**Rotary – Changing the World**

**By Kent Hutchison**

**Rotary Club of Nacogdoches**

2016-09-28

**Rotary is a huge part of my life.**  Hopefully, it is an enormous part of your life too.

Margaret Mead said, *“****Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.*  *Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”***

Changing the world, however, was hardly the primary thought in the mind of Paul Harris when he founded Rotary. The young lawyer from rural New England was having a difficult time adjusting to the boom of turn-of-the-century Chicago. Business boomed, but the “Windy City,” was a storm center of labor unrest. Chicago’s boundaries spread like oil on a rain-slickened street, barely able to keep pace with the exploding population. Life in the rough-and-tumble metro area was fast paced – but **lonely.**

As Paul Harris lamented soon after his arrival, ***“People were everywhere, but nowhere a friend.”***

Determined to overcome his feeling of isolation, Paul Harris contacted three associates to chat about a notion he had been thinking about for some time. They agreed to meet after work on **Thursday February 23, 1905** in the office of one of the three – a mining engineer. The others two men were a coal dealer and a merchant tailor.

Paul Harris wanted to know – *What did they think about getting together on a regular basis to share friendship and to expand their circle of business and professional connections?*

The group thought the idea had merit. They continued to meet at the same office for some time.

However, the four soon decided to ***“rotate”*** their meetings among each other’s offices. Settling upon *“ROTARY”* as a natural name for the fledging group, and *“Rotarians”* for its members. They extended an invitation to a printer to join their ranks – and the five men formally organized the **Rotary Club of Chicago**.

However, it wasn’t long before they recognized that camaraderie and networking were not enough to keep a club of busy professionals meeting each week.

An even more powerful motivation was found -- ***reaching out to improve the lives of those less fortunate.*** *“Service Above Self”* became Rotary’s motto. Membership grew, the meetings shifted from Rotarian’s offices to restaurants, hotels, and country clubs.

In 1907, the Chicago club undertook its first Community Service project --- erecting a “public comfort station” near city hall. ***Flushing with Pride*** … Rotary’s first public service project was also rooted in Vocational Service. In their effort to promote more business, the members decided that since the women did most of the shopping in downtown Chicago, they would do even more if they stayed downtown longer. So, what was the answer? If they put public toilets in downtown Chicago – the shoppers would not have to go home so soon. And that is what they did — installed the first public restrooms in downtown Chicago.

Soon the news of the organization spread, and the ideal of service won ready acceptance everywhere it was introduced. Two years later, the second Rotary Club was organized in San Francisco.

In 1910, Rotary was established in Winnipeg Canada, and crossed the Atlantic in 1911 with the formation of two clubs Ireland.

As the world’s first association of service clubs, Rotary International also paved the way for several other well-known organizations.

* **Kiwanis International**
* **Lions International**

In addition, Rotary laid the foundation for other humanitarian organizations, such as theOhio Society for Crippled Children; which later become the *International Society for Crippled Children*, and later to the organization we know today --- the *Easter Seals*. The U*nited Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization* grew out of a Rotary conference held in London, England.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared after World War 2, *“All thinking men recognize the moral and spiritual value of Rotary. There is indeed a wealth of meaning in the motto, ‘Service Above Self.’ Few there are who do not recognize the good work which is done by Rotary clubs throughout the free world.”* **This was in 1942!**

After World War 2, Rotary sought to help promote international understanding through educational and charitable programs of *The Rotary Foundation* and other service efforts.

**FAST FORWARD. In 1979**, Rotary clubs bought and helped deliver the polio vaccine to more than six million children in the Philippines.

As the first and largest internationally coordinated public health initiative, by a private-sector N.G.O., Rotary International launched **PolioPlus in 1985.**

In 1988 the World Health Assembly pass a resolution to eradicate polio and setting up the launch of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. Polio is found in more than 125 countries.

**By 1991**, the last case of wild poliovirus is identified and eradicated in the Americas. The Western Hemisphere was declared polio-free in **1994**. **One year later** (1995), more than ***165 million children*** in China and India are immunized in a single week, by Rotarians, health workers and other volunteers.

**By 1996**, the number of nations declared polio-free increases to 150. In eight short years, the reported incidence of polio drops by 85 percent worldwide. **1997 –**  The last case of wild polio occurs in the Western Pacific Region. She is a 15-month-old girl called *Mum Chanty* living in Cambodia. *Melik Minas*is the last person to contract polio in Europe, Turkey, **1998** History is being made as we approach the 6th anniversary of zero**Polio**cases in India - considered to be the**Eradication**Date. So, India is safe, right?

No, not as long as the Wild Polio Virus survives anywhere in the World.  But, if India can stop Polio, can the final three polio-endemic countries be far behind?

**My hope for 2016**is that it will be the last year in which Polio cases are reported anywhere in our world.

Significant challenges lie ahead, including immunizing **all children** — even those in remote, conflict areas. We must maintain our commitment to polio eradication.

Given the tremendous progress so far achieved, the prospects of achieving global polio eradication are fantastic.

We should all be looking forward to providing all children with the permanent gift of **a world free of polio.**

Did Paul Harris ever imagine Rotary would grow from an oasis of friendship and service in a single city to become a global force in improving people’s lives?

*He is quoted as saying in 1947, “No, I did not in 1905 foresee a worldwide movement.”* He went on to say… *“When a man plants an unpromising sapling in the early springtime, can he be sure that someday here will grow a mighty tree? Does he* ***not*** *have to reckon with the rain and sun, and the smile of Providence? Once he sees the first bud – ah, then he can begin to dream of shade.”*

**How Does Rotary Serve?** Rotary clubs serve communities around the world, each with unique concerns and needs. Rotarians have continually adapted and improved the way they respond to those needs, taking on a broad range of service projects.

* Such as our Summer Mobile Library Program.
* Volunteering to help keep Nacogdoches beautiful.
* Helping with the holiday fundraising for the local Salvation Army; helping families in need.
* Or maybe it’s joining the Literacy Committee and volunteering to read to elementary students.
* Supporting the development of our high school youth in leadership development by volunteering at the RYLA event.
* Or maybe it’s volunteering and supporting the Rotary **Interact Club** at Nacogdoches High School.

As I travel the world speaking to audiences, I frequently quote an old Chinese proverb:

* If you want happiness for a hour – take a nap.
* If you want happiness for a day – go fishing.
* If you want happiness for a week – take a vacation.
* If you want happiness for a month – get married.
* **But, if you want happiness all your life – it will come only by helping others.**

You see, many Rotary service tends to fall within our community.

But as an international organization Rotary promotes service worldwide. The most successful and sustainable Rotary service tends to fall within one of the following six areas:

* *Peace and conflict prevention and resolution*
* *Disease prevention and treatment*
* *Water and sanitation*
* *Maternal and child health*
* *Basic education and literacy*
* *Economic and community development*

It is this commitment, dedication to Rotary’s motto of ***“Service Above Self,”*** that is a common bond uniting: 1.2 million Rotarians, 35,000 Clubs, in more than 250 countries.

A hallmark of Rotary service is *flexibility*, reflecting Paul Harris’ firm belief that Rotary should never remain static.