

REPORT OF THE ROTARY INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA MAY 2023

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1:0 INTRODUCTION

1:1 Rotary International

Rotary International is the world's service Club organization with more than 1.4 million members in 34,000 Rotary Clubs worldwide. Rotary members are self-motivated volunteers who work locally, regionally and internationally to combat hunger, improve health and sanitation, provide education and job training, promote peace, protect the environment, and promote polio under their motto of service above self. The mission of Rotary International is to provide service to others, promote integrity, and advance world understanding, goodwill and peace around the world.

1:2 Beyond Subsistence

Beyond Subsistence is an Australian Christian organization which supports projects in Africa. It has been supporting Kabale Agroforestry Network in its junior land care work in schools and in the communities of landslide-prone landscapes of Kabale in Uganda since 2015. While visiting KAN projects in Kabale, Uganda in November 2022 the Beyond Subsistence team members learnt of my interest to attend the Rotary International Convention in Melbourne and immediately started a fundraising campaign to make this happen. It is against this background that I was able to attend the Melbourne Rotary International Convention from 27th -31st May 2023.

2:0 Preparation

The journey to attend the Convention started in February 2023 with the usual hurdles to process a Visa to Australia. It should be recalled that Australia does not have an embassy in Uganda. However the processing of a visa is done on-line and all documentation is submitted on-line. With the combined efforts of Jon Lambert the Beyond Subsistence CEO, and Hugh Stewart the Past President of Flemington Kensington Rotary Club, preparations for me to attend the Melbourne Convention began.

The visa process is a vigorous exercise but I was able to go through it thanks to previous travel. It should also be recalled that I am a Rotary alumni and was a scholar in Australia in 2015 under the Royce and Jean Abbey Rotary Ambassadorial scholarship that enabled me study Agroforestry. This previous travel record made granting me a visa easy to attain almost 3 months after my application. A flight itinerary, an air ticket, and a convention invitation letter were then sent to me in time to travel.

During their fundraising plans the Beyond Subsistence team arranged for me to connect with the people who had hosted me in 2015 when I stayed in Australia for 3 months. I therefore arrived in Australia one week before the Rotary Convention.

3:0 The visits prior to the Convention

Before the Rotary Convention a programme was prepared for me to visit a number of places in different parts of Victoria.

My 22 hour flight started from Kigali airport in Rwanda and took me to Dhoha where I connected to Melbourne.

On arrival in Australia I was hosted by Elizabeth and Tony Williams in Melbourne who oriented me to the weather, the food and the culture generally, which I had forgotten! I attended a Sunday service at a Baptist Church and a football match on my first and second days in Melbourne.

I then travelled to Gippsland where I was hosted by Wendy and Peter Ronalds, whom I had known in 2015.

I also attended a meeting at the Rotary Club of Warragal with President Chris Drenen, a former President

at Flemington Kensington Rotary Club. I presented him with a club banner.

While there I connected with other old friends such as Clinton, Peter and Helen. I briefly visited their farms and also attended a Curving exhibition in Drouin.

I was then picked by Jon Lambert who took me around the Heartwood enterprises and hosted me for a night in Melbourne.

I proceeded to Deans Marsh by train and attended a MasterTree Growers training going on at Yan Yan Gurt West Farm with Andrew Stewart. I also visited an Organic farm where I participated in a Site Support Visit led by a team from Otway Agroforestry Network. In the Otways I was hosted by Jill and Andrew Stewart, my hosts in 2015. I was then picked from the Otways by Hugh Stewart who took me back to Melbourne.



The last leg of the visits ended with a dinner organized by Rob Youl of Global Landcare in Southern Melbourne who was to be my host throughout the Rotary Convention. The dinner was attended by a couple from Japan who were Rotarians also coming to attend the Rotary Convention. They had travelled with Dr Kasuki Kagohashi their son, a landcarer from Japan Landcare.



4:0 The Melbourne Rotary International Convention

The primary purpose of the Rotary International Convention is to stimulate and inform Rotarians at an international level while advancing the strategic objective of the organization. It is also the annual business meeting of the organization. This year's Rotary Convention program included pre-convention forums, plenary sessions, break away sessions, workshops, closed meetings, and entertainment. This year's Convention took place at 2 prestigious venues, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, and at Rod Laver Arena all in the Centre of Melbourne.



While I did not participate in the pre-convention events, I was able to attend all the plenary sessions and a number of breakaway sessions, which offered a variety of interesting topics about Rotary. The House of Friendship was another exciting part of the Convention. It is here that one could find Rotary exhibitions of all sorts including Rotary outfits. A lot of networking during the Convention is also done at the House of Friendship. Apart from the exhibition booths one can also grab a meal of one's choice.

Here I was able to meet up with PP Lesley McCarthy and Peter Cribb from the Flemington Kensington Rotary Club.

During the Convention I was able to exchange contacts and Rotary banners with Rotarians from all corners of the world. Some of these connections are already paying dividends!



5:0 Lessons from the Rotary Convention

The Convention offered me a lifetime experience and was the largest meeting I have ever attended. Rotary provided an opportunity to understand the international nature of Rotary beyond my Rotary District, but above all it exposed me to the huge opportunities resident in Rotary.

The following are some of the lessons learnt during the Convention:

✓ Rotary is a worldwide, diverse extended family. The free discussions with fellow Rotarians and the exhibitors during the Convention demonstrated this.

✓ Rotary can be used to improve the well being of marginalized communities out there in the world. There are many compassionate people and organizations in the world, ranging from those who can provide a wheelchair to a disabled person, to organizations like Habitat who can provide shelter to a destitute! These are opportunities I learnt at the Convention.

✓ The Convention is a place to showcase the huge contribution Rotary provides to development in the world. Through Rotary Action Groups (RAGs) Rotarians use their professions and business knowledge to do good in the different corners of the globe linking up with people like Melinda Gates. Every booth I visited had something to offer and in the end I had a pile of their contacts!

I hope to use them in my Rotary journey.

✓ There was a break away session for the Rotary Alumni in which we received recognition for joining Rotary after our scholarships,

✓ I became a member of the [Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group](#) (ESRAG) and was nominated as a delegate for the Africa Chapter! Thank you to Lesley McCarthy.

✓ Some people strategically go to the Convention to make money! There are people who combine their businesses with Rotary.

✓ The Convention brings a lot of dollars to the countries that host this event in form of hotel accommodation, food, and the shopping done by participants.

6:0 Appreciation

I wish to acknowledge my deep appreciation to individuals, and organizations who made it possible for me to attend the Melbourne International Convention by meeting all the expenses that I would not have afforded.

Special recognition goes to [Beyond Subsistence](#) team headed by CEO Jon Lambert who spearheaded the fundraising after their visit to Uganda in November 2022.

Thank you to Andrew Stewart and the [Otway Agroforestry Network](#) for their ongoing support and assistance in helping me get to Australia.

My special appreciation and that of my family to the families who offered their homes resources, and hospitality to me for all the time I stayed in Australia.

Finally, thank you to the Flemington Rotary Club family who inspired me to join Rotary, and to my brother Rotarian Hugh Stewart who has supported me at every stage since 2015.