

Rotaplast Update

Rotaplast International has been forced to postpone all upcoming missions because of travel restrictions and concern for the safety of our volunteers. The covid-19 epidemic has necessitated some painful decisions at Rotaplast that were needed to keep it viable for the future. It is important to keep in mind that Rotaplast International is still 100% in business and will resume its missions as quickly as conditions allow. As we move toward the restart we want to keep everyone in the Rotaplast family up to date on events and plans. This Newsletter is a part of our effort to keep you connected.

Recent Past

In February, travel restrictions were imposed and we decided to cancel missions until November. It was anticipated that conditions would improve by that time and we planned accordingly but couldn't have been more wrong. By mid-March, we saw clearly that planning a mission for any date was futile. Our staff spent countless hours unraveling the paperwork and arrangements made for future missions. They worked with volunteers, airlines, hotels, Rotaplast committees, host Rotary Clubs and hospitals and so on. Some airlines were understanding but others were not, and negotiations became intense. It seems there is as much work canceling a mission as there is to arrange one.

The board of directors met weekly to evaluate the changing situation. Their decision to let the staff go was painful, but ultimately unavoidable. There was no income and no missions planned for the foreseeable future. The Rotaplast staff were all excellent professionals dedicated to Rotaplast.



Dr. Anne Delaney

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Have a story or idea to share?

Send them to:

Rotarian.Paul@Outlook.com

We hope for better conditions ahead.

All of us were aware of the children and families being left unaided and our promise to fulfill our mission. As Dr. Anne Delaney noted, "They are waiting for us, and we are committed to being there for them now and when we can travel safely. We are exploring opportunities for continuing support of our host sponsors and their patients, such as remote education or critical care supplies." **Cont.'d on page 6.**

Mission Tales

There are a thousand stories about people, adventures, and misadventures on Rotaplast missions. Share your memories.

Send them to: Rotarian.Paul@Outlook.com

Starting the Day with a Song



“It all began on a mission to Cumana, Venezuela several years ago,” recalls Dr. David Low, a pediatric plastic surgeon from Philadelphia, and a man who loves music and getting people together to sing. “I knew we would have a farewell party at

the end of the mission and thought it would be fun to give our hosts in Cumana a song dedicated to them and to our work together.” So, Dr. Low composed one using “*O Canada*” as the tune because *O Cumana* fit perfectly. “After the tune was chosen, it was just a matter of telling our story with new words that described the mission. I was sure to include everyone and the events of the mission.”

The song was printed, and copies were distributed in the morning for the bus ride to the hospital. David acted as choir master, sometimes reseating tenors here and baritones there. “Everyone got into the act and the spirit of the moment. We mixed serious practicing with kidding and praise and laughing a lot. We were bonding.”

David added, “We couldn’t sing the same song every day, so to keep the bus ride lively, we occasionally sang Broadway show tunes. We used classics like *Oklahoma!*, *The King and I*, *Carousel*, and others. We also sang many pop tunes that everybody knew and it turned out to be a great wake-up activity.

“At the farewell dinner, we sang our version of *O Cumana*, and our hosts and guests were delighted that

we’d recognize them that way. Since then, on other missions, we’ve also changed the words to songs like *Do-Re-Mi* from *The Sound of Music*. On one mission we honored our mission director Rosalie with our version of *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. Lots of fun.”

Back home, David brought his talent to his daughter’s wedding. He dressed up as Alexander Hamilton and used the opening song of the musical *Hamilton* as an ode to the bride. It was sensational then and it’s on YouTube now. 🌟

See it at *Hamilton Father of the Bride*:

<http://youtu.be/RpskVq0Q7v8>

Evelyn and the Volcano

Experienced volunteers know that anything can arise on a mission and one must be flexible. However, a mission to Retalhuleu, Guatemala in 2015 had far more surprises than anyone could have expected. It took cool heads and lots of scrambling to get everyone home safe and sound.

“It was on the last day of a successful mission. We had completed 117 procedures and were getting ready for the farewell party when someone announced a volcano near Guatemala City had erupted. We were told to pack up and travel immediately,” recalls Evelyn Abad, the group’s head nurse.

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Evelyn and the Volcano - Cont.'d

“We were used to volcanos by now. One was literally down the road and reminded us of its presence with a little tremor from time to time. But the volcano near Guatemala City was spewing mountains of ash and we needed to get to Guatemala City before the roads became impassable. We packed quickly and called for the bus. The quartermaster packed the truck with luggage and equipment in record time.

“The 120 mile drive usually takes 3.5 hours. But the blizzard of ash slowed things down considerably. The driver feared the air filters might clog up and leave us stranded. But, we arrived safely at the El Rancho Hotel, which is owned by a local Rotarian, and were warmly greeted. We soon settled in for a stay that was a lot longer than expected.

“The next day we learned that the airport was closed and we would be in the hotel for quite some time. The ash was over three inches deep and causing all sorts of problems. Clearing it from runways, highways

and local roads was no easy task,” said Evelyn. “We were told it would be several days before we could depart. Then we got really bad news. A full blown hurricane was on its way to Central America and we were in its path. The torrential rain was bad enough, but with the mountains of ash, things got worse. Drains were clogged, streets flooded, rivers overflowed and bridges destroyed.

“Our dauntless mission director managed to secure airline travel from an airport in nearby El Salvador and chartered buses to get us there. It was normally a four hour bus ride, but Mother Nature was not finished with us yet. Part way to El Salvador, a major landslide blocked the road and we waited hours for heavy equipment to clear the way.

“The quartermaster and I had to wait for the airport in Guatemala to open to take our cases of equipment. So that kept us sequestered for several more days. I’ve been with Rotaplast for 22 years and on countless missions. But this was one I’ll never forget,” says Evelyn. ✨

Going the Extra Mile



Brian Walker has been a mission director many times and busy as he is, he finds time to do even more to aid people in need. Since 2014, Brian has distributed prosthetic hands to people who could not hope to afford them. The LM4 Prosthetic Hand is a simple device that can grasp objects as small as a pen or large as a bicycle grip.

“The first year I went to Bangladesh with 12 hands. I told the hospital administrator and everybody at the hospital that I had these prosthetic hands and would give them to people in need. The next day there were eight waiting in line for them,” says Brian.

“One, a young schoolteacher, had lost her hand five years before. When I put the prosthetic on and

put a pen in her new fingers, she started writing and burst into tears. She hadn’t been able to write anything for these five years, and now could resume beautiful penmanship.

“An unusual occurrence comes to mind. In Cebu City, Philippines, an indignant beggar came knocking on our bus window as we were at a stop sign. I saw he was missing a hand and immediately went back to the hotel to pick up a prosthetic



for him. In the last six years I have distributed about 60 hands on my Rotaplast medical missions. It’s just another good thing we can do for people. ✨

Fundraising Tales

We're always looking for new ideas.

Share yours with everyone.

Send them to: Rotarian.Paul@Outlook.com

Theatre Night



Each year, the Media Theatre in District 7450 donates 200 tickets to Rotaplast to use for its biggest fundraising event. The Theatre offers them on Thursday evening performances when sell-out is unlikely, so there is no loss of income for them. The theatre gets excellent publicity and sees many who have

never been there before, particularly young adults. Tickets sell for \$50, yielding \$10,000 to Rotaplast. It's a win-win for everyone.

To enhance the experience for theatre goers, Rotarians host a pre-theatre party and serve a light dinner. To liven the occasion, a few of the ladies dressed in 1960's style and wowed the crowd by singing songs from *Saturday Night Fever*, the show performed that night. Billed as "The Glitterettes," they stole the show. *Staying alive, baby.* ✨



Building Bridges

Like many Rotaplast committees, the one in District 5300 follows the tried and true practice of making PowerPoint presentations to clubs after each mission. However, Roger Schulte and other committee members take it



one step further. "We are strong believers in building bridges wherever we go. It really isn't enough to just tell about a recent mission. We need to establish and retain close relationships with people in the clubs," says Roger.

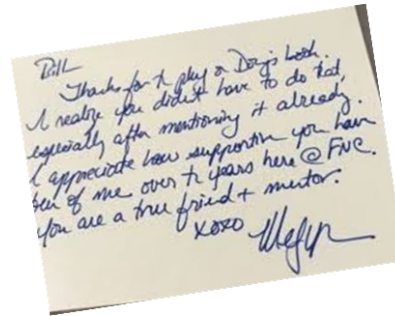
Several years ago, a club presentation led to the friendship with an individual who later donated 7.25% ownership of a trailer park, the business continues to generate \$20,000 per year to the Rotaplast committee. Later, that same person's family dissolved its own foundation and donated \$98,000. Now that's serious bridge building!

Club meetings present opportunities to get to know people. We need to take steps to make the most out of them.

- Leave your Rotaplast business cards on all the tables and mention them during your address. Ask people to call you with any questions or thoughts. **Cont.'d on next page.**

Building Bridges - Cont.'d

- Keep records of donations from the clubs and especially by individuals. Mention the club donations made over the years to show a lasting relationship. Acknowledge the individuals and thank everyone for their support.
- After receiving a donation, hand-write a thank you note to the club. It's a unique practice in business and is always noticed. Handwriting a note makes it personal.
- Ask clubs to appoint a Rotaplast Committee so there is a direct contact who will work in Rotaplast's behalf. ✨



Keeping Rotaplast Active During the Pandemic

*What are you doing to keep friends aware of Rotaplast?
Please share your ideas.*

Send them to: Rotarian.Paul@Outlook.com

Keep Rotaplast on Everyone's Radar

Now is an important time to be active and keep Rotaplast on everyone's mind. Remember, "Out of sight is out of mind." Here are a few suggestions:

- Write a news article for your district newsletter. Tell how the pandemic mission cancellations affect the children in developing countries at the earliest opportunity.
- Send this Newsletter to those volunteers, donors, clubs and all those who support Rotaplast.
- Utilize social media to keep people aware and interested. Update your committee's website regularly. Post stories on your FaceBook, Twitter, and LinkedIn pages.
- Write letters to clubs to let them know your Rotaplast committee remains active.
- Schedule virtual presentations to clubs to tell the Rotaplast story. Clubs are looking for speakers and Rotaplast is perfect for virtual.
- Plan virtual fundraisers. Programs can be found online and there are companies that will guide you.
- Look for new opportunities everywhere. There are many social, fraternal, professional, and other organizations to be contacted.
- Make plans to participate at district conferences, PETS Seminars and Zone Institutes. Some virtual district conferences are accepting advertisers.
- Keep a supply of Rotaplast book page markers with you. It's a great handout to people when you are talking about Rotaplast. It can happen on an airplane flight, at a neighborhood block party, supermarket, farmer's market or kids' soccer game. ✨



Letter to the Rotaplast Family

When we started planning for a Rotaplast mission nearly thirty years ago, as a World Community Service Project of the Rotary Club of San Francisco, we never thought our dream would be so successful and take on a life of its own. What was to be a single mission to La Serena, Chile, became a Rotary movement that had produced 220 missions to 26 different countries. The results include life-changing surgery for over 20,000 patients, and the joy of service to others for so many volunteers.



We are so proud of the Rotaplast Family, Rotary Clubs, and Rotary Districts, medical and non-medical volunteers, along with our valued non-Rotarian donors and volunteers, all of whom have volunteered their time, talent, and treasure to make the world a better place. Our gratitude extends not only to those across

the United States but to our many volunteers from around the world especially in our host countries. Many of you have become as dedicated as us in our work, and we are excited that the opportunity to serve has been extended to over 2,000 volunteers. We sincerely thank you all.

The Covid-19 pandemic has unfortunately brought a temporary pause to our plans until international travel is feasible, and we can safely send surgical teams around the world again. We expect a stronger return and with renewed energy and enthusiasm to help thousands more have a better life. We ask for your prayers and good thoughts to make this possible. As you plan your charitable giving in the coming months, please remember Rotaplast International and the life-changing work we do. We want to be ready to promptly send new missions once it is safe. In the meantime, God bless and take care.

**Angelo Capozzi MD and Peter Lagarias
Co-Founders of Rotaplast**

Rotaplast Update - Cont.'d

Present

Members of the board of directors have taken up the chores of the staff in keeping Rotaplast fully functional. They keep communications open worldwide with volunteers, donors and host Rotary clubs. The building in San Francisco is maintained, calls and letters are answered, donations are received, and donors thanked. The bills are paid, our software upgraded and relations with the community preserved. The Rotaplast headquarters building is in good condition and has no mortgage or lien. There are reserve operating funds that assure stability for the foreseeable future. Donations from Rotaplast committees for future missions are set

aside and protected. And, donations from Rotary clubs and individuals continue to arrive. In brief, Rotaplast is being managed well and will endure the conditions created by the pandemic.

Future

Well before the pandemic, the board of directors had been studying alternative models for attaining its goals. Their objective focuses on creating missions with greater efficiency so as to conduct more missions and serve more children. They are confident that Rotaplast will restart and will operate in the most economical manner possible. With that in mind, we ask that as you plan your fundraising in the coming months, you remember Rotaplast and the amazing and inspiring work that we do. We are sure that Rotaplast will emerge from the present crisis as stronger, to serve as many as possible. ✨