



2026 Rotary Eighth Grade Leadership Program – Informational Overview of Our Program

District 5190 is pleased to offer our 15th Residential Rotary Eighth Grade Leadership Program (REGL), a special youth leadership program at Grizzly Creek Ranch in Portola, CA on **September 11 – 13, 2026 (REGL I)**, and on **September 18 – 20, 2026 (REGL II)**.

Background:

REGL was started in 2009 as a day program by the Rotary Clubs of Sparks and Sparks Centennial Sunrise, and four middle schools in Sparks. In 2011-2016 the Rotary Clubs of Alturas, Portola and several clubs in the Grass Valley/Auburn area expanded REGL to include a 3-day residential program to serve middle school students throughout our large District. Beginning in 2017, District 5190 offered two residential REGL sessions open to all District 5190 Rotary Clubs and their sponsored schools. Sadly, we took a break in 2020 and did not have our REGL camps due to Covid 19, but we reopened REGL in 2021. Please join us in 2026!

Purpose:

The purpose of REGL is to provide high quality leadership training with a strong emphasis on ethics to selected 8th grade students who have demonstrated leadership skills. Our aim is to provide these selected students with tools for the difficult choices that they face as they move into high school and beyond. **Our Theme for 2026 is “Create Lasting Impact.”**

Through our experience from Rotary Youth Leadership Awakening (RYLA) for students entering their senior year of high school, along with the Ethics Initiative materials developed for Rotary by the Josephson Institute, we benefit from the expertise and energy of **Dean and Rochelle Whellams**. They are the program directors at RYLA, and along with the staff of Grizzly Creek Ranch (Sierra Nevada Journeys), we are most fortunate to offer an amazing program for our 8th grade students.

2026 Program Offering:

REGL I - Our three-day weekend residential camp at Grizzly Creek Ranch will begin at noon on Friday, September 11th and conclude with graduation on Sunday, September 13th, beginning at 3 pm.

REGL II - Our three-day weekend residential camp at Grizzly Creek Ranch will begin at noon on Friday, September 18th and conclude with graduation on Sunday, September 20th beginning at 3 pm.

District 5190 Rotary clubs play an integral part by sponsoring middle schools (**\$2,000 for 5 students per school**) and assigning one or more Rotary REGL coordinators to work closely with the school principals and the REGL operations committee. The clubs therefore maintain a good relationship with the middle schools in their community and provide support for the students in their continued growth as ethical leaders.

The middle school principals choose five student participants (and one girl and one boy alternate) based

on demonstrated leadership traits. In this way we hope to capitalize on those natural leadership abilities to produce positive leadership skills. We engage recent RYLA graduates as Counselors, small group facilitators and role models for the program.

During these three days, the students become acquainted with each other, the program directors (Dean and Rochelle Whellams) and the RYLA Counselors. Topics covered in the training include respect, truth and trustworthiness, communication, and teamwork.

The weekend includes a ropes course day, with further work on effective communications, teambuilding, leadership, and confidence. The ropes course is conducted by Sierra Nevada Journeys, the same group that the RYLA camp uses.

On Sunday, the students work on goal setting, breaking through obstacles, and service. They will initiate a service project for their school or community by assembling Care Kits with needed hygiene products that help those in need. In collaboration with their principals and Rotary Clubs these REGL students will assemble more kits for school or community distribution by the end of the school year.

We end the program with a graduation attended by family members, friends and faculty members. Each student takes a turn on stage to speak about what insights they each are taking away from the training.

Outcomes of the program include:

- Increased confidence and communication skills, as we will see during the graduation ceremony.
- Focus on ethical values of respect, truth, character, responsibility and service as evidenced by the conversation, comments and behavior of the students.
- Increased leadership skills as evidenced by greater success in meeting challenges presented in the sessions.
- Increased communications skills as evidenced by improved success in accomplishing group tasks presented in the sessions.
- Increased self-knowledge and understanding of individual thinking and behavioral attributes.
- Greater appreciation of the value of diversity in a team based on experiences and insights gained during the sessions.
- Increased understanding of how their attitude can affect their lives — “get to,” instead of “have to” — as evidenced by comments from the principals.
- Longer term, we expect the program to help the middle school students become “positive” leaders and agents of change in a positive way in their school and community. It is our hope that being able to see how to use their influence for good, and increasing their confidence in making positive changes, will help them make good decisions in their lives.

For all the students, the training will be a benefit as they transition to high school and life beyond.

- They now have a peer group for positive support and a greater sense of self-confidence.
- All the students become more aware of, and understand, problems that others may have in their lives.
- This sympathy and empathy will lead to less bullying and destructive criticism with other students.
- The students will have increased respect—for others and for themselves—with a long-term

benefit for us all.

- The students will consider their goals, and the obstacles to their goals. We expect this process to have a positive impact on achieving those goals, including staying in school and going to college.
- All the students will participate in a service project assembling Care Kits for their school or community. We expect that this experience will empower the students to make changes on their own and to learn the joys of giving back.

A further benefit of the program is the experience gained by the Counselors, the high school seniors who volunteer to work with us. These RYLA graduates are able to expand and improve their own leadership and communication abilities through their work with the eighth graders. Each come away with a renewed sense of the joy of giving back and for making a positive difference.

Lastly, the exposure to Rotary is a long-term benefit to be considered. The students gain awareness of other youth programs offered by Rotary, such as Interact, RYLA and Rotary Youth Exchange (RYE), and became acquainted with Rotarians in their community, as well as hearing about other projects in which Rotarians are involved. The family and friends of the students also gain some awareness and exposure to Rotary and its presence and impact within the community.

We hope your club will sponsor a middle school in your community and participate in the Rotary Eighth Grade Leadership Program. If a presentation or discussion with your Club would be of value, please contact us. We look forward to hearing from you.

Your District 5190 Rotary Eighth Grade Leadership Camp Director,

Paula

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