

Rotary Club of Palgrave's Weekly Rotary Minute

By Craig Robbins

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More than a million refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan streamed into the European Union last year. Most entered through Greece after a harrowing raft trip across the Aegean Sea from Turkey. Once there, they made their way north, often on foot, travelling more than 1,000 miles through the rugged mountains of the Balkan countries towards Germany.

One of these refugees is Muhammad Mallah Hamza, 26, an ethnic Kurd who decided to leave his native Syria in 2014. The trip led him to Feldbach in southeastern Austria. The final stop of Mallah's journey proved fateful both for him and the Rotary Club of Feldbach.

On his first day at the shelter, he wandered into town seeking bread, when he met Fritz Hummel, a 69-year-old baker and Rotarian. Fritz and Mallah developed a close friendship. Fritz commented that Rotary wants to help people and that is what he wanted to do. Feldbach Rotarians were best known for sponsoring the town's annual Christmas concert and raising scholarship money for local students. But Mallah and Fritz Hummel led the club to becoming more deeply involved in helping refugees from Syria in Austria. The centrepiece of the club's effort is a program to collect donations of money and household items to help them adjust. The club gives them clothes, food, computers, and televisions, as well as used bicycles. Most importantly, professionals from the club, such as doctors and teachers, have become very valuable contacts for the refugees.

This is another example of where Rotarians work to improve someone's quality of life in the world.

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