



Dear Fellow Rotarians,

My name is Tim Straub, and I recently volunteered to be your new PolioPlus Chairperson for District 5060. My wife Tammy and I would like to take this opportunity to introduce ourselves and why we are passionate about polio eradication.

It was my first week in country as a Peace Corps Volunteer in The Gambia, West Africa in 1986. Part of our language training was to negotiate prices for food and staples in the outdoor market. Before we knew it, sirens blared, and the market was surrounded by their military police. But their war was not on the people, it was with an invisible crippler and killer of children: Polio! They were there to check and vaccinate anyone who could not show evidence of vaccination. It was a little unnerving when they came to us nearly at gunpoint, but realized we were Peace Corps, and to be in their country meant we had to prove we were vaccinated at Customs upon entering the country. With

little health care infrastructure, mandatory vaccination was their only way to keep from breaking their meager health care system.

As I served as a school teacher in the countryside, I saw firsthand the devastating effects on the survivors of polio. One of my students was not only a survivor, he was also a malaria survivor, and because he worked the rice farms in his bare feet, contracted schistosomiasis, an internal worm infection where the worms travel through bare feet into the bloodstream causing debilitating disease. PS clean water and sanitation is my next passion!!

When I returned to the United States in 1988, I got my masters and Ph.D at the University of Arizona in Soil and Water Science. My advisor was also a polio survivor. My research was focused on detecting enteric viruses in the environment. We used vaccine strain polio as a model to test recovery efficiency of the methods we were developing. Some of these methods are still used today.

Flash forward to 2012 when I joined Rotary. I belong to the Prosser, WA Rotary Club. My wife Tammy and I had always been about “Service above Self,” and I felt it was time to join my local Rotary Club. My brother Chris is a member of Tucson Sunrise in D5500, and when I told him I joined, his response was “I already thought you were a Rotarian!” When I received my first copy of The Rotarian, I saw the advertisement for the bicycle “Ride to End Polio” sponsored by District 5500.





As a passionate bicycle rider, I knew this was my connection to my love of cycling to promote a fantastic cause to eradicate the second human disease since smallpox. We have had the honor of joining General Secretary John Hewko and his wife Marga, and Rotarians across the world for the last 3 years on this bicycle ride. Each year funds raised for the Ride have increased from a little over \$700,000 USD in 2012 to \$7 million USD in 2014. In 2013, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced that it would match United States Rotarian donations 2:1, and that is why we believe we have been able to raise so much money with this ride. It was certainly

a big motivator in our club to give more.

Our passion is driven by our optimism on recent successes in Africa and Pakistan. Nigeria has not had a new case of wild polio in over a year. On August 13, if successful in East Africa, we will reach another significant milestone: no new importation cases and no wild polio in Africa for 1 year. Think about this: Another continent polio free!!!! This is despite radical groups making it difficult for health workers to reach at risk children. In Pakistan, cases are down 70% from this time last year. I believe that, thanks to Rotary as volunteer and financial advocates, we are getting this disease eradicated once and for all!

As District 5060 PolioPlus chair, my goals are very simple. I do not want to duplicate efforts clubs already have. If your club hosts a bicycle ride, a run, a dinner, or other fundraiser that benefits PolioPlus, please send virtual “happy bucks” to tstraub1@mac.com so we can promote and report on the success of your event. If you would like me to speak to your club, I might be willing to ride that bike to your club, given my employer’s permission, time of year, and how long it might take me to get to you from Prosser on a bike. I am always willing to speak to your clubs about my passion regardless of transportation means!!



In closing, virtual “happy bucks” that Canadian Rotarians will have their contributions to PolioPlus matched by the Canadian Government. That is all for now, in the meantime, I had better train for the Ride to End Polio in 2015. I think I will start with the Rotary’s Chelan Century (June 20) and then do the Ride Around Mt. Rainier in One Day (July 30) (R.A.M.R.O.D.). I just finished R.A.M.R.O.D., a ride that is 147 miles, 3 mountain passes, with 10,000 ft of climbing, and this year, intense heat!!!!

YIR,

Tim and Tammy Straub