

our world



A vine idea

HEIDI KÜHN

Rotary Club of San Francisco

Heidi Kühn arrived in Utsunomiya, Japan, in 1975, a few months after the end of the Vietnam War. She was a Rotary Youth Exchange student, and what she saw and experienced in Japan led her to reflect on the post-World War II reconciliation between that country and her native United States. “The idea of former enemies bridging borders for

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peace left an impression in my heart,” she says.

More than 20 years later, Kühn had become a successful television journalist. She was asked by the Commonwealth Club of California, a well-known public affairs forum, to host an event featuring Jerry White, a land mine survivor who had escorted Princess Diana on her last humanitarian mission in 1997. It was a short time after the death of Diana, whose efforts to ban land mines had inspired Kühn. “That night, I made a prophetic toast,” she recalls. “‘May the world go from mines to vines.’”

Kühn decided to act on those words and founded a nonprofit called Roots of Peace that has worked to remove hundreds of thousands of land mines and other unexploded ordnance from farmland and replace them with productive fields, such as orchards and vineyards.

In Afghanistan, the organization has helped restore fields in the Shomali Plain north of Kabul, which had been a thriving agricultural region until the Taliban burned vineyards, cut down fruit trees, and laid land mines. Since 2003, Roots of Peace has connected growers with supermarket chains in India.

Roots of Peace is also partnering with the Rotary clubs of San Francisco and Bangkok Klongtoey, Thailand, which received a \$197,000 global grant from The Rotary Foundation to remove land mines and plant black pepper vines and taro in Vietnam’s Quang Tri province, and help farmers market the high-value crop.

Kühn and her husband and Roots of Peace partner, Gary Kühn, visited Afghanistan in 2018 to see the fruits of their labor. They flew out of Afghanistan on a cargo plane carrying the harvest.

“To me, that was the greatest inspiration, the greatest moment in my life, to know that we can turn dreams into reality,” Kühn says. “Not just for ourselves, but for countless farmers and families around the world.”

—NIKKI KALLIO



Pingpong in the park

WHEN DIANNE MOORE read an article about how expensive hockey and swimming lessons were for kids in Toronto, she knew exactly what to do.

“I thought, ‘Pingpong is not expensive,’” recalls Moore, a member of the Rotary Club of Toronto Bay-Bloor. “So I took my idea to Toronto Parks and Recreation, and I said, ‘What about having outdoor pingpong tables in parks?’ They said, ‘That’s a great idea. Go for it.’”

Having grown up playing the game with her dad nearly every day, she knew it was a fun, physical activity that didn’t require a lot of costly equipment.

Moore, who was a member of the Rotary Club of Toronto-Forest Hill at the time, approached concrete company Alpha Precasts, which built a prototype at its plant.

The concrete tabletops are set on four large, ball-shaped legs, a clear invitation to play. Each 2-ton table is equipped with a permanent steel “net,” so players need to bring only paddles and balls.

The first table was installed in 2013 in Toronto’s Mel Lastman Square. Now they number more than 100 throughout Toronto, funded partly through donations and partly by the city. Each costs \$3,700 to \$4,500, Moore says.

The tables have caught on elsewhere too. For instance, in 2015, the Toronto-Forest

Hill club donated two of them to the First Nations community in Cross Lake, Manitoba, a remote area that has been plagued by youth suicide and drug use. And in 2016, the club sent a table to France, where it was installed near a memorial to Canadian soldiers who fought in World War I.

Faiza Arshad Alavi, a member of the Rotary Club of Lahore Crescent, Pakistan, learned about the project and brought the idea to her club. She hoped to encourage children to engage in physical activity and thought the tables, designed to endure the extreme cold of Canadian winters, would also withstand Pakistan’s heat. In Lahore,

The tables have caught on from Canada to France to Pakistan.

she says, summer temperatures can soar to 114 degrees Fahrenheit.

The first of four tables manufactured in Lahore was installed in February 2017 at Friends Public School. The club planned to identify more sites in the future.

Moore knew the pingpong tables would provide enjoyment for Torontonians. Now that vision has expanded around the world. “It’s for people of all ages — children, adults, it doesn’t matter,” she says. “It’s just to have fun.”

—NIKKI KALLIO

COURTESY OF CITY OF WINDSOR