

RI President's Ian Riseley's February Message



Dear Fellow Rotarians,

One hundred thirteen years ago this month, the four members of Rotary's first club held their first meeting. Although no minutes were kept, it's unlikely anyone talked about service; the club did not begin focusing on the needs of the community for another few years.

The meeting was held not in a hotel or a restaurant, but in a member's office; there were, so far as we know, no agendas or announcements, no committee reports, speakers, or nametags. The meeting would have failed today's usual standards for a productive Rotary meeting most resoundingly. It was, of course, the most productive Rotary meeting ever held.

Today, as in 1905, many of us come to Rotary seeking what Paul Harris sought: friendship, connections, a place to feel at home. But today, Rotary gives us so much more than it could ever have given its earliest members in those earliest days. The Rotary of today, more than 1.2 million members strong, lets us feel at home not only in a small group of our peers, but also in our diverse clubs, across our communities, and indeed throughout the world. Today, Rotary connects us all in a way that Paul Harris could never have dreamed on that February evening so long ago. Not only can we go anywhere in the world there is a Rotary club and feel at home, but we can reach out to anywhere in the world there is a Rotary club and make a difference.

In the 113 years since that first meeting, Rotary has become far larger, and more diverse, than those founding members could have conceived. We have gone from an organization that was

all white and all male to one that welcomes women and men of every possible background. We have become an organization whose stated purpose is service, reflected in our motto, Service Above Self. And we have become not only an organization that is capable of changing the world, but one that has already done so, through our work to eradicate polio.

None of us can know what lies ahead for Rotary. It remains for all of us to continue to build on the solid foundations that were laid for us by Paul Harris and his friends: to forge and strengthen the bonds of service and friendship through Rotary: Making a Difference.

IAN H.S. RISELEY

President, Rotary International — with Ian Riseley.