



Paul and Beth Viren

Rotary's 110th International Convention – 2019

Hamburg, Germany

What an amazing experience! To have my Rotary family in Club 21 send me to the Rotary International Convention in Hamburg, Germany!

The goal of this overview is to share our impressions, sights and news about Rotary International to help inspire my fellow Club 21 Rotarians to be proud of our global work and the impact we are making in so many corners of the world.

Beth and I took a pre-convention vacation with a Viking River Boat cruise for a week down the Rhine River from Basel Switzerland to Amsterdam. Totally fun and great memories.

We took the 6+ hour train ride from Amsterdam to Hamburg the Friday before the Convention began. Of course, we ran into a few U.S. couples on the train, which was fun to share stories of our local Rotary Clubs.

Saturday, June 1st - Registration Day - From the downtown Hyatt we took the very modern subway to the convention center to be greeted by hundreds of taxis, many buses and a mob of Rotarians from all over the world. This was registration day and for about an hour we snaked through the line chatting with Rotarians that could speak English. But it was a melting pot of all different languages, cultures, dress and Rotary pins. I did not know Rotary had pin collectors! Some had literally hundreds of pins on vests, jackets, shirts, hats, whatever, that were symbols of their involvement in some sort of event or club activity. You can imagine the challenges at the registration counter if a person could not speak English. I was so proud of the many young people that helped us who spoke many languages as if it was no big deal. Our culture is so monolingual I was a little ashamed to speak only English.

I heard the unofficial number of attendees was over 34,000. The bottom line – it was a huge crowd of Rotarians!

The Hamburg Convention Center complex was huge. It reminded me of McCormick Place in Chicago with many large buildings and a maze of corridors, stairs and walkways, not at all geared for the disabled or elderly. We were a little surprised about the accessibility for some

areas of the facility but people helped each other and made it work. Our average number of daily steps each day was around 18,000 – 20,000. We were exhausted after each day.

Sunday, June 2nd - The opening ceremony was one of the highlights of the convention. My notes cannot do justice to the size and scope of the event. There was a morning and afternoon seating in two large rooms. The primary convention hall had large screens all over the room to view the event from any corner of the convention hall. Since we were near the back you looked primarily at the screens since the speakers and entertainers were so far away. The second huge room was the Rotary Lounge. Simply a room set up with large monitors and cameras, comfortable seating making us all feel a part of the general sessions. The amazing translators would broadcast the English presentations into one of many languages over an FM receiver that you could borrow and dial in your language.

The Flag ceremony which ushered in 180 country flags carried by Rotaract members from each country was inspiring to say the least. I realized how geographically challenged I am when they announced names of countries I thought must be from another planet.

There were the expected updates on Polio eradication, other major projects going on around the world and inspiring messages from Club leaders from various countries. There was a major focus this year by Rotary International President Barry Rassin on growing the number of Rotaract Clubs. He accomplished this goal with 1,148 new Rotaract Clubs and 24,254 Rotaractors started in 2018 – 2019. Please Google Barry Rassin and look for his presentations at the convention. The overarching impression for this kickoff event, (and the convention in general) is the fact that Rotary and our members are people of action. We simply set our sights on amazing goals, locally and globally, and we get stuff done! That is what makes me proud of being called a Rotarian!

The many breakout sessions were impressive, from clubs sharing ideas on membership solutions, local and global projects, peace initiatives, Rotaract idea sharing to leadership training. Each breakout had about 300 – 500 people in the rooms and they were packed. Interpreters were onsite in a small booth translating the English presentation into their native language for those with the FM translation device and ear bud stuffed in their ears. I attended a few sessions and came away with some good ideas that I will share with the board and committees throughout the year.

We finished day one with a visit to the House of Friendship. Rotarians warned us about the exhibit hall but I had no idea of the expanse of booths, merchandise, local rotary projects, Clubs and Rotarians interested in all sorts of activities, music and entertainment, car collectors and

more in two separate buildings. We struck up many conversations with vendors selling handmade jewelry and other items made primarily by women that had been freed from human trafficking supporting themselves through the creation of these items.

If you have an interest in any subject, I mean anything, there is a special interest club or group of Rotarians that has organized themselves to share these common interests. From sailing to biking, whiskey tasting and wine enthusiasts, (imagine that! 😊) car collecting, racing, on and on, there were booths sharing their passion for their interests.

I spent most of my time at the Club Runner booth with my new friend, Zach. You may know Club Runner since this is the backbone of our Club 21 database, website, communication link to our members and our Club App. I was very impressed with the work that this group does to support so many clubs. They have made significant advances in their support of clubs like ours. There has been considerable criticism from our members in how Club Runner works and frustrations with the services they provide. I am a believer in their work and they are a key partner with us in our efforts to communicate our message to our members and the community we serve.

Monday, June 3rd – Each day carried a theme and this first full day was “Leadership and Integrity.” The highlight for me at the general session was Rotary International’s General Secretary, John Hewko’s address. I have attached the address for your reading enjoyment. A couple of quotes stand out. “You know, Rotary’s birth was about finding acceptance. Rotary’s evolution was about service and adventure. And Rotary’s future is about each of us — together, *together* — leading, with integrity, to seize every new opportunity to grow our organization, to connect, and to serve.” He shared some statistics that shocked me. In a typical year, about 45 million volunteer hours are generated by Rotarians. That translates to \$850 million in economic impact to all those we serve globally. I hope you will take the time to read his inspiring words.

Tuesday, June 4th – The theme for this special day was “Service.” We, as Rotarians, are people that serve our communities and the world in so many ways. One of the highlights was our region’s own special Rotarian, Bob Carroll from the Deer Park Club. Bob and Cassie Howder, from the Interact Club in Springdale, WA, presented their work together on the international stage in mentoring, teaching and literally changing the lives of students. I was so proud of Bob and Cassie, along with the many other speakers that day, each taking action in changing and impacting the lives of others. As you may know, my slogan for my Rotary year is “Service with Purpose!” Serving is what we do as Rotarians! Period!

Wednesday, June 5th – “Diversity and Fellowship” was the focus for the final day of the convention. The morning general session which celebrated the strides Rotary International is making, and goals for the future to be more diverse and to include in leadership more women and people of color. Excellent goals but still a long way to go and work to be done to find equality.

The fellowship aspect of Rotary is a core benefit of our time together. Seeing the many clubs represented at the convention and how much fellowship and good friendship is created by our time and service together made an impression on me. I reflect on our own Club and the close fellowship we have amongst our members. Rotary Club 21 is my Rotary family!

The closing ceremony was what you would expect. Thanks given to everyone and introductions for the new incoming leadership and the many volunteers that helped pull off this amazing event. My hands were tired after two hours of clapping.

I should end by saying the entertainment portion of each session was world class. Performers from all over the world came to share their talents and it was over the top good!

I know many of our Club 21 members have attended an International Convention and I hope to attend another meeting in the future. This coming year, Gary and Mariesa Stokes will enjoy the 111th Rotary Convention in Honolulu, HI in June, 2020. You might consider joining them for an amazing experience.

I have also downloaded pictures of the event if you want to take a look at our experience.

Thanks to my Rotary Club 21 for providing some underwriting for the cost of the travel to the Convention. It was an honor to represent our club this year and I am humbled by the experience.

Let's make this year special for our Rotary Club 21, a year of Service with Purpose!

Cheers,

Paul Viren
President – 2019 – 2020
Rotary Club of Spokane 21

