

## **General Secretary's Report to the Convention Los Angeles, June 2008**

It is my pleasure to make this annual report to the RI Convention, in keeping with the requirements of the Bylaws of Rotary International. I hope the information provided here will inform Rotarians about the Secretariat's work in 2007-08 to support the program of RI President Wilfrid J. Wilkinson and the actions of the RI Board and The Rotary Foundation Trustees. If you have questions about the report or comments you'd like to make, send me an e-mail with the subject line "Report to Convention."

### **Eradicating Polio: New Opportunities**

With polio remaining endemic in only Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan, Rotarians have redoubled their efforts to eradicate the virus globally. This push received a big boost in November from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which awarded a US\$100 million challenge grant to Rotary for polio eradication. There were only two conditions: All the money must be spent during the 2008 calendar year, and Rotary must match the funds by December 2010. Following close on the heels of the Gates Foundation grant was a \$3.5 million grant for polio eradication from the Google Foundation, which Rotary will match within a year.

Rotarians have responded enthusiastically to the news of these grants. Already, we've received two very large commitments: \$2 million from Harshad R. and Naina Mehta, of the Rotary Club of Bombay Metropolitan in Maharashtra, India, and \$1 million from Rajashree Birla, an honorary member of the Rotary clubs of Bombay and Mulund. We've also received a number of smaller but significant contributions. One that especially impressed me came from Becky Smith Lanier, a former Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholar who is not a Rotarian but learned about PolioPlus during her 1986-87 scholarship year in Argentina. Her generous \$15,000 gift demonstrates the commitment alumni have to Rotary's ideals and their desire to help the organization continue its critical work.

When Rotary leaders asked clubs to help meet Rotary's \$100 Million Challenge by holding fundraisers each year for the next three years, clubs and districts responded immediately. District 7190 Rotarians jumped into the frigid waters of Lake George in New York, USA, on New Year's Day to raise \$25,000 in support of the challenge. Shortly after this convention ends, hundreds of golfers will take to the links in Ayrshire, Scotland, hoping to beat the record for the most golfers completing a round of the game on a single course in 24 hours. Proceeds will benefit PolioPlus, so participants are encouraged to raise at least £50 (\$100) and solicit sponsorships. If organizers reach their goal of 624 golfers, they will generate more than \$50,000 for polio eradication.

The Gates Foundation grant garnered much positive media coverage for Rotary. Its announcement involved a coordinated global outreach strategy that resulted in 197 news articles worldwide. Rotary Foundation Trustee Chair Robert S. Scott took part in a

telepress briefing with William Gates Sr., cochair of the Gates Foundation, and Dr. Margaret Chan, director-general of the World Health Organization. About 20 journalists representing media outlets in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America were included on the call. In addition, RI President Wilf Wilkinson made the announcement during a press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, which was covered by 15 news organizations.

All our partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative are joining us at the convention to discuss our successful public-private partnership and the global legacy of PolioPlus. In addition to Dr. Chan, we'll be hearing from Ann Veneman, executive director of UNICEF, and Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Also joining us will be Dr. Tadataka Yamada, president of the Gates Foundation's Global Health Program.

In addition to funding eradication activities, the grant from the Gates Foundation and the \$100 million match from Rotarians should inspire governments as well as other foundations and nongovernmental organizations to join with Rotary and its partners to finally rid the world of polio.

### **Communicating with Club Members and the World at Large**

One highlight of this Rotary year was the launch of the rebuilt RI Web site, [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org). The new design streamlined much of the content while making most of it available in all nine Rotary languages. Visitors to the site will now find more Rotary news on a wide variety of topics. For example, you can learn quickly about Rotarian disaster relief efforts and how you can help, find out about critical RI Board decisions, or read heartwarming stories about club and district service worldwide.

The revamped site also offers readers the opportunity to comment on news articles. I encourage everyone to use this feature: It's a great way to share your reactions with other Rotarians and the Secretariat staff.

The changes to the Web site triggered a sharp increase in traffic. The average number of page views per month climbed from 2.8 million to 4.3 million. Clicks on the featured news article more than doubled, from 1,090 to 2,391 per week. The increase in translated content from 5 percent to 95 percent accounts for some of the new interest in the site. For example, monthly page views on the Spanish site jumped from 87,872 to 260,831.

Another exciting new feature is Rotary Images, the image library that contains thousands of photos of club members, projects, and events taken by RI photographers. Rotarians can browse the library and download any of these compelling images free of charge for use on their Web sites, in newsletters and brochures, or for billboards and newspaper supplements. We will be adding to the library regularly as a way of providing Rotarians with high-quality, professional photographs to enhance their communications and public relations materials.

We are also continuing to provide clubs with ready-made television, radio, Internet, billboard, and print public service announcements to help them promote their efforts to local media. *Humanity in Motion IV* focuses on building membership, using the message “Start with Rotary and good things happen.” Many clubs are using these tools in conjunction with PR grants from RI. More than 230 grants of up to \$6,000 per district were awarded in 2007-08 to help Rotarians in 53 countries promote Rotary and their projects to local media and the general public.

All editions of the *Humanity in Motion* series can be downloaded at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org) or viewed on Rotary’s YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/rotaryinternational](http://www.youtube.com/rotaryinternational). Our channel also features segments from *RVM: The Rotarian Video Magazine* and other materials produced by RI.

### **Planning for the Future**

As part of its strategic planning efforts, the RI Board adopted the following mission for Rotary International: The mission of Rotary International, a worldwide association of Rotary clubs, is to provide service to others, promote high ethical standards, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through its fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders.

To support this mission, the Board agreed on five core values that define the organization: diversity, fellowship, integrity, leadership, and service. The Board also approved the RI Strategic Plan for 2007-10, which establishes seven priorities, each with its own set of goals, focused on eradicating polio, advancing recognition and public image, increasing our capacity to provide service, expanding membership, emphasizing our vocational service commitment, optimizing our leadership talents, and ensuring continuity and consistency in our organization.

The Rotary Foundation Trustees made significant advances on the Future Vision Plan to streamline the Foundation and make it a more effective and dynamic force for good in the world. The goals are to simplify access to the Foundation, direct more resources to projects with high-impact and sustainable outcomes, and gain greater public recognition for the Foundation’s work. Based on input from a variety of stakeholders, the plan will allow the Foundation to build on its strengths by strategically focusing on a specific range of concerns. In addition, the plan will give districts greater control over their District Designated Funds, an outcome that will also simplify Foundation operations.

The Future Vision Plan will begin with a three-year pilot involving about 100 districts worldwide. The plan offers opportunities for clubs and districts to make a greater impact in meeting urgent humanitarian needs and to strategically partner with organizations that have recognized expertise in one of the areas of focus determined by the Trustees and RI Board.

In line with the RI Strategic Plan and the Future Vision Plan, we have implemented a strategic plan for the Secretariat that focuses on the people and processes critically

important to its operation. Our goals are to optimize our staff's knowledge and talents to better serve Rotarians, support RI and Foundation priorities, apply a continuous business process improvement plan, and refine the customer service program to ensure the organization's long-term success.

I encourage Rotarians to learn more about long-range planning for RI and the Foundation at [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org).

### **Supporting Membership Efforts**

To develop strategies for counteracting the alarming membership decline in North America, RI President Wilfrid J. Wilkinson convened seven membership conferences: six in the United States and one in Canada. These two-day meetings focused on current membership trends and challenges in the region, including demographic shifts and public image concerns, and underscored the need to identify and target recruitment efforts to all relevant business and professional populations in the community. To promote the idea of individual responsibility for membership, the president developed a new-member sponsor pin, which he personally presented to any Rotarian at the conferences who had sponsored a new member. The meetings drew a total of more than 2,900 Rotarians.

As of 30 April, Rotary clubs worldwide showed a net increase of about 4,500 members over the same time last year. Parts of Europe and Asia continued to demonstrate growth, and North America remained stable.

A survey of district membership chairs revealed several interesting facts. Asked to identify the top three factors contributing to membership losses, respondents cited clubs that do not appeal to younger members, weak club leadership, and weak club programs. The areas they believed clubs needed to improve most: recruiting diverse members, identifying and inviting prospective members, and publicizing events in the media.

### **Increasing Service**

Providing service to Rotary clubs and districts is the Secretariat's primary mission, and all staff are charged with promoting efficiency and increasing responsiveness to Rotarians' needs. This year, we have begun working on security enhancements for conducting Rotary business online. New features on Member Access include tighter password controls, streamlined registration via e-mail, and forgotten password functionality. Rotarians will be able to view and maintain their personal data when a new membership system is implemented in 2009-10. This system will also allow staff to respond more quickly, completely, and accurately to Rotarians' requests while protecting the privacy of their personal information.

### **Working for Peace: The Rotary Centers**

Very soon, another class of graduates from the Rotary World Peace Fellowships program will join scores of other alumni in the world of diplomacy, conflict resolution,

humanitarian aid, higher education, and other fields related to bringing peace to our world. To ensure that this important program continues, the Trustees launched a \$95 million funding initiative to run from 2005 to 2015. Currently, almost a third of the funds have been raised in the form of current gifts and future commitments.

The value of the program can be measured by the work of its graduates. Here are just a few examples of what our alumni are doing:

- Amy Kay is developing a proposal for a strategy to combat AIDS in South Sudan.
- Miho Kishitani manages and coordinates reconstruction programs in Iraq focusing on education, social care, and health, water, and sanitation.
- Maiko Shimizu is working for Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, posted to Dili, Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.
- William Payne heads a delegation to Colombia that is meeting with human rights workers and church leaders to help villagers who are vulnerable to threats from various armed groups.
- Robert Opira is working with internally displaced people in northern Uganda.

We've also seen exceptional results from our pilot peace studies program in Thailand. This success prompted the Trustees to join the two programs and designate Chulalongkorn University a seventh Rotary Center for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution. This newest Rotary Center will continue to operate a short-term program on conflict resolution and mediation designed for midcareer professionals.

The Rotary Centers are gaining public recognition for their work. The center at Duke University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recently received a \$238,000 grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to transform an existing military simulation into a humanitarian assistance game, virtually turning swords into plowshares. The game will focus on leadership skills, cultural awareness, problem solving, and adaptive thinking, all of which are necessary to coordinate international natural disaster relief. The Rotary Center will own the rights to the simulation game and can share the program with other centers.

### **Maintaining Our Resources**

Unfavorable investment markets and a shaky world economy make it even more imperative for Rotary International and The Rotary Foundation to safeguard and maximize their resources. Like all organizations, RI and the Foundation have been affected by the markets' current volatility and poor performance. I'm happy to report, however, that both remain strong financially, largely because of careful stewardship by the RI Board, the Foundation Trustees, and the Secretariat staff. More detailed financial information is available in the "Treasurer's Report to the Convention."

The generosity of Rotarians continues to provide essential support for our Foundation programs. On 15 May, contributions to our Annual Programs Fund totalled more than \$87.7 million.

Donations to the Permanent Fund also rose in 2007-08, by about 30 percent. As of 30 April, net assets and expectancies stood at \$594.9 million.

This has also been a record year for major gifts of \$10,000 or more. Excluding the grants from the Gates and Google foundations, we're projecting a 50 percent increase in the number of contributions and a 10 percent rise in their face value. By the end of April, more than 1,000 contributors had joined the ranks of Major Donors by making cumulative gifts of \$10,000 or more.

Of these Major Donors, 20 qualified for the Arch C. Klumph Society, bringing its total membership to 206. These extremely generous contributors have donated at least \$250,000 to The Rotary Foundation, and many have given much more.

Donors to the Foundation cite various reasons for providing this critical support. But Past District Governor Paul N. Geisel, a recent Klumph society inductee, summed up the feelings of many Rotarians: "The people we help are real. This is not an abstraction. That's why I give money. Somebody real is out there, somebody whose dignity is threatened, whose life is challenged. . . . The continuation of all this is very important. We need to support The Rotary Foundation."