**Membership Corner – July 18, 2016**

**District 7910**

**Are We Volunteers – Or Are We Rotarians? What’s the Difference?**

Often we are asked “What is Rotary?” and a quick response is “We are a service club.” Our motto is “Service Above Self!” followed by “We are a volunteer organization.” I suppose those responses are better than nothing but do they suffice and do they really capture the essence of Rotary. When faced with difficult questions I tend to revert back to fundamentals. In the early years of Rotary the founders were faced with similar questions and they spent considerable time and effort developing The Object of Rotary. These four statements capture well the essence of Rotary and served as the basis of a century of rapid growth to over a million members in 34,000 clubs throughout 200 countries. What are these four magic “Objects” which set us apart from every other “volunteer service organization “ – and are we still living up to them?

The Object of Rotary is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise and, in particular, to encourage and foster the following:

1. The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service.
2. High ethical standards in business and professions, the recognition of the worthiness of all useful occupations, and the dignifying of each Rotarians’s occupation as an opportunity to serve society.
3. The application of the ideal of service in each Rotarians’s personal, business and community life.
4. The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, peace through a world fellowship of business and professional person united in the ideal of service.

The idea of service is clearly contained within the Object of Rotary but in a very deep and meaningful manner far beyond the typical understanding of a “volunteer” organization. There are many clubs to join as volunteers without the trappings of the Rotary organization. What sets us apart? How do we interpret these goals? How do we explain this to prospective members? Or even to our current members? Do we utilize our assembly meetings as vehicles for education of the Object of Rotary?

Let us take the first goal. A common goal for joining Rotary is the opportunity for networking for personal and/or business reasons. We want to associate with and to enjoy fun, fellowship and friendship with like-minded folks. As time goes on, our Rotary engagement grows stronger and we become more committed to deeper Rotary objectives rooted in the other three goals.

Does your club develop opportunities for fellowship through social gatherings? When members become friends and are having fun they become more committed to Rotary the club’s objectives. Acquaintance leads to friendship leads to commitment!

The next brick in the foundation of Rotary understanding is the second goal which talks about the high ethical standards in business and professional skills. This is the basis of “classifications” unique to Rotary. The idea is engage members with a wide variety of skills, talents and experiences to be able to tackle very tough problems. We want to bring in members who have the talents and skills we need. We learn about those skills through biographical talks by each Rotarian. These are great opportunities for the members to talk about their backgrounds and for the rest of us to learn about each other. There is more to this object however. The intent is for Rotarians to share their knowledge, skill, experiences and wisdom gained through a lifetime of toil with those who gain the most. Consider the vast amount of collective knowledge and experience we have and how much good can be realized by sharing that knowledge with others. This is especially true with younger folks who hunger for knowledge about the world that awaits them. Through the second goal we build pride in ourselves, our members and our clubs.

The third goal builds upon the idea of service leading to the motto “Service Above Self” – quite a high standard. This is essence of Rotary and we are surrounded by opportunities to apply this ideal of service in our communities and internationally. Satisfying critical community service needs represents a great opportunity to gain public knowledge, image and support for Rotary. It helps us to search out the folks doing this work full time and invite them to speak at rotary functions. Many of them are Rotarians and do not know it.

The fourth object of Rotary pertains to international service. While most of our efforts are concentrated on local communities, the international accomplishments of Rotary are astounding. We have a fine record of supporting The Rotary Foundation (TRF), the prime mechanism though which hundreds of international projects are funded. We have supported the eradication of polio, The Gift of Life, GEMINI, peace scholars, disaster aid, exchange students, water and sanitation projects, disease prevention and numerous other projects. Our goal is to have every Rotarian contribution every year (EREY). Then you can proudly say that you are a part of the effort to advance international understanding, goodwill and peace by supporting the fourth object of Rotary.

Taken together these four Objects of Rotary complete a more robust explanation of the ideals of Rotary. Our clubs need to do a better job of educating members about the Object of Rotary and to develop their own understanding of the meaning of each goal. Devote your next assembly meeting to the Object of Rotary. You do not have to be an expert – just mention each object and get the members to discuss their interpretation of and the meaning of each one. Simply talking about them will increase everyone’s understanding ten-fold. The more we know about Rotary, the better we will be able to communicate it to prospective members.

Tom Sturiale – Vice Chair Membership Committee