

THE ISLAND

Rotarians offer WTC program

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By FRANK WILLIAMS
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While the city was still engulfed in clouds of dust and chaos after the collapse of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, Helen Reisler, president of the Rotary Club of New York, already had received dozens of e-mails offering condolences and help from Rotarians around the nation and world.

She collected more than 350 messages during the months that followed, and has since translated her contacts into some relief for the victims' loved ones.

Working with her international brethren, Ms. Reisler and the Rotary Club are offering family "adoption" programs and vacation trips to New Zealand, South Africa, England and Germany.

"Everyone around the world was so concerned with us. I always felt the Rotary world is a beautiful, living world," said Ms. Reisler.

Families of victims now can apply for the Rotary's Adopt-A-NY-Family Project, which is being offered by clubs in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Milipitas, Calif.

"The Grand Rapids club offered to have three of their families adopt one New York family each," said Jim Thompson of Wester-

leigh, co-coordinator for the New York Rotary 911 Adoption/Vacation Committee. "Three hundred Michigan families will adopt 100 New York families in need."

In addition to giving financial assistance and addressing special needs for one year, Thompson said the families will correspond and hopefully "forge an ongoing relationship."

If more than 100 New Yorkers apply, Thompson said there will be no problem to "work it out and get everybody."

"That won't be a problem at all. We're looking to fulfill every need," said Thompson.

The Milipitas Rotary Club plans to adopt one New York family and prefers a mother with one to two children, who lost a husband.

"All this is going to go to anybody who was directly affected by the tragedy. It just has to be a legitimately close relationship. We're going to do our best to fulfill all the requests we get," said Thompson.

Free vacation packages are also being offered as "a great way to let the victims' families relax," said Ms. Reisler, the first woman president of America's host Rotary club.

New Zealand families from the Nelson area will provide accommodations for up to 100 singles, couples or families who are coping with the disaster. The vacation on the other side of the world will include 10 days of rest and recuperation while staying with a host family. The trip includes sightseeing, meals, entertainment and transport to and from airports.

The Rotary Club of Wellington North, New Zealand, is offering a two-week vacation for children who have lost a parent and are facing financial hardship. Preferring children between the ages of 10 and 14 years old, they are taking 10 to 12 children in a group accompa-

nied by one or two adults. Rotary families will host and all expenses (including pocket money) within New Zealand are paid.

So far, the Rotary clubs are not able to provide the airfare for most of the trips, but Ms. Reisler said they "are still in the process of looking into getting that paid, too."

"We're getting in touch with the Red Cross and appealing to the airlines' good will and sense of patriotism," said Ms. Reisler.

But the Rotary Club of Villingen-Schwenningen, Germany, is offering a one-to-two-week vacation and is collecting money to pay for the flight costs. Children of lost police officers and firefighters are eligible.

Also preferring the families of rescue and emergency workers is the Rotary Club of Chichester Harbour, England. They are offering a two-week stay in the homes of Rotarians in the spring or summer.

Finally, the Rotary Club of Helderberg, South Africa, near Capetown, wants families needing to recover to join them for three weeks of sightseeing and fellowship functions. They'll pay for accommodation and board with a host family, outdoor activities and transportation to and from the airport.

Thompson said interested families can call him at (646) 336-2316 for an application.

Rotary is an international organization, composed of business and professional men and women, who volunteer humanitarian services to their individual communities as well as the world. Their stated goal is to create good will, peace and greater understanding. There are 30,000 Rotary clubs in 163 countries with a global membership of 1.2 million.

"I'm honored and looking forward to bringing some joy to the families of Staten Island's victims," said Thompson.