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Opinion Piece for Calgary Herald

In the weeks and months ahead you will be hearing more about the Rotary International Convention that is coming to Calgary on June 21-25, 2025. Up to 20,000 Rotarians from around the world will descend on our great City.

Given the current times, several Rotary members thought it would be appropriate for Calgarians to learn more about a peace initiative with our friends in the US that was conceived, promoted, and is nurtured to this day by Rotarians on both sides of the border. It all began when a group of Rotarians from Cardston, Alberta invited fellow Rotarians to the Prince of Wales Hotel in Waterton Lakes National Park on July 4-5, 1931 for a good will meeting. Over 100 Rotarians from Montana, Saskatchewan and Alberta attended the meeting. At that meeting there was a consensus to advocate for the creation of an International Peace Park that would encompass both National parks. It was resolved, “that the proper authorities be petitioned to commence negotiations to establish the two parks indicated as a permanent International Peace Park, which will be definitely set aside for this laudable purpose, pledging our loyalty and allegiance to foster all international relationships”. Canadian and American Rotarians reached out to their respective federal governments and in the days when things could get done expeditiously, the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, a first in the world was commemorated on June 18, 1932!

It's worth noting the words of our leaders of the day. Prime Minister Bennett said, “It is my earnest hope that this great International Peace Park stretching across our common frontier and in which citizens of both our countries may seek recreation, may forever remain a permanent memorial of all that neighbourly relations should be between adjoining nations”. And from President Hoover: “Dedication of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park is a full gesture of the good will that has so long blessed our relations with our Canadian neighbours, and I am gratified by the hope and the faith that it will forever be an appropriate symbol of permanent peace and friendship”.

Authorized by the U.S. Congress and Canada's Parliament, the designation of the peace park combines the 203-square-mile Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada with the 1,600-square-mile Glacier National Park in the United States. The arrangement allows both national parks to operate as separate entities under the peace park mantle. Thereafter, the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park Association was created to perpetuate the message of peace and good will inspired by this monumental achievement. Rotarians agreed to meet annually at a *Peace Park Assembly* which alternates between each country. Rotarians from over 200 clubs across four districts partake in the Assembly, usually on a September weekend which culminates with the *Hands Across the Border Ceremony*. The ceremony which normally takes place over a long white ribbon and sometimes at the border, includes Rotarians, members of the indigenous community, park staff, politicians and other government officials. After the speeches the groups form an East-West line, with Americans on the South side and Canadians on the North side who embrace with a handshake and recite the Peace Pledge: *In the name of all we hold sacred, we will not take up arms against each other. We will work for peace, maintain liberty, strive for freedom, and demand equal opportunities for all. May the long existing peace between our nations stimulate other peoples to follow this example.*

This Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park Association endures and stands to promote the creation of Peace Parks around the world with a message of Peace and Understanding. In a world that seems in constant turmoil the pursuit of Peace is something we can all strive for because the alternative is not the solution for humanity. May Peace Prevail on Earth!

Bryan Walton is the Past President of the Rotary Club of Calgary at Stampede Park and a former Director of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park Association.