Richard “Dick” Morse was a well-known architect and community leader in Springfield whose influence is evident in buildings throughout the area. Dick entered into partnership with Ralls Melotte to form Melotte-Morse Architects in 1978. Their partnership grew to become Melotte Morse Leonatti Parker, Ltd., a firm specializing in architecture and sustainable design.

Through his Springfield Sunrise Rotary membership of 25 years, Dick impacted the community as well, and one of his strongest passions was the Rotary Youth Exchange Program. He was continually involved in leadership roles with Rotary Youth Exchange not only in Springfield, but throughout central Illinois. Dick saw how international youth exchange experiences had positive and life-changing impacts on high school students.

Thanks to a generous donation from Dick’s wife, Nathela Chatara, the Rotary Club of Springfield Sunrise has established the Richard Morse Rotary Youth Exchange Scholarship Fund, a designated fund at the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln.

“My family and I created this in Dick’s name because Rotary Youth Exchange was his passion,” said Nathela. “Dick sincerely believed Rotary Exchange students were global ambassadors helping to build understanding around the world. He was deeply committed to this program, and we, his family, wanted to honor that commitment.”

The Rotary Club of Springfield Sunrise will administer the scholarship application process. Students within Rotary District 6460 will be eligible to apply, with priority given to students who reside in the City of Springfield or within 25 miles. Students undergo a rigorous selection process to participate in Rotary Youth Exchange, and they incur significant personal expense to study abroad. This scholarship will make it more feasible for students to participate in this life-changing opportunity.

Dick was a passionate volunteer and served as Rotary Youth Exchange Chair.

“Dick’s dedication and rectitude set the tone for all of the youth exchange chairs who followed in his path, and he made working with the youth exchange students enjoyable,” said Barb Malany of Sunrise Rotary who worked with Dick for many years to host students and lead the District’s Youth Exchange Program.
“For as long as I knew him, Dick was always community-minded,” says David Parker, MMLP partner and member of Sunrise Rotary. “When he and Ralls started the firm in 1978, their business model included assisting non-profits and human services organizations with their facilities. Dick’s legacy is not only an architectural firm with a passion for sustainable design and helping non-profits with their facility needs, but having employees who contribute to their community.”

“Rotary is involved with many projects, and Youth Exchange has been described by many as Rotary's best project to promote peace in the world,” said Brian Barstead, Sunrise Rotary and 2018-2019 Rotary District Governor. “It is costly and complex to send and host students. It takes very passionate people to give the time and energy to make that work. We were blessed to have Dick with us to make that possible.”

“We are delighted that Nathela has chosen to honor the memory of Dick by creating a scholarship for high school students who wish to travel to another country for a year. His indomitable spirit and legacy will live on and continue to inspire young people through the scholarship program,” said Rotary Sunrise President Bill Wheelhouse.

For information on starting a designated fund or to contribute to the Richard Morse Rotary Youth Exchange Scholarship Fund, please the Community Foundation at 217.789.4431 or visit CFLL.org.

Special thanks to Karen Witter for writing this article.