

# Gazette

## COMMENT

### Oldest graduate inspires all of us

**T**HERE is an old saying which says age is just a number and should be no barrier to you achieving things.

No-one embodies that more than Betty Mandelli.

She is set to receive a well-deserved degree from Essex University at the age of 75.

Inspired by her daughter and her cousin, she took the plunge to study therapeutic communication and organisation to try to help her in her medical career.

Hopefully the new skills she has acquired will enable her to help even more people.

Clearly Betty has faced many challenges in her life which makes her remarkable achievement even greater.

No doubt, next month we will be bringing you extraordinary stories about young people who have taken their GCSEs and A Levels at a much younger age than is intended.

And their is much to be admired about the effort, talent and commitment to achieve so much so young.

But Betty shows you can keep on learning no matter how old you are.

She is also a shining example of the contribution made by so many people from abroad to our communities, especially in the health service.

After deciding to leave Zimbabwe with a wealth of experience in nursing, she has used all of her years of knowledge to work hard and give back to society here even though red tape has stopped her from getting the job title she has perhaps deserved.

Her achievements should be an inspiration to each and every one of us.

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■ Vibrant - Lesley Sulley who has become a Rotary District Governor

# Equality in motion for Rotary clubs

"MALE, pale, frail and stale" - the words Lesley Sulley uses when she explains what she thinks is other people's perception of the typical Rotary Club member.

Describing herself as "lively and vibrant" Lesley, 65, is clearly at pains to distance herself from that unflattering and rather archaic description.

First and foremost, she's female.

And while in 2018 it shouldn't make a difference, Lesley, who is this year's District Governor for her Rotary area, says it has, on this occasion.

"Women have been accepted into Rotary for 35 years. I am challenged regularly and interestingly, my husband is challenged, on it.

"It is male Rotarians and sometimes their wives. Their issue is they have said things to me like 'We were happy, our husbands were going out on a week night, now women are spoiling it'."

But adds Lesley: "It is only the tiniest minority and our biggest defenders are male.

"People in general are frightened of change. It doesn't mean once they get over the hiccup that they don't approve. Most clubs will say women joining is the best thing that has happened."

Lesley, of Braiswick, joined one of the town's four Rotary

clubs, Colchester Centurion, ten years ago.

Her appointment to district governor will mean she is her Rotary district's second woman to the role, for an area which spans Essex, east Hertfordshire and east London.

In total there are 63 clubs in the district of which seven don't have any women members.

Across Great Britain and Ireland, women make up just 17 per cent of the membership.

Evidently the organisation, which has been around for 113 years and is couched in helping the community, clearly still has some catching up to do.

Lesley is helping to trailblaze that. She joined Rotary while she was still running her own travel agency, Leisuretime tours, after a long career in tourism.

She founded the Colchester Tourist Information from its first home in Trinity Street.

Being in a female minority existed even in Lesley's early career. Lesley studied business

management at North East Essex Technical College, now Colchester Institute.

"I was the only female in 32 boys throughout the whole two years of the course," she recalls.

It was another business woman, Kate Bunting, who suggested Lesley joined the Rotary.

Lesley's club was the first in Colchester to be open to men and women and was founded by Christine Beedle 18 years ago - in order for women to join.

The other three clubs have since followed suit and there are about 35 female Rotarians across Colchester.

So what have women brought to Rotary?

"Diversity," says Lesley.

"To be honest, women have a different sort of approach to things. There are good and bad woman Rotarians and good and bad men.

"I would hate to say one sex does a better job than another.

"It has just moved with the times, not as quickly as it should

have done."

She adds: "What they say to me is I am a breath of fresh air. I don't go down the route of the boring speeches. I tend to try to make them interesting and fun but still get across a serious message."

Lesley's tenure as District Governor will be for a year but, as with her predecessors, has been three years in the making since her 2015 election.

Her successor will be a woman, Pauline Dean, and from her Colchester club too.

District governors undergo intense training as they are seen as the figurehead to administer the Rotary Foundation's money to good causes.

"It is such a massive commitment," says Lesley.

This has involved meeting district governors in America to take on board how she can motivate others and increase membership too.

Other essentials are to promote a positive public image and serve as spokesperson for the district, conducting conferences and other meetings.

Lesley said: "I am directly responsible to the international president. I have got to know what I am talking about."

And it certainly sounds as though she does.