

UP FRONT



DIANA MARKOSIAN

Pioneer

GURGEN BARIKYAN
*Rotary Club of Yerevan
International, Armenia*

They sometimes met in the cold and empty auditorium of an unused theater. It was the early 1990s; the Soviet Union was heading for collapse. Electricity came on for one hour a day. People heated their homes with wood stoves, food was rationed, and salaries hovered around US\$10 a month. It was amid these challenges that Gurgen Barikyan, a professor of linguistics at Yerevan State Linguistic University Bryusov, helped form the Rotary Club of Yerevan – Armenia’s first – with a group of friends. Six years later, in 1996, it received its charter. The members may not have yet fully understood all that Rotary was, but they knew they wanted to be part of an organization that valued humanity and friendship. “We realized we could benefit our people through Rotary,” says Barikyan, who also helped establish his current club. One of the Yerevan club’s first projects involved a young musician who had been invited to attend a competition but had outgrown her violin. The fledgling Rotarians bought her a new instrument for \$300 – a huge sum at the time. Barikyan’s daughter, Anna – who along with her brother, Grigori, is now a Rotaractor – says her father’s reason for being a Rotarian is simple: “I think that without Rotary, he can’t live.” – KATYA CENGEL