

# Global Health Takes Center Stage: PATH CEO, Steve Davis, and PolioPlus Director, Carol Pandak, Discuss Progress in Global Health

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By Jeanne McKnight

**President Mark Wright** called the October 25 meeting to order, followed by **Past President Sten Crissey**, who led the invocation.

Setting the stage for a program focused on global health and the role of Rotary in the eradication of polio (down to just 12 cases worldwide!), **Sten** quoted from Usha Saboo, wife of past RI president, Rajendra Saboo, “Immunizing our own kids is ordinary. Immunizing the children of the world is Rotary. Giving education to our own kids is ordinary. Building thousands of schools for poor children is Rotary.”

After highlighting the 29 service projects of Seattle #4 Rotary in the past year, **Sten** urged us to read the Seattle Rotary Service Foundation annual report. In closing, he talked about watching a recent George Stephanopoulos news program where General David Petraeus talked about the threats and challenges facing our country today. “America’s greatest problem is not North Korea, nor Russia, nor Afghanistan,” General Petraeus told Stephanopoulos. Instead, “Our biggest challenge is the lack of civility in the political discourse in our country today.” **Sten** wrapped up his invocation with these memorable words: “Given our times, I could not be more proud to be a Rotarian,” and, he added, “I hope you are, too.”

Next up: **Freeman Fong** on piano and **Arnie Ness** on trumpet (a new definition of “song leader”) led the Club in a spirited rendition of *God Bless America*.

After introducing visiting Rotarians and guests, **President Mark Wright** noted the presence of some very special guests, including former Seattle SuperSonics player-coach, Lenny Wilkens; former Rotary Club President, **Eric Bremner**; and Mark’s own Rotary mentor and sponsor, **Past President Nancy Buffington** (Lucks), who was accompanied by her son.

**Kathy Williams** then introduced us to new member, **Linda Thompson-Black**, currently Development Director at the United Negro College Fund for the Pacific Northwest; **John Steckler** did the honors by introducing **Mark Kurose** of Ernst & Young.

Following the new member introductions, President Mark called upon **Daron Vchulek** to give an update on Spruce Street dorm painting





and kitchen remodel project. President Mark then thanked the Short Program presenter and PolioPlus Director, Carol Pandak, for extending her stay in Seattle one more day so she could speak to our club. Pandak, who was in Seattle to celebrate the Fifth Annual World Polio Day at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, outlined the history of the PolioPlus project, which has reduced polio cases by 99.9 percent worldwide since its beginning in 1979 with a project to vaccinate children in the Philippines. Now, she pointed out, there are just 12 cases of polio left in the world, compared with 350,000 in the 1980s. “Who could imagine it?” she asked, answering her own question with, “well, Rotary could.”

Pandak asked the question many have asked her: How do we get from 12 to zero cases? First of all, constant immunization is vital, she said. Secondly, eradication requires surveillance—both medical and environmental. What is Rotary doing? First and foremost, she said, Rotary is involved in advocacy work, helping meet with elected officials to emphasize the importance of funding this important effort; second, Rotary is vital in helping raise awareness of the issue. Pandak talked about Rotary’s role in bringing about a “polio-free world.” Third, she said, “everyone can donate” to this effort.

**Corinne Cavanaugh** then introduced the main program speaker, Seattle #4 member and PATH President and CEO, **Steve Davis**.

Davis, whose credentials include an undergraduate degree from Princeton and advanced degrees from the University of Washington and Columbia University, described PATH as the “voice” for global health for 40 years. He acknowledged the “hometown heroes” who started PATH: Gordon Perkin, the first president of the organization; Peggy Morrow, the first employee; and co-founders Richard Mahoney and Gordon Duncan.

In a short but very powerful video, Davis talked about the “40 years of impact” of PATH and said, “This is what 40 looks like.”

PATH, he said, reaches 150 million people per year in over 70 countries. With some 1600 employees to date, PATH now has approximately 100 products in its pipeline. “Right here from Seattle,” PATH has pioneered 24+ vaccines that reach “the poorest people around the world,” he noted. How has this organization managed to make such an impact? “Our magic sauce is partnerships,” Davis said. Such partnerships span sectors and industries and include non-profits as well as for-profit companies.





One shining example of success, said Davis, is Zambia, where a half million people die of malaria per year and where PATH leads in the effort to make that country malaria-free by 2021 through a national elimination strategy. Such a national strategy depends on partnerships that focus on the strengthening of systems in four areas: prevention, diagnosis, capacity-building, and treatment.

Malaria, a parasite carried by mosquitoes, can lie dormant in some people, Davis said, which makes it challenging to address the life-threatening disease. The progress being made in Zambia, however, shows how technologies such as geocoding and mapping can help community health workers isolate areas where the parasite is present. Being able to map the presence of the disease to the village level and the household level through new tools and technologies has been effective in the fight against malaria—lessons learned from the polio eradication effort, he noted.

So what kind of progress is being made in the malaria fight?

“Despite the headlines, the trendlines in this work are pretty good,” said Davis. “We are seeing enormous progress.” From malaria eradication to work in family planning and diseases that not only are the result of poverty but also *lead* to poverty, PATH has been leveraging its extensive partnerships for the good—he cited the work being done in Africa to make vaccines against Meningitis A more affordable.

There are many such stories in the history of PATH, according to Davis, who emphasized the progress being made daily against global health threats. “I want to give you hope,” he said, adding, “I really do believe the best is yet to come.”