

Hilgers named Rotary district governor

REMO ZACCAGNA – Herald-Tribune staff



Supplied: Kevin Hilgers and his wife Janice McNeice. Hilgers is the new governor for Rotary District 5370.

For the first time in more than 50 years, a Grande Prairian has been named governor of a Rotary International district.

Kevin Hilgers, a member of the Rotary Club of Grande Prairie since 1997, was named governor for District 5370 on Saturday. Art Balfour was the last district governor from Grande Prairie in 1958.

Hilgers will be governor of the district for 2012-13, and his selection also means that Grande Prairie will host the district conference in 2013.

"It's an honour, a real honour, because you've been chosen to lead all these wonderful business leaders in this giant district, and to be the first in 50 years from Grande Prairie is even more of an honour and privilege," he said.

District 5370 is Rotary's third biggest in the world in terms of territory, encompassing parts of Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and Alberta.

The district is home to more than 2,500 members and 60 clubs, three of them in Grande Prairie alone.

"The job of the district, and therefore the district governor, is to assist the clubs to get to the next level. So when clubs are struggling, or they want advice, or they want inspiration, that comes from the district headed by the district governor," Hilgers said.

"A large part of my job that year will be I visit every club in the district. So I'll be driving with my wife from North Battleford to Fort Nelson, Yellowknife down to Jasper and all points in between."

This isn't the first time that Hilgers, 46, a past-president of the Grande Prairie club, has submitted his name to become district governor, having gone through the entire process two years ago.

He joined Rotary by chance in 1997 after a friend invited him to attend a lunch meeting.

"It was a very impressive crowd in there, (all those) business leaders, and that's impressive. I joined to network and I joined as well because I believe in being a part of the community, and that includes giving back to the community."

Hilgers and his wife, Janice McNeice, will soon attend various Rotary conventions in Lisbon, Bangkok, San Diego, New Orleans, and the International Rotary Convention in Montreal in 2010.

They will also attend a week-long training session in London, Ont., next November.

He said that as governor he hopes to tackle various issues and challenges plaguing service organizations like Rotary across North America.

"All service clubs are challenged with deteriorating membership, so how do I inspire people to bring in more quality members? How do we inspire Joe Average to want to join a service club, not necessarily just Rotary?" he said, adding that he would like to start a youth movement.

"The greying of North America is even more prevalent in the service clubs."

But a youth movement is not needed in Grande Prairie or surrounding areas, he said. The city has one Rotaract club (18-30 years old) and two Interact clubs (high school) with the second one recently opening up at Sexsmith Secondary school.

"I think that young people today are looking for things to bite their teeth into, to do, to serve the world, to serve the environment, and Interact is a fantastic way to do it."

Hilgers said District 5370 is doing relatively well compared to other districts in North America in terms of membership, with Grande Prairie one of the stronger places for the Rotary brand.

"We call ourselves the Rotary City in the district, and other people call us Rotary City because we have three very active clubs in Grande Prairie," he said.

"We're a very strong rotary city, we have 300 members and we just sort of think it's about time we have a district governor again from Grande Prairie."

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