

# From Bollywood to Adelaide

## A ROTARY SUCCESS STORY



From Bollywood producer to 2022-23 president of the Rotary Club of Adelaide, SA, Rajeev Kamineni is leading Australia's second biggest Rotary club into its centenary year as it prepares to officially kick off celebrations in August 2023.

By Amy Fallon

**B**ollywood may be nearly 10,000 kilometres away from South Australia, but former film producer Rajeev Kamineni says there are some lessons he learnt on movie sets there that have come in surprisingly handy as the 100th president of the Rotary Club of Adelaide.

"We are, at the end of the day, at the mercy of the stars. If suddenly one doesn't turn up for the filmmaker that means the whole day's schedule has to be cancelled," says Rajeev.

"So that taught me something that I apply in Rotary – just get on with

it. No amount of micro-managing and planning can guarantee anything."

He stresses that Rotary is completely volunteer run.

"We can't force their help, we can only request it. If I have to manage 10 volunteers, let's say in a shelter house, I can't call them and say, 'you're fired'. We have to see if they take up the responsibility and run with it. That's another big learning from the movie industry that I brought into Rotary."

Rajeev was just four years old when he decided he wanted to be a movie producer after seeing a man in Vijayawada, in India's southeast, changing the film posters on the streets

outside his bedroom.

"He would arrive every Wednesday on his bike and change the film poster. It was the highlight of my week and I thought he had the coolest job."

Rajeev experienced his first major impression of the film industry when he was six years old.

"I watched the first *Star Wars* movie at the cinema. My mother said I sat there for the entire two and a half hours with my mouth wide open, and I never blinked. It was just so fascinating to watch, and it drew me into the industry."

It would take him nearly another three decades, but he would finally fulfill his childhood ambition of working in Bollywood. He started financing films in 2007, and since then he has also worked on the production of movies, including *Naan Ee* by critically acclaimed Indian film director S.S Rajamouli. Rajeev's company, Picture House Media Ltd, adapted the award-winning French



film *The Intouchables* into a successful Bollywood movie. He has also worked on the films *Brahmotsavam*, *Kshanam*, *Irandam Ulagam* and *Yevanda*.

To date, he has been involved in producing 14 movies and financing 35.

Rajeev's Rotary journey began when he was around eight years old, when his father, who was a surgeon, started taking him to club meetings with him. His mother, a paediatrician, was an Inner Wheel member.

"If it was not for my family, I would not even have known about Rotary," says Rajeev, who went on to join the Rotary Club of Madras in Chennai, in India's south.

In 2017, after racking up one decade in the film industry, he decided to take a break from it.

He called one of his professors from his time studying for his Master's Degree in International Management, International Business and International Relations in Queensland, who was now living in

Adelaide. He encouraged Rajeev to move there also, and one of the first things he did after arriving in the city was to check on Rotary meetings.

As a self-confessed cricket tragic, he was delighted to find a club that meets at Adelaide Oval and signed up straight away.

"I knew that the Rotary Club of Adelaide was one of the oldest clubs in Australia, that cricket legend Don Bradman was a member and they met at Adelaide Oval – one of the most famous cricket grounds in the world – for meetings every week. It was a perfect match where my passion for cricket and Rotary came together."

Today, Rajeev fits in meetings around his positions as Associate of Head Accreditation of the Adelaide Business School at the University of Adelaide and as Academic Director of The Academy by Deloitte at the same institution. He also has a PhD in movie entrepreneurship from the university.

In his seven years with the Rotary Club of Adelaide, one of the club's projects Rajeev is proudest of is Nurture Kits, which involved giving care kits containing coffee mugs, coffee, tea, chocolate, lip balm and hand sanitiser to medics working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other projects include helping children with hearing problems in Tonga, and water treatment projects in Sri Lanka.

In its 100th year, with approximately 180 current members, Rajeev says one challenge that Australia's

third oldest club has is attracting younger people.

"It's hard to get them to come to our meetings because they are on a Wednesday lunchtime, so if you're working full time you have to take two hours off from work. That's why we also have evening meetings, social meetings, and weekend activities."

When Rajeev joined the Adelaide club, the average age of a member was about 69, but this has now dropped to approximately 65.

"It's an ongoing process, but we need to have younger members, diverse groups of members," says Rajeev, who is living proof of this gradual shift in better community representation.

"I can be as culturally and linguistically diverse as possible. My accent itself sounds different to begin with."

He points out that the club's president two years earlier was a woman, and that members have come from diverse backgrounds and contribute different skill sets and expertise, a step towards change that he believes Rotary as an entire organisation needs to embrace.

With a Rotary success story set in Bollywood that also includes a stint as a Rotary club president in Adelaide, Rajeev says his career to date is full of honours.

"I might be one of those fortunate guys who got to do what they really loved a lot in life," he says.

The Rotary Club of Adelaide's 101st president, Cam Pearce, will begin his term on July 1, 2023. ABU