

OPENING CEREMONY

DISTRICT GOVERNOR SPEECH

April 14, 2011

Conference Chairman Joe Steinbok, The Honourable Freundel Stuart Prime Minister, Justice the Honourable Mr Sherman Moore, Acting Chief Justice, Members of Cabinet, RI President's Special Representative John Smarge & Cindy, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Past District Governors, District Governor Elect, Distinguished Guests, Fellow Rotarians, Members of The Media, Ladies and Gentlemen:

One of the chief highlights of a Rotary District Governor's year is the annual District Conference. It is therefore with great pleasure that I welcome you with heartfelt sincerity this afternoon, to this 19th District Conference of District 7030 here in Barbados. The theme of this year's conference, based on the Rotary International theme is "Building Healthier Communities, Bridging Regional Cultures". We will be addressing issues relating to this theme, in the various presentations which we trust you will find enlightening.

If the Conference is one of the District Governor's highlights, the other would have to be his official visits to the Rotary Clubs. A district such as ours with its 17 territories, different governments, three languages and a variety of cultures is not without its challenges. Reaching all the clubs has entailed some 45 flights, several ferry rides, some very long drives and some very mountainous drives not to mention five months with few nights spent at home! However, for me, the rewards of our wonderful district far outweighed the challenges. The knowledge gained of our region and its peoples as well as the knowledge gained of our clubs and their members have been a most enriching experience that will remain with me for the rest of my life and I know that I also speak for Helene who accompanied me on many of my official visits.

During these official visits I met with the leaders of all the countries sometimes a President, sometimes a Governor General and in some cases also with the Minister of Health, in the hope that Rotary will continue to be well received in our District. The main purpose of the official visits was the meeting with the boards of all the clubs, each with its own personality, its own successes and its own problems. Most clubs are healthy and doing good work in their community while a few clubs are struggling. In many of the territories I had the privilege of meeting with the greater family of Rotary, that is, Rotaract and Interact clubs where it was a joy to witness the enthusiasm of our youth. In the French territories I met with members of active Inner Wheel Clubs, a service little known to me and to my wife Helene. We were impressed with their zeal and with their work which sent us to the internet to learn more about these service clubs related to Rotary.

Most of the Rotary Clubs in our district were proud to take me on a tour of some of their most worthwhile projects. I witnessed every manner of project be they Medical, Literacy, Community or Water and Sanitation.

In French Guiana for example, the smallest club in our District has published a booklet on sickle cell disease whilst the RC of Kourou gave a bus to transport autistic children. In Guadeloupe all 8 clubs working together have established a home for autistic persons.

There are many medical outreach programs in the District in South Trinidad, Guyana and St Vincent to name a few where doctors visit very rural areas and give free clinics and medicine.

The dental bus is still in operation in Guyana visiting schools on a rotating basis and in Antigua, the Sundown club has donated eye screening equipment to the hospital whilst in Dominica and Point Fortin, Trinidad, eye tests and free glasses are provided through those Rotary Clubs. Several clubs are now involved in diabetes projects and even the youngest Rotaract club in Paramaribo presented as their first project, supplies for taking diabetes tests to the diabetes poly-clinic. These are but a few of the outstanding projects that are happening in our District in the Medical area.

In the Literacy area there are very diverse projects, such as equipment to translate books into braille for the blind to using Chess boards to teach primary school kids about mathematics. In Guyana the Starbroek club has gone into what was once one of the most violent areas of the country and are helping students there to achieve better grades. The Maraval club in Trinidad has established a learning centre and in South Trinidad, the Pointe a Pierre club has provided books and supplies to 16 schools.

In ten of our countries the Community projects centre around a similar theme of providing Christmas hampers for the elderly or needy. Several clubs are involved with retirement homes and providing equipment or refurbishment. In the environmental area, there is a recycling project in Antigua where both plastic and metal are compressed and shipped overseas and in French Guiana the RC of Cayenne collects old batteries.

The RC of Felicity/Charlieville in central Trinidad has through a Matching Grant obtained 840 wheelchairs which they have passed on to many other clubs in the District for distribution.

In the water and sanitation area there have been some very innovative projects such as providing clean water to villages in the interior of Surinam where there is no electricity. Pipes run out into the middle of the river and water pumped through sand filters. These pumps were run using electricity generated by solar panels. This has had the effect of dramatically reducing dysentery.

I have highlighted but a few of the wonderful projects that are being done by our clubs in the District. Tomorrow there will be presentations of four of these projects that you may get an in depth view of some of the work being done by the Rotary Clubs of District 7030. We also urge you to spend time in the House of Friendship visiting the various booths where clubs will be showcasing their special projects.

As governor of the district, I also had goals for the district at the outset of my year. The first goal was to increase our support for the Rotary Foundation. During 2010/2011, my District Chair for the Rotary Foundation, PDG David Edwards held three Foundation seminars; in Barbados, Martinique and Antigua with a fourth one planned for French Guyana later in the year. You will be getting PDG David's report on Saturday morning.

The ever difficult goal of increasing membership was my second goal. I say "ever difficult" because Rotary membership is dwindling worldwide. In District 7030 we have managed to remain stable with small gains in membership but I would have liked to have seen a substantial increase. I invite you to listen to PDG Jim Henry's discourse on Membership tomorrow.

The third of my goals was having better communications throughout the district. In keeping with this we have come up with a new website, distributed our Newsletters on the 1st of every month in both English and French, communicated with the French Presidents and Secretaries in French wherever possible, made extensive use of Skype conference meetings and sent out anniversary congratulatory letters to all the clubs.

My fourth goal was my pet project; Diabetes. A most serious chronic killer in our District, has a rate of almost twice that of the world average. I set out with three goals in mind: a) An increase in public awareness; b) An advocacy programme lobbying governments to pay more attention to diabetes; and c) the promotion of the footcare step by step programme. There will be three important presentations on diabetes on Friday. As I do not wish to steal their thunder, let me just state that I am heartened by the response throughout the district to this goal which far exceeded my expectations.

I now turn to the main events that took place during the year 2010/2011. Our Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, RYLA, took place in St Kitts at the end of October with 170 participants some of which came from our sister district, District 7020. The whole experience was most refreshing. The usual vim, vigour and vitality of the young participants was infectious. They did not subscribe to the idea that they were there to learn leadership skills for their future; instead, they maintained that they were learning leadership skills for TODAY as they were serious in their desire to serve their communities in the here and now as evidenced by the theme of the conference, "Youth Taking Charge". This successful conference will be reviewed by its organiser, District Chair PP Leah Sahely on Saturday morning.

The Inter Guyana's Meeting, IGM, took place in Guyana the weekend of the 13th and 14th of November with 114 Rotarians attending from 6 of the Guyana clubs, 2 of the Suriname clubs and 2 of the clubs from French Guyana. The general theme of the meetings was on diabetes with most informative multi-media presentations and panel discussions. The excellent fellowship went a long way towards fostering the good relations that exist among the three South American countries of our District.

One Group Study Exchange was planned for this Rotary year. Our outgoing team left for England to visit with District 1210 in September. I was pleased to read some glowing reports on the comportment of our team members. The incoming GSE team from District 1210 arrived on March 19th to begin their tour of our district in St Kitts, followed by visits to Guadeloupe, St Lucia and finally they arrived in Barbados this week to complete their month here at our District Conference. We trust that their stay with us has been a positive experience and we will hear and see their presentations on Friday afternoon.

On the Rotaract/Interact scene, three new Rotaract clubs have received their charters, one in Suriname, one in Barbados, one in Tobago, and one new Interact club has been formed in Antigua while we have lost one Rotaract Club in Trinidad.

We are proud that an Ambassadorial Scholarship has been awarded to Kwame Burgher of Barbados and five Literacy Awards will be given out here at the conference. In the meantime 12 clubs have submitted their applications to Rotary International for Presidential Citations, two of which will be with distinction. In addition 6 Rotaract clubs have submitted their application for a Presidential Citation.

Not everything that happens in a district is positive. On a sad note, two of our illustrious Past District Governors have passed away this Rotary year; PDG Neil Isaacs 83/84 of Guyana and PDG Stanley Blanchette 85-86 of Barbados. We also had the resignation of two club presidents.

We were also plagued with hurricane Tomas wrecking havoc in St Lucia and to a lesser extent in Barbados and St Vincent. I wish to take some time here to thank all the clubs and their members that helped during this disaster. A full report on Hurricane Tomas will be presented tomorrow by AG Lisle Chase who worked indefatigably during these trying times. Suffice it to say that once again like Grenada in 2004, several Barbadian fishing boats transported water, foodstuff and water tanks to St Lucia. Clubs in the other islands also provided much needed relief.

The District through the District Disaster Relief Fund also provided assistance to Trinidad during the floods there last August and gave some assistance to Pakistan with their widespread flooding.

At the Rotary International level, this year has seen quite a few innovations: e-clubs, satellite clubs, corporate memberships and associate memberships. As yet none of these

new types of membership have been tried in our usually traditional District but I am aware of two clubs that will be seeking two of these innovations. We have also seen the birth of a brand new avenue of service called "New Generations" which brings together Rotaract, Interact and Youth Exchange. Rotary International will be having its annual Convention in New Orleans this year from 22nd to 26th of May. This is our chance to attend a Rotary International Convention without venturing too far afield as the venues for the next few years after will be in far flung areas of the world.

Even though the Conference has only just begun, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my conference chairman, PP Joe Steinbok, the presidents of our three clubs in Barbados and all the Rotarians and their Partners in Service who have helped to make this District Conference possible. Also I wish to thank most sincerely RI Director John for being with us at this conference. Due to his many commitments PDG John and Cindy were only able to fly in this afternoon. Thank you John.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my wife Helene. I could not have survived this year so far without her help and support. She has been my Personal Assistant, Secretary, Translator, confidante and newsletter writer. Merci beaucoup.

At this conference you will hear and see the service that Rotarians perform throughout our district, but Rotary is not just about service, it is just as importantly about fellowship through which we hope to promote goodwill and understanding among the people of the world. Fellowship comes naturally to the peoples of the Caribbean and I expect that this will be the order of the day, the Hospitality suite has been and will be open every evening until

Finally, I invite you to make the most of our District Conference. We have some new features which we hope you will enjoy. There are the slide shows courtesy of PP Stephen Broome and Rotarian Renner Yearwood which you will have seen as you were waiting for the Opening Ceremony to begin. We have a House of Friendship complete with booths where you can buy Rotary memorabilia and where club projects are being showcased in the hopes that you may get ideas that may work for your club. It is also a place to meet with old Rotarian friends and make new Rotarian friends. We also promise you a new and different Gala Banquet experience.

Together, let us continue toward fulfilling this year's RI Theme in Building Communities, Bridging Continents.

Honourable Prime Minister, distinguished guests and fellow Rotarians I thank you.