



LEADERSHIP PROFILE



Executive Director Rotary Club of Birmingham Birmingham, AL



THE OPPORTUNITY

How exactly does a mid-sized city in the Deep South become home to the largest Rotary Club in the world? Through “*service above self*,” writ large in the hearts and actions of an enviable group of leaders who collectively guide, represent or influence essentially every facet of this dynamic region.

Founded in 1913, the [Rotary Club of Birmingham](#) (RCB) has for over 100 years been true to the challenge embraced by its founders “to advance the interests of its members in proportion to the advance of the welfare of the communities

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in which we are established."¹ Today, the Birmingham Rotary hosts weekly meetings for its 650 members and serves as the catalyst or champion (and often the arms & legs) for a host of community and philanthropic efforts, both locally and internationally

The weekly fellowship and speakers are an attraction, to be sure, but what makes the Birmingham Rotary a force year after year is the context it provides for members to learn together, grow together and collaborate together on projects and initiatives with outsized impact on Birmingham and the world beyond.

For over a hundred years, Rotary has attracted and engaged the metro area's most impactful leaders. In addition to convening the CEOs, Managing Partners, Executive Directors and other senior leaders common to most thriving Rotary clubs, Birmingham has been intentional in fostering the development of the next generations of civic and corporate leadership. In short, the Rotary Club of Birmingham is not impactful because it is so large; it is large because it is so impactful.²



Whether through sponsorship of the [Rotaract Club of Birmingham](#) (also the largest in the global Rotary family), academic scholarships or individual mentoring, Birmingham's Rotary Club has consistently expanded the horizons of the people it touches. And those horizons have had ripple effects elsewhere: Over the years, Birmingham fostered Rotary's expansion to over a dozen cities in Alabama and even helped launch the Atlanta club, Georgia's first Rotary. RCB's members speak especially fondly of their engagement with international efforts the club has funded and facilitated.

Professionally, Birmingham Rotarians lead an eclectic array of entities from the area's most established institutions to its most promising start-ups, whether corporate, academic, civic or philanthropic. If an organization or initiative expects to have real impact in the community, odds are high that its own leader is part of Rotary.

Membership is dynamic and evolving; natural attrition (whether through transfers, changing priorities or deaths) means about 4% of the membership

¹ Per letter from the founder of the Rotary movement, Paul Harris to Harry Wheelock, RCB's initial champion

² In fairness, the Rotary Club of Oklahoma City occasionally prevails in the "largest club" competition. For both clubs, the designation is a point of pride, not a driving strategy.

turns over each year, and yet overall membership continues to grow incrementally, a testament to the Club's continued relevance.

The commitment to service above self is shared by every Rotary club, but in Birmingham it is central to the Club's ethos. Evidence of RCB's commitment is pervasive; here are a few highlights from recent years:³

- **The Rotary Trail.** Through Rotary's leadership (and its multimillion-dollar funding), an "ugly dump of a stretch"⁴ in downtown Birmingham was transformed into a beautiful walking trail, an ongoing project celebrating the Club's centennial. What once was civic blight is now a source of civic pride.
- **Rotaract.** RCB played a material role in fostering the [Rotaract Club of Birmingham](#), now, like Rotary itself, the largest in the system, with some 300 active members aged 25-35. A dynamic organization in its own right, Rotaract has become an important development pipeline for greater Birmingham's emerging leaders.
- **Statewide Preschool Learning Initiative.** RCB was instrumental in garnering statewide support and state budget funding for Pre-K education. Over the last 15 years, RCB has served as an advocate for best-practice quality early learning standards, and has partnered as a funder of projects with the Birmingham City Schools and United Way Success By 6.
- **Polio eradication.** RCB member Leslie Wright, then president of Samford University, chaired the initial push for funds in Rotary's long fight against polio, ultimately raising \$240mm, twice the initial goal. Thus began a pattern of local support for international Rotary projects that today is an integral part of the Club's fabric.
- **Cancer prevention in Sri Lanka.** RCB has played an important, ongoing role in cancer prevention in Sri Lanka, partnering with UAB's O'Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center and three Rotary clubs in Sri Lanka, Germany and Switzerland to provide cancer screenings, test kits and related services to over 33,000 women and men in that island nation--all just one example of the overseas engagement that is so treasured by RCB members.



Another indication of the pervasive commitment to service is the growth of the [Rotary Club of Birmingham Foundation](#)⁶, whose assets exceed those of its

³ For a fuller list, see <http://www.birminghamrotary.org/service/>

⁴ <https://rotarynewsonline.org/an-iconic-rotary-club/>

⁶ <http://www.birminghamrotary.org/service/rcb-foundation/>

counterparts in such major cities as Chicago, New York and San Diego. This is not a club inclined to rest on past accomplishments, and expanding the foundation's assets to support increased impact is an important priority.

For more information on the Rotary Club of Birmingham, please visit the Club's [website](#).⁷ Click [here](#)⁸ for information on the larger Rotary movement and [here](#)⁹ for an overview of Rotary District 6860, which includes RCB and 50 other Rotary clubs in the district.



THE ORGANIZATION

RCB was the 56th Rotary club to be established in a network that now encompasses some 35,000 clubs globally, and it has been a leader from the very outset. Whether operating behind the scenes or more publicly, RCB has been a convener, collaborative partner or dependable catalyst behind numerous initiatives with consequences beyond the immediate footprint.

Today, RCB is a successful, well-funded and well-led organization with an impressive past and the momentum to realize an even more impressive future. As the organization transitions from an Executive Director of long-standing who has built deep relationships and credibility across both Birmingham and Rotary International's far-reaching network, RCB's executive search committee is seeking a successor who can solidify today's successes while preparing the Club and its membership for tomorrow's challenges.

The Club's machinery works exceptionally well at present, so much so that the effort required to sustain momentum is largely invisible to individual members: hosting hundreds of members and their guests for weekly luncheons; keeping communications current and relevant with speakers, members, partner organizations and the larger community; providing support to volunteer leaders

⁷ <http://www.birminghamrotary.org/>

⁸ <https://www.rotary.org/>

⁹ <http://www.rotary6860.org/index.php>

and committees; all while serving as a key ambassador for the Club and its priorities. The fact that members are able to take such activities for granted is testament to just how well they are being handled today.

Susan Jackson, RCB's indomitable Executive Director for over 21 years, recently announced her intention to retire by the summer of 2020, thus prompting the current search.

Like essentially all US Rotary Clubs, RCB is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit corporation; its Foundation—the growth of which will be central to the Club's plans for even greater impact—is a 501(c)(3). Both are governed by volunteer boards drawn from Club membership and supported by committees tasked with programming, membership development, community engagement and financial oversight.

The Executive Director is responsible for both the Club and its Foundation, reporting to the boards of each and working most closely with the Club's President and committee chairs. The boards may set the vision, but the ED sets the tone, managing operations, facilitating relationships (internal and external) and channeling the energies, with nuance, of a membership accustomed to taking the lead.

The Club is served by a small, highly dedicated staff operating from beautiful purpose-built offices in the [Harbert Center](#)¹⁰ in downtown Birmingham, also the site of the Club's weekly meetings.

THE MANDATE

RCB is successful, well-funded and well-led. It has an impressive past and the momentum to realize an even more impressive future. As the organization transitions from an Executive Director of long-standing who has deep relationships and credibility across Birmingham and the far-reaching network of Rotary International, RCB is seeking a successor who can solidify today's successes while preparing the Club and its membership for tomorrow's challenges.

RCB remains an ambitious organization, and there is little support for simply maintaining the status quo. In fact, there is a collective sense that the Club



¹⁰ <http://www.theharbertcenter.com/home/>. Of note, RCB played a major role in the creation and funding of the Harbert Center, now operated as a free-standing nonprofit.

could be even more impactful and more relevant than it already is. The path from “now” to “next” is largely uncharted, however, which means the next Executive Director will have both the opportunity and the obligation to help frame the future and shape the path.

As with many roles requiring servant leadership, Rotary’s ED must have the competence and confidence to lead from behind, knowing when to push and when to keep counsel. RCB’s main asset is its members, not its financials. The board expects the Executive Director to help harness that asset to collective advantage while retaining the convivial spirit and efficient operations that characterize Rotary currently. Accordingly, we seek an Executive Director who embodies service above self with the right balance of efficiency, warmth and chutzpah.

THE LOCATION

With more than one million residents, greater Birmingham is Alabama’s largest metro area. Sometimes referred to as the Cradle of the American Civil Rights Movement, the metro area is home to six major academic institutions, two important automobile manufacturing plants, the [Southeastern Conference](#) the [Birmingham Barons](#) (the Chicago White Sox’s minor league affiliate), the world class [Children’s of Alabama](#) and a host of standard-setting cultural, civic and athletic resources.

Birmingham boasts more green space per capita than any other US city. Its residents are proud of the local farms and gardens, which in turn have helped Birmingham become known as a magnet for foodies. The area has received substantial publicity for its cutting-edge restaurants and chefs, who are frequently featured in the national press.¹¹



Birmingham has earned a national reputation as one of America’s “[most exciting food cities](#)”

A fuller view of Birmingham, its attractions and its history can be gleaned from such sites as [InBirmingham](#)¹², the [Birmingham Business Alliance](#)¹³, and [Wikipedia](#).¹⁴

¹¹ E.g., “[An Alabama Chef and her Beloved Deserts Hit the Big Time](#),” NYT, May 29, 2018

¹² <https://www.birminghamal.org/>

¹³ <https://www.birminghambusinessalliance.com/>

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham,_Alabama

THE CANDIDATE

Rotary's Executive Director must be a passionate advocate for civic leadership, a resourceful manager of details, and a patient strategist able to harness the ambitions for impact envisioned by a group of accomplished leaders who share a deep commitment to their community.

Operationally, the Executive Director must ensure all the tactical bases are covered, among them:

- Member engagement and communications
- Daily operations, supported by appropriate administrative systems and staff
- Budgeting and finances
- The ED's overarching role as the Club's constant ambassador, whatever the context.

Strategically, the real measure of the next ED's success will be the ability to help tap the Club's capacity for service beyond its already impressive levels.

Accordingly, assets being sought in the Executive Director include the best possible mix of the following attributes and experiences:

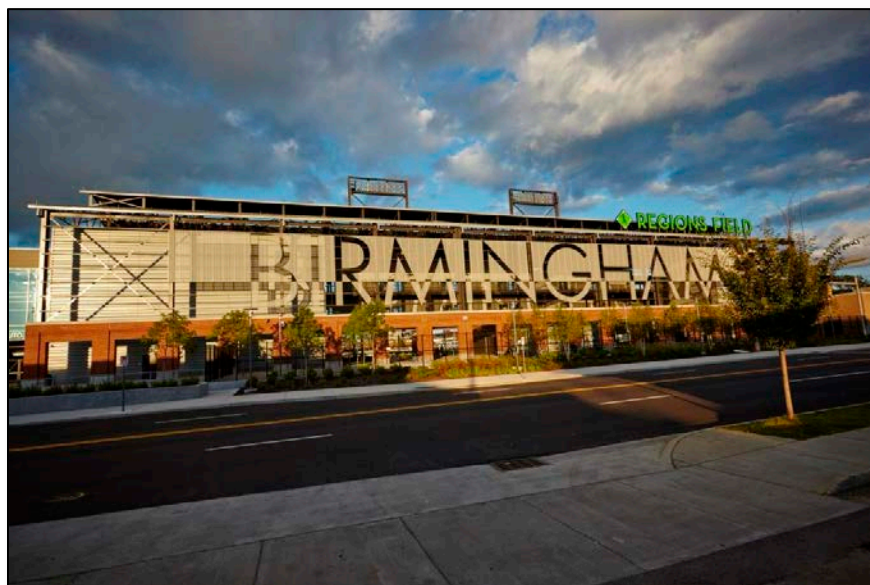
- Authenticity and integrity
- A facility for fostering relationships, whether within the Club, within the community or within the larger Rotary network
- A tactician's touch and a strategist's perspective
- The business savvy to manage a club with high aspirations, members attuned to excellence, and many moving parts
- A demonstrated affinity for RCB's core values of service, fellowship, diversity, integrity and leadership¹⁵
- Experience working with and guiding volunteer leaders
- A board-savvy leader with the competencies to help RCB shape and achieve its ambitious goals for enhanced community impact
- An engaging, collaborative operating style, equally effective with professional staff, seasoned members, emerging leaders and community partners



¹⁵ <https://rotarynewsonline.org/core-values/>

- The proven ability to get things done through other people, leveraging the Club's considerable leadership and financial capabilities in pursuit of bold goals
- A global mindset supported by the ability to marshal local resources to great effect elsewhere
- Enthusiasm for the occasional travel, both regionally and internationally, that is integral to the role. For example, the Executive Director will be expected to join the Birmingham contingent for the next [Rotary International convention](#)¹⁶, to be held June 6-10, 2020 in Honolulu
- A compelling communicator experienced in the power of effective messaging, whether conveyed one-on-one or via the full range of available media
- The maturity to represent a club of leaders, the creativity to engage them, the humility to embrace service above self, and the gumption to aim high.

**For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect, please
email RCB@BoardWalkConsulting.com
or call Sam Pettway, John Sparrow or Paula Nicholas at
(404) 262-7392.**



¹⁶ <https://www.riconvention.org/en>