

**Glenn E. Estess Sr.**  
**RI president**  
**Keynote address**

Friends and family of Rotary,

It is a great pleasure and a tremendous honor to speak to you again at this historic event, Rotary's centennial convention.

This time last year, when we were gathered together in Osaka, I didn't know what lay ahead for me in my year as president of Rotary International. But I remember thinking to myself, standing on that stage with my family at the beginning of Rotary's centennial year, that I must be one of the most fortunate Rotarians who ever lived. Now, looking back on a truly incredible centennial year, I know that I was right.

Over the course of my year as president, I have been privileged to see Rotary as few people are able to do. I have seen clubs in every area of the Rotary world carry out projects that are changing lives in too many ways to count — from a playground and sports field for low-income children in Arizona to vocational training programs that are restoring self-sufficiency, and self-respect, to polio victims in India. I have visited countries and cultures different in every way from my own home state of Alabama. I have met Rotarians from villages, towns, and cities around the globe. Every day, I was amazed by the diversity in Rotary, its members, its clubs, and its projects.

But there is one characteristic that unites Rotarians around the world, and that is an overwhelming desire to be of assistance. Rotary's willingness to help has earned it international honor and respect. And Rotary's reputation for honesty and integrity has helped it grow, from four men in one office to 1.2 million members in 168 countries. Now, in our centennial year, Rotary is truly an organization with not only the will to do good but the ability to change the world, one positive act at a time.

In our centennial year, it's natural to want to talk about the history of Rotary and where we see ourselves going in the next century. At our convention, today is the day for us to look back together at Rotary's past. But as we *Celebrate Rotary* history with joy in our hearts and pride in our accomplishments, let us not forget about what is the most important: who Rotary is and what Rotary does, in every club, in every community, every day.

Past [RI] President Almon E. Roth understood this very well. Seventy-five years ago, he told Rotarians that Rotary's success or failure would depend on much more than just the number of its members. Success, he wrote, would depend "on the extent to which Rotary's ideals are translated into positive results in personal, business, community, and international life. We shall be known by our works." And there is no question in my mind that Rotary's works at this moment, in every corner of the world, are many, varied, and overwhelmingly good. I know because I have seen them.

In Mexico, I saw a Rotary project that brought hearing aids to deaf children, children who could not afford the device that stood between them and the world of spoken words, music, and the sound of their own laughter. Mary and I will carry with us forever the face of a little girl receiving her first hearing aid. As the aid was switched on, she heard the sound of her mother's voice for the first time. She looked up in amazement at the sound of that voice. Her eyes opened wide, and

she smiled at her mother — the biggest smile we had ever seen. There wasn't a dry eye in the room. That is something neither Mary nor I will ever forget. And it happened because of Rotary.

The good work that Rotary does inspires a new generation of volunteers. Youth Exchange student Daniel Davis helped translate for the doctors involved in that project. He came home afterward and wrote, "On Thursday, I think I did the best deed of my life." He won't ever forget what he saw that day either. I wouldn't be surprised if, 10 or 15 years from now, he comes back to Rotary to get that wonderful feeling of helping others again. That wonderful feeling is why Rotary has survived — and thrived — for 100 years.

With a standing army of 1.2 million volunteers in 32,000 clubs, Rotary breaks down every barrier of nationality, language, religion, and culture. Rotarians are everywhere, and they know their communities — all 32,000 of them. And so, when the tsunami of 26 December 2004 hit South Asia, local Rotarians knew right away what was needed. They were able to begin work within a day of the disaster and call on fellow Rotarians around the world for assistance, sending help exactly where it was most necessary and would do the most good. And when Rotary International announced a fund for tsunami relief, the donations poured in and now stand at well over US\$5 million. That fund will bring assistance to tsunami-affected areas for years to come, rebuilding the homes, schools, and lives devastated by the disaster.

Rotarians know that true humanitarian service means much more than giving a handout and going home. True humanitarian service means committing to the projects that will lead to real and permanent change in the world, one human life at a time. True humanitarian service is about having the courage, the vision, and the practical knowledge to commit to projects that might at first seem like dreams.

PolioPlus, the crowning achievement of Rotary's first 100 years, has brought us to the brink of something no one could have imagined a century ago: a world free of polio. It happened because of Rotarians' hard work and commitment. People like Clem Renouf, Jim Bomar, Chuck Keller, Les Wright, Herb Pigman, Walter Maddocks, Carlos Canseco, Herb Brown, John Severs, Jack Blane, Gustavo Gross, Grant Wilkins, Benny Santos, and especially Bill Sergeant, who took that dream and made it reality. These are but a few of the giants of Rotary who set us on the path toward a polio-free world. There are so many more who deserve recognition; it is impossible to name each one.

The polio effort would not have survived without the leadership that has been so evident for all these years. I thank every one of these great men and women who have worked so hard and for the amazing achievements that they have helped accomplish. Please join me as we express our appreciation for all who have contributed to this remarkable effort. It could not have happened without them. And it could not have happened without The Rotary Foundation.

Last year, the Foundation's Annual Programs Fund received contributions totaling \$61 million. That's roughly \$50 per Rotarian around the world. In an ambitious campaign to double the strength of the Foundation and its ability to make a positive change in the world, we have launched the Every Rotarian, Every Year initiative. The goal is simple: asking every Rotarian to make a donation to the Foundation every year, with an average donation of \$100 per Rotarian.

This is a lot to aim for. But just think what that really means. One hundred dollars, though significant, is not a tremendous sum in most parts of the world. But if we received that amount from every Rotarian, that would be \$120 million every year that we could devote to bringing clean water to children, literacy to the uneducated, renewable food supplies to the hungry, and

health care to the poor and underserved around the world. One hundred dollars may not be a vast amount of money to most Rotarians. But it's more than enough to change — or save — a life. It can buy dozens of mosquito nets to help keep families safe from malaria. It can buy schoolbooks for a whole classroom, rebuilt hearing aids for two children. It can buy enough packets of oral rehydration salts to help 1,000 children recover from deadly waterborne illnesses. It buys education, health, and hope. It very literally buys life. And combined with the contributions of 1.2 million Rotarians, it is an unstoppable force for good in the world.

Few organizations last as long as Rotary has. Rotary has spanned a century that has seen so many changes, good and not so good. But I feel confident in saying that of the changes Rotary has wrought, the overwhelming impact has been good.

There is no question that as we enter Rotary's second century, we are at an unprecedented point of strength and growth. But this is no time to sit back and say that it is a job well done. Polio is nearly gone. But so many health crises remain. Malaria, HIV, malnutrition, and waterborne illnesses claim millions of lives every year. When polio is gone for good, Rotarians will cheer. And *then* we'll keep on working, to make the world a better and safer and healthier place.

Nobody could have known a hundred years ago what the first century of Rotary would bring. And nobody here today knows where Rotary will be a hundred years from now. It isn't our job as Rotarians to predict the future. It is our job to do what we can, as well as we can: to plan well, work hard, give generously, and always *Celebrate Rotary* by putting *Service Above Self*. If we do this, the future will be as bright as the past. If we do this, Rotary will continue to grow and thrive for generations to come. If we do this, we will be proud to call ourselves Rotarians when Rotary is known by its works.

Thank you.