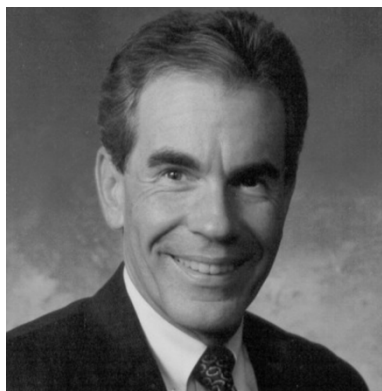
- Benefit students in the public high schools in Jefferson County which have been identified by the latest state assessment as "low performing schools."
- Address the "college affordability gap" which was a huge barrier for disadvantaged students.
- Align perfectly with major community initiatives supporting educational attainment for economic growth including the 55,000 Degrees initiative.

- Assist in the preparation of a better educated workforce.
- Strengthen collaborative efforts between Jefferson Community and Technical College and JCPS in support of student success, improving college readiness, graduation and college-going rates for high school students and college retention, degree completion and transfer rates for scholarship recipients.

President Henry worked with JCTC President and fellow Rotarian Tony Newberry to fine tune the concept and develop descriptive materials. Over the next few months, with the full support of the Board, Heuser and a Rotary team including Mitch Rue and Greg Braun moved through the quiet phase of fund-raising, reaching out to potential donors and securing early commitments. The team also laid the groundwork for strategic partnerships, not only with JCPS and JCTC but with the University of Louisville, Indiana University Southeast and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. With UofL and IUS, the goal was to create bridges to four-year degrees. With KCTCS, the aim was to secure access to an endowment matching program that would double any funds raised by the Rotary Club of Louisville.

The Fundraising Challenge

At the Rotary meeting on October 7, 2010, during Woody Northup's official District Governor (DG) visit, President Heuser unveiled what he called "Louisville Rotary's 100th Anniversary gift and challenge to our club and community – the Rotary Promise



**Henry Heuser, Jr., President
Rotary Club of Louisville
2010-2011**

Scholarship." By launching the campaign now, Henry explained, "we can combine available funds set aside from the Rotary Fund of Louisville, individual members' contributions and significant matching funds to build the \$2 million endowment." An anonymous Rotarian would match all member donations. Those gifts in turn would be matched dollar-for-dollar by the Kentucky Community & Technical College System, for an initial total of up to \$500,000.

At subsequent meetings in early 2011, President Henry announced several large gifts: \$50,000 from the Cralle Foundation in honor of Rotarian Lee Cralle, a 57-year member; \$76,741 from the Rotary Fund of Louisville, and \$45,000 from Kosair Charities. These gifts moved the

Club toward the campaign's first \$250,000, which would be presented in a giant check to KCTCS President Mike McCall in a Rotary meeting on April 18, 2011.

In an update published in SPARKS on February 11, President Henry reminded the Club that the purpose of the "Louisville Rotary Promise Scholarship is to provide qualified, underprivileged high school students with a free college education, along with the motivation to do well in high school and finish college. What a great contribution to our community's success that will be! So, we are off to a great start, but our goal can only be reached with the support of each and every member of our Rotary Club. The 100th anniversary of our club is a once in our lifetime opportunity to make a lasting impact on the future of the Louisville area."

The Campaign Goes Public

The Club's internal fundraising continued into the next Rotary year (July 2011-June 2012), setting the stage for the dramatic public unveiling of the Club's Signature Project. In June 2012, on the eve of the 100th anniversary, Club President Maynard "Stet" Stetten published a full-page op-ed in the *Courier-Journal* which announced the goal to raise \$2 million to establish a permanent endowment to support and sustain the scholarships. "By eliminating the cost of tuition as a barrier to college," Dr. Stetten explained, "we hope to motivate students to be successful in high school and prepare for higher education. We also want to make attending college an expectation, not an afterthought, for the students and their parents."

On July 21, 2012 at the Ice House in Downtown Louisville, more than 650 Rotarians and guests attended the Club's Centennial Celebration where President Stuart Alexander, the Club's 100th president, confirmed the commitment to the endowment. In four successive years, the Club would raise \$250,000 – to be matched dollar for dollar by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System -- to reach the \$2 million total.



Celebration of \$1 Million Milestone

Each \$250,000 increment showcased the Club's ongoing dedication to "service above self". One example was the two-day fundraiser/family outing at the Parklands on May 17-18, 2013, which completed the second \$250,000 installment. More than 250 members of the Club and community contributed to the campaign. Major gifts from Rotarians Woody Northup and John Gregory and philanthropists David and Betty Jones helped fulfill the third and fourth installments in 2014 and 2015.

***The Louisville Rotary Promise:
Provide a Beacon of Hope, Create a College Bound Culture***

As the fundraising progressed, the Club's Rotary Promise Scholarship Committee, led by Rotarian Mitch Rue, met with principals, teachers and counselors at Western and Iroquois high schools, the two Jefferson County public schools whose students were best positioned to benefit from the scholarships. The Committee worked closely with administrators to create policies and structures to manage the program. With both schools, the stated goals were to "provide a beacon of hope" and create "a college bound culture". The Committee sponsored kickoff events with the freshmen classes at both locations, introducing excited students to the financial support that would be available upon graduation.

The Club also launched several support programs during this early period: a speaker series on career pathways in industry and trades, a food literacy program, and job shadow/job track programs in culinary arts and health care. The Club started an Interact Club at Western and recruited students from both high schools for RYLA, the District 6710 Rotary Youth Leadership Awards program. Probably the most significant early initiative was a one-on-one coaching initiative that later would expand into a full-fledged mentoring program.

In 2016, graduates of Western High School and in 2017 Iroquois High School received the first scholarships to attend Jefferson Community and Technical College. These were "last dollar" scholarships, meaning that the funds would cover all tuition expenses not paid by state and federal grants. To be eligible, the students had to graduate with a 2.5 grade point average and achieve defined attendance and behavioral goals. After two years at JCTC, many would be eligible for special transfer scholarships to partner institutions like the University of Louisville and Indiana University Southeast.

The Rotary Scholars Mentoring Program

Alongside the scholarships, Rotarians led by Walt Kunau expanded the fledgling advising program into a structured mentoring program which engaged students at both high schools in focused academic and career planning. In short order, scores of Rotarians were engaging promising juniors and seniors in meaningful discussions of goal setting and life and business skills. These small group coaching sessions occurred six times each year at both Western and Iroquois and for several years at the WHS Early College Program at JCTC's Southwest Campus. In 2020-21, during the pandemic, the mentoring program paused at Western and Iroquois high schools, but persisted at JCTC Southwest, when mentors and mentees wore masks and maintained proper distance. In the fall of 2021, the mentoring program resumed at Western and Iroquois high schools.



Today Rotarian Craig Mooney leads the mentor program. More than 60 Rotarians and community volunteers contribute hundreds of hours to the coaching sessions, providing 120 students each year with the tools to move from high school to college and ultimately to success in the workforce. All told, Louisville Rotarians have committed more than 5000 service hours to mentoring at the two high schools.

Recent Mentoring Session at Iroquois High School

Interact and the Annual Honors Scholars Celebration

Under the leadership of Rotarian Linda Bartrom-Moore, Rotary also sponsors strong Interact programs at the high schools. Both Interact groups encourage student



leadership development and conduct multiple service projects including annual blood drives. According to Dr. B, “[t]heir media accounts on both Facebook and Instagram provide a wider venue of the good work our Louisville Club is doing with our youth.”

In 2024 the Rotary Club of Louisville helped launch a community-based

Rotaract Club and this year renewed its support for District 6710’s Rotary Youth Leadership Awards program in Greenville. Just this year the Youth and Education Committee and Rotarians Rick Harned and Rensha Allen launched a new Rotaract Chapter at the University of Louisville. Currently advised by UoL Assistant Director Renecia Davis and Dr. Bartrom-Moore, the Club has active media accounts on both Facebook and Instagram, held a fall food drive and a winter clothing drive, and will soon hold their 2nd virtual international meeting with a sister club in Nepal.

Each May, in an event which has become a high point of the Rotary year, the Club sponsors a scholarship luncheon to showcase Rotary Honors Scholars and Interact leaders from Western and Iroquois high schools. This May the event will feature two seniors in the UoL Rotaract Club, both of whom will receive the maroon International Rotaract Silk Sash as graduation regalia.



Honors Scholars Celebration May 2022

Adaptation and Innovation: Enhancements to the Original Plan

Beginning in 2018, the Rotary Club of Louisville's Promise Scholarship program served as a model and inspiration for the community-wide Evolve502 initiative which provides last dollar scholarships for graduates of every high school in Jefferson County. Rotarians Ken Middleton and Kevin Wardell led the effort to formalize our program's relationship not only with Evolve502, but with our primary partners JCPS and JCTC, developing detailed MOAs which ensured annual data sharing on student success and program financing. These agreements put the Rotary Promise Scholarship program on solid ground and guaranteed an ongoing and significant role for the Rotary Club of Louisville in promoting educational progress in the community.

During this same period the program was rebranded as the Rotary Honors Scholars Program. Working closely with JCTC President Ty Handy, several initiatives designed to encourage student persistence and increase credential completion were added to the "last dollar" scholarship support. The first of these was the "opportunity grant" program, providing stipends of \$500 (now \$1000) for RHS students who persisted from semester to semester. Other initiatives focused on success and retention of English language learners and African American males. More recently the program funded dual credit and ACT preparation courses for students at Western High School.

Beginning this year, a \$79,000 Rotary Bridge Grant enables high school seniors to attend four classes on the JCTC Southwest campus one day a week. The students come from The Academy@Shawnee and Doss High School as well as Iroquois and Western. The grant pays tuition costs that are not covered by the state's Dual Credit Scholarship program, provides a textbook allowance and supports transportation from the high schools to the college campus. [See pages 10-12 for a complete list of current Special Opportunity grant initiatives.]

*The Rotary Bridge
Program "removes barriers
for bright students to access
more dual credit classes and
enjoy the experience of
being on a college campus.
We can't thank the Rotary
Club of Louisville and
JCTC enough for making
this available to our
students."*

*JCPS Superintendent
Marty Pollio
January 2025*

Impact on Student Achievement

In collaboration with Jefferson Community and Technical College and Evolve502, our Club is now undertaking a comprehensive study of the impact of the Promise Scholarship on the achievement of students from Western and Iroquois High School at JCTC. Highlights of the early findings include:

- Since 2016 and 2017, when the program's first students received their diplomas, 463 students have enrolled at JCTC as Rotary Promise Scholars. 302 of these students are graduates of Iroquois High School and 161 of Western. In the Fall of 2025 alone, 58 Rotary Promise Scholars were enrolled at JCTC, 43 from Iroquois and 15 from Western.
- Collectively these Rotary Promise Scholars have earned 176 Associate Degrees, Certificates and Diplomas. Many additional Rotary Promise Scholars have earned college credits while planning to transfer to universities. The University of Louisville's ULTRA program provides early admission and comprehensive advising for transfers from JCTC, for example. Other Promise Scholars access JCTC's wide range of high-demand technical programs -- from nursing and allied health to advanced manufacturing and information technology to aviation maintenance and auto technology – empowering them to move directly into the workforce.
- JCTC students from Western and Iroquois – recipients of Rotary Promise Scholarships -- have a rate of retention from Fall to Spring which is comparable to the general population of high school graduates and Evolve 502 Scholars enrolled at JCTC. The charts on the following page, provided by JCTC and Evolve502, summarize outcomes for entering first time students for 2024 High School graduates. This data provides a baseline for understanding retention and success among Louisville Rotary Promise Scholars at Jefferson, and will help frame discussions about future success initiatives.

Entering First Time Freshmen Cohort: Fall 2024 Outcomes for 2024 High School Graduates				
	Count	Average Term GPA	% Passed 9+ Credit Hours in Term	Fall to Spring Retention
All 2024 HS Grads Enrolled at JCTC	678	2.09	47%	76%
2024 HS Grads: All Evolve Scholars	600	2.20	53%	77%
2024 HS Grads: Opportunity Grant Scholars	270	2.17	52%	76%
2024 HS Grad Evolve Scholars: Iroquois HS	22	2.12	55%	73%
2024 HS Grad Evolve Scholars: Western HS	14	2.16	31%	71%

All Evolve Scholars Enrolled in Fall 2024				
	Count	Average Term GPA	% Passed 9+ Credit Hours in Term	Fall to Spring Retention
Evolve 502 Scholars	1177	2.61	63%	75%
Opportunity Grant Scholars	534	2.31	57%	76%
Evolve Scholars: Iroquois HS	41	2.20	61%	71%
Evolve Scholars: Western HS	21	2.33	44%	76%

The Health of the Endowment

A team of Rotarians led by Mitch Rue meets regularly with Dr. Ty Handy at JCTC for a detailed review the status of the Rotary Promise Endowment. Key observations from recent meetings include:

- The endowment is performing nicely and at the end of FY 25 \$615,215 was available to expand support for scholarships and student support programs.
- The endowment's current market value as of June 30, 2025 is \$3,505,222, with \$1,810,119 representing the Rotary Club of Louisville portion and \$1,695,102 the KCTCS portion.
- \$296,480 in scholarships and \$76,771 in grants have been awarded through June 30, 2025, for a total of \$373,251.
- In FY 23, \$53,544 was awarded through scholarships and special opportunity grants. In FY 24, scholarships and grants totaled \$79,612. In FY 25, expenditures increased to \$108,882.

Special Opportunity Grants

In recent years JCTC, with encouragement from our Club, has invested Rotary Promise funds in Special Opportunity grants which promote academic success, increase college going and improve retention and degree completion. In FY 24, Special Opportunity grants totaled \$50,963; in FY 25 expenditures increased to \$54,955. Recent awards in in this category include:

The **Rotary Bridge Program** supports an immersive Senior Year on Campus for Western, Iroquois and Doss high schools and the Academy@Shawnee. The grant provides transportation to JCTC's Southwest Campus and a book allowance. Students take three college general education classes each semester for dual credit. As described on page 7, this program was expanded in 2025 to enable high school seniors from the four high schools to attend four classes on the JCTC Southwest campus one day a week. \$79,040 for each of the next three years is earmarked for this program. [Actual expenditures in FY 24 totaled \$35,542 and \$30,128 in FY 25.]

The Jefferson Scholars Project expands on an earlier JCTC program called Accelerate to College (A2C). The program enables high school juniors to prepare for college-level learning by completing developmental English and mathematics courses in their high school classrooms. Students who successfully complete an A2C course are considered college-ready at Jefferson and may qualify to enroll in dual credit courses during their senior year.

Launched in fall 2024, the Jefferson Scholars Project initially served students at Iroquois and Western high schools, and is now slated to expand to Doss, Shawnee, Pleasure Ridge Park and Valley high schools. This three-year initiative provides tuition support for a dual credit experience during students' senior year, specifically covering a third dual credit English or mathematics course for students who have already exhausted the state's dual credit scholarship, which funds only two courses.



By removing this financial barrier, the program enables successful students to continue their academic momentum, reinforcing college-going expectations and making higher education part of their routine. [Award amounts are \$16,190 in Year One, \$32,381 in Year Two, and \$48,571 in Year Three. Actual expenditures in FY 2025, the program's first year, totaled \$9,082.]

The **Western High School ACT Prep Intervention** is designed to improve math, reading and performance on the ACT. Programming, staffing and supplies are addressed in the grant. Past President Henry Heuser, the inspiration and architect of the Rotary Promise Scholarship program, recommended the ACT Prep Intervention to ensure WHS students achieve eligibility for the prestigious Vogt Educational and Leadership Scholarship at the University of Louisville. [\$16,500 is allocated for this program in FY 26.]

The **EvoIYOUtion** initiative, a partnership with Evolve502, provides an incentive-based app for students to participate in events/workshops and connect with staff, peers and other supports. [\$6,000 is allocated per year for three years. Actual expenditures in FY 25, the first year of the program, totaled \$2,108.]

The **English Language Student Success** program provides tutoring for recent immigrant students. [Actual expenditures for this program in FY 24 totaled \$7,592 and \$4,600 in FY 25.]

The **Access and Community Engagement** initiative provides special tutoring services for students from downtown neighborhoods. [Actual expenditures for this program in FY 24 totaled \$7,470 and \$9,051 in FY 25.]

Partnership Updates

One of the most significant effects of the Rotary Promise Scholarship has been to build stronger collaboration with major institutional players in the educational arena. These include not only the partnerships with Jefferson County Public Schools and Jefferson Community and Technical College but with Evolve502 and key universities.

Evolve502 and the Rotary Promise Scholarship

The partnership with Evolve502 is particularly noteworthy in that the concept for providing every eligible JCPS graduate a two-year, tuition-free postsecondary education through a KCTCS college or Simmons College of Kentucky is built upon the Rotary Promise Scholars program. Like RPS, Evolve502 is a last dollar program and offers opportunity grants for low-income students. As it was being developed in 2018, Rotarians led by Kevin Wardell and Ken Middleton worked closely with Evolve502 to make sure that our efforts were compatible with the larger community effort. A detailed Memorandum of Agreement provides a framework not only for ongoing collaboration and but for annual evaluation and improvement.



As of August 2025, Evolve502 has invested more than \$5.8 million in college costs for eligible JCPS students. Evolve502, which includes the Rotary Promise Scholarships for students from Western and Iroquois high schools, supports 2,269 KCTCS students who collectively have earned 769 credentials. Evolve502's plans include textbook stipends, emergency grants and one-on-one success coaching, supporting students through to the completion of their degree or credential. Each of these innovations will apply as well to the schools directly supported by the Rotary Promise Scholarship.

Transfer Pathways to the Universities

Another major effect of the Rotary Promise Scholarship is that it has built transfer partnerships

with the universities in our region. From the beginning of the program, the University



Indiana University Southeast

of Louisville and Indiana University Southeast have offered pathways to bachelor's degrees for RPS students. Our Club is now gathering

detailed information on the numbers and achievements of these graduates, and in the process is looking for ways to strengthen collaboration.

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Testimonials and Endorsements

From Rotary Club of Louisville Past President Alice Bridges

“Establishing the Rotary Honors Scholars Program was a historic milestone in the life of the Rotary Club of Louisville. It marked one of the most significant and lasting service projects ever undertaken by our Club--and that is saying a lot given our now more than 100 years of existence as a fellowship of community leaders! At its inception, it catalyzed major philanthropic gifts from members and institutional partners to move the needle on academic achievement for students at Iroquois and Western High Schools. And the scholarship model we built has now been supercharged for students across Louisville through the partnership with Evolve502. I'm especially proud that our Club continues to mentor students at Iroquois and Western, demonstrating an enduring passion for their success. In short, I believe the Rotary Honors Scholars Program illustrates what Margaret Mead famously said: ‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.’”



From Jefferson Community and Technical College President Dr. Ty Handy

“When I arrived at Jefferson ten years ago one of my first introductions was to the Rotary Scholars Program and the major impact it was having on students at Western High School. Not just a scholarship program, the Rotary Club embraced Western students and worked to help them succeed through tutoring, counseling and other impactful interventions. Rotarians truly leaned into student success and set an example for the rest of us to follow. Fast forward a few years and the Rotary Club expanded the program to Iroquois High School and became a major partner and example setter for the new Evolve502 program. Jefferson has followed their lead and, over the past decade, our 3-year graduation rate has more than tripled as a result of focusing on student success. Rotarians have definitely lived their value of ‘service over self’ with this program and many students, families and needy communities in Louisville are better for their hard work.”



From Evolve502 Executive Director Marland Cole

“The Rotary Club of Louisville's 113-year legacy of fellowship and service has helped drive transformational change in education for young people in Louisville. Under Henry Heuser's leadership, The Rotary Promise Scholarship launched in 2010. Rotary, through Walt Kunau's leadership, built on that foundation by launching a successful mentorship program. Together, these efforts identified tuition as a significant barrier to postsecondary education and served as the catalyst for the Evolve502 Scholarship program. In partnership with The Rotary Club of Louisville, Evolve502 now provides up to two years of tuition-free college to a generation of eligible Jefferson County students, creating the workforce of tomorrow and ensuring a vibrant future for our community. We are grateful for Rotary's enduring vision and leadership, which continue to inspire our community to stand up in support of our students and families.”



Plans for Next Year

Mitch Rue and members of the Rotary Honors Scholars Committee will meet with leaders at Western and Iroquois High Schools, Jefferson Community and Technical College, and Evolve502 to continue the smooth running of the scholarship program and explore ways to expand and improve upon it.

The discussions will center on two sets of issues:

- (1) strategies for recruitment, retention, and credential completion, and
- (2) the health of the endowment, the use of scholarship funds, the progress of current Special Opportunity Grants and the potential for new ones.

The Committee will also meet with the University of Louisville, Indiana University Southeast and other universities to explore ways to strengthen transfer pathways for LRPS and Evolve502 students.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mitch Rue, Chair

Walt Kunau, Vice Chair

Tony Newberry, Member

Rotary Honors Scholars Committee
February 19, 2026