

The Evolution of Rotary Service

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You have just seen a very attractive video of the presidential emphases for the year ahead, 2010-11. Seldom have district governors been given such a clear vision of the specific programs that are yours to promote and achieve. These emphases are not new programs, but they do give the Rotary world a fantastic focus for a great year ahead.

Few Rotarians have the experience to really know how Rotary programs are created and how they have evolved throughout Rotary's history. That's what I have been asked to discuss this morning.

Rotary programs do not start with the RI Board of Directors or the Trustees of the Foundation. Nearly all of our programs grew out of a simple idea started in the mind of a creative Rotarian who saw a need and said, "Maybe our club can do something about that."

Perhaps many of you have never heard of the name Edgar "Daddy" Allen, a Rotarian in the Rotary Club of Elyria, Ohio. Back in 1919, Daddy Allen firmly believed that every Rotary club should help crippled and handicapped children. His son had been killed in a tragic streetcar accident, and Daddy Allen took up the cause — raising money, speaking to Rotary clubs and traveling the nation, urging every Rotary club to make disabled and handicapped children the major focus of Rotary. Soon, every Rotary club had a "crippled children committee" concerned about youngsters who suffered from injuries, birth defects, blindness, or crippling diseases. State and national crippled children societies were formed. Rotary's efforts led to the creation of the organization we now know as the Easter Seals society for people with disabilities.

Why was the passion of Daddy Allen such an important milestone in Rotary? Because the pressure to make handicapped children the primary activity of all Rotary clubs led to long and heated debates throughout the Rotary world. But finally, at the Rotary convention in 1922, the Rotary world voted and rejected the plan to make crippled children's activities Rotary's single activity. And that meant that from then on, every Rotary club would be fully autonomous to select the club programs and service activities that best fit their club and community.

So Rotary clubs went back to selecting their own projects — delivering Christmas baskets, collected shoes, food, and clothing for needy families, and giving toys and books to underprivileged youngsters. Clubs built park benches and community playgrounds. So, for our first 50 years, Rotary service activities were largely done by individual Rotary clubs selecting projects in their own communities.

However, a major change took place during the 1960s as clubs began to look at the whole world as their community — and international service activities began to emerge. In 1963, RI President Carl Miller introduced the Matched District and Club Program. Shortly after, in 1965, The Rotary Foundation launched the very first Matching Grants. The following year, in 1966, the concept of World Community Service was officially launched. Rotary clubs began to reach across national boundaries and the oceans of the world. International service began to complement local community projects. The next year, 1967, Rotary expanded its international activities with Rotary Volunteers Abroad, offering technical and professional assistance to developing nations. Disaster relief became another extension of Rotary clubs into worldwide service.

But some Rotary leaders dreamed of doing even more. In 1978, RI President Clem Renouf initiated the Health, Hunger and Humanity (3-H) program to enable Rotary to complete international projects much larger than any club or district could ever attempt. I was a cochairman of that

first 3-H Committee, and we realized that this was to be a huge departure for Rotary clubs to undertake and support large-scale projects that could *really* make a difference in the world. The program was not enthusiastically endorsed and was actually challenged and criticized by many senior Rotary leaders.

Fortunately, special funds were being collected to celebrate Rotary's 75th anniversary in 1980, and those funds launched the first 3-H program. We wanted an immediate success story to demonstrate that the program was effective, so the very first proposal we selected for the very first 3-H project provided polio immunization for six million children in the Philippines. This effort, and other successful immunization projects, became the forerunner of the PolioPlus program to eradicate polio throughout the entire world. Other 3-H projects provided community sanitation in Colombia, national literacy programs in Thailand, health care and food production projects in several nations, and much more. Rotary had found a way to launch huge national and regional projects, in spite of the opposition from many Rotary leaders.

Building upon the 3-H program, in 1981, RI President Stan McCaffrey appointed the New Horizons Committee, which set a new path for future decades. Among the committee's 30 recommendations which the RI Board adopted was the idea of providing polio vaccine for all the children of the world. The massive fundraising campaign did not really begin until President Carlos Canseco in 1984-85 said, "It is time to get started." And we did.

As PolioPlus has progressed with such success in the world, a whole new attitude has been created in Rotary. There are so many illustrations of how Rotarians with new ideas believed they could make a difference in the world.

Tony Zino, a New York Rotarian, read of a child badly mauled by a hyena in Uganda. He was so touched by the tragic plight of Margaret-Rose Illukol that he initiated an effort to help her secure the plastic surgery she needed. This simple act of kindness set the stage for a Rotary-initiated program called Gift of Life. In 1974, a second child, five-year-old Grace Agwaru, traveled from Uganda to New York to undergo a four-hour open heart surgical procedure. These simple responses by Rotarians developed into a dynamic program that has provided the gift of life to over 10,000 children, involving 60 Rotary districts worldwide.

In a remote community of Jaipur, India, in 1968, Dr. P.K. Sethi and a local sculptor had an idea that many amputees and persons with birth defects could be given a chance to walk if an inexpensive prosthetic device could be designed. With plastic pipe and scrap rubber, the amazing lightweight Jaipur foot was created. Today, Rotarians have provided the Jaipur foot to over 100,000 men, women, and children around the world, giving them new mobility, independence, and dignity.

When a group of Texas Rotarians, led by J.B. Roberts, learned of the desperate famine among the Tarahumara Indians in Central Mexico, they turned to another sponsored Rotary project, the Breedlove Dehydrated Foods in Lubbock, Texas, and shipped thousands of pounds of dehydrated food to Mexico. This led Rotarians to create Hunger Plus, a new Rotary club-sponsored relief agency to reduce hunger and develop new food supplies. Since 1998, this program has provided Rotary club-sponsored shipments of millions of meals with dehydrated fruits and vegetables to nearly every continent in the world to relieve hunger and malnutrition and offer disaster relief.

In England, Rotarian Tom Henderson had an idea that one box, filled with lifesaving materials and equipment, could be prepared and ready to be sent instantly to areas facing floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis, and other disasters. Thus, the ShelterBox program now provides a tent and supplies for 10 persons, with cooking equipment, sleeping bags, basic tools, a water

container, and other essential items. This program, started by one Rotarian as a club millennium project, has been continued by Rotarians and has spread around the world to enable Rotary clubs to provide immediate disaster relief to over half a million people in more than 30 nations because Rotarians care.

I hope you are seeing that most Rotary-initiated programs started out when just a few Rotarians saw a need and reached out to meet it.

As the years passed, and using the experience gained in our PolioPlus program, many Rotary clubs and districts found that their efforts could be greatly expanded by working with other humanitarian agencies and nongovernmental organizations. A major leap was achieved in 2000 when RI President Frank Devlyn established task forces to create working partnerships with organizations that had common humanitarian goals.

For example, it is estimated that 50 million people live in blindness or have limited vision for the lack of cataract surgery or care for basic eye diseases. By cooperating with several of the leading world agencies, such as the World Health Organization, Global Vision, International Trachoma Initiative, and other agencies, plus support from several worldwide pharmaceutical companies and foundations, Rotarians have created an active program, aptly named Avoidable Blindness. With 3-H grants and Matching Grants, clubs and districts are caring for millions of people afflicted with river blindness, cataracts, trachoma, lack of corrective lenses, and other forms of vision impairment. Rotarians alone have sponsored over a half million cataract surgeries throughout the world. What a tremendous demonstration of the new directions in Rotary's world community service.

In another outreach of Rotary service, over 2,000 Rotary clubs and districts have donated more than 200,000 wheelchairs in 100 countries in cooperation with the Wheelchair Foundation since 2001. These Rotary clubs have given mobility to children and adults who were victims of polio, birth defects, disabling accidents, and disease. Many of these Rotarian-sponsored distributions have been enhanced by Rotary Foundation Matching Grants in cooperation with the Wheelchair Foundation, operating in Canada, England, Australia, Florida, and California. Through these cooperative efforts, over 200,000 people are living a better life because Rotarians saw a need and filled it.

In more recent years, we have seen the creation of a new area of international service: the Rotarian Action Groups. These activities grew out of the long-established Rotary Fellowships, formerly called Rotary Fellowships of Sports and Recreation. The new Rotarian Action Groups are initiating worldwide activities and awareness in such areas as population and development, elimination of malaria, blood donation, multiple sclerosis, polio survivors, disaster relief, and several other humanitarian activities.

One of them is the Water and Sanitation Rotarian Action Group, which is seeking and supporting long-term water initiatives for the 1.2 billion people who do not have safe water and the 2.4 billion who do not have proper sanitation. It is estimated that over 7,000 Rotary clubs are already engaged in water projects. This Rotarian Action Group, working with WaterAid, Water for People, Global Water Challenge, Living Waters for the World, Engineers Without Borders, the Canadian International Development Agency, and many other agencies, churches, and foundations, are promoting clean water and sanitation for millions of people in 40 countries in Africa, 25 nations in Asia, and 17 countries in Latin America.

Another Rotarian Action Group is facing the worldwide devastation caused by HIV/AIDS. Rotarians have reacted to the plague of this deadly disease with a variety of educational, medical, and care-giving activities. In one single project, the AIDS action group is providing care and support for 46,000 orphans and vulnerable children in Africa. Working with USAID, the Coca-Cola

Africa Foundation, Microsoft, Nike, the Gates Foundation, and other foundations, these Rotarians are extending their work in a pilot project in Kenya and other nations throughout the continent. Clearly, Rotarians are giving education, medical care, and hope to the children and youth of Africa.

I urge every district governor to become aware of the potential of these special groups. It may be that Rotarian Action Groups will become the most effective way to achieve the six areas of focus of The Rotary Foundation. Action groups may certainly be the new frontier of Rotary service in the years ahead. Rotarian Action Groups frequently combine the passion and knowledge of Rotarians in a partnership with other nongovernmental organizations to create sustainable humanitarian services not possible by single club or district projects.

With the amazing developments of information communication and technology through the Internet, Rotarians can be linked with critical issues at a moment's notice and the resources of interested Rotarians put to work without hesitation. I assure you, there is no end to the creativity and imagination of Rotarians.

In recent years, we have shown the world — and we have proved to ourselves — that Rotarians can meet even greater challenges by multiplying our resources and working with other organizations and foundations that share common humanitarian goals.

In this evolution of Rotary programs, we must not bypass our other traditional programs that are part of the established fabric of Rotary, all of which grew out of the dreams of individual clubs or Rotarians — Interact, Rotaract, Rotary Community Corps, Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (or RYLA), Rotary Volunteers, Rotary Friendship Exchange, and certainly Rotary Youth Exchange.

Our Youth Exchange program is one of the areas of special emphasis this year. Again, this is a program that began with a few Rotarians in Nice, France. Today, over 7,000 young people participate each year in the rich experiences of Rotary Youth Exchange.

Within The Rotary Foundation's six areas of focus, we will continue to distribute medical equipment, establish blood banks, build schools, provide clean water, improve sanitation, control disease, provide microcredit, remove land mines, enhance literacy, plant seeds for food, restore dignity, assist refugees, and simply bring hope to the world. The list of Rotary projects is almost endless, because the needs of the world are almost unlimited.

The real message I have this morning is that there is *so much more* to Rotary than meeting and eating. For over 100 years, the programs of Rotary have been evolving. Some of the greatest program ideas may still be in the minds of the Rotarians in this room today. Our most exciting activities may come when you are able to inform, motivate, and stimulate your clubs and district into action.

Sadly, there are many Rotarians and Rotary clubs that have not yet discovered the real joy and satisfaction that comes when we share our time, energy, and resources with the people of the world. As governor, you must lead the parade. Don't just let your Rotary clubs stand on the sidewalk and watch the parade go by. Use your leadership to get your clubs on the bandwagon, and be part of the parade yourself!

Rotary's greatest days are still to come! Your president has given you the emphasis and direction for 2010-11. Our most exciting achievements may come when you and your district get involved.

Rotary's achievements of the past are merely the prelude to the Rotary of the future. Rotary has the potential to build better communities and build a better world with the presidential emphases of 2010-11. And would you believe it? It is all up to you, because you have been chosen to lead the Rotary world. That's the task. Now go to it!