

RI President's Welcome Address

Ray Klingensmith, 2010-11 RI President
New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
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Many of you are aware that I have been using "Cowboy Logic" as my theme song for the past two years, and it is a treat for me to actually meet America's favorite cowboy singer, Michael Martin Murphey, who made the song popular. It is a great song with a meaningful message, and Michael is a truly amazing singer. Moreover, he is a Rotarian and an ardent supporter of Rotary values. For all these reasons, I am delighted that he will be one of the featured performers at our closing session on Wednesday evening. In addition, he will be performing in the House of Friendship this week, and available to sign autographs in the celebrity booth during the next three days. I intend to be the first one in line for his autograph!

Now, welcome to the convention! I am so pleased that you are here in New Orleans to celebrate our Rotary year — and to have a good time. The first time I came here was in 1960, and I was accompanied by one of my high school friends, Richard Thompson, who will be here on Tuesday along with another of my high school friends, Mark White. We went to school together in Unionville, a small farm town in northern Missouri, USA, and the fact that we are still close friends after being separated for more than 50 years is a tribute to the quality of life in small towns around the world.

One of the things I remember well from my school days in Unionville is the memory of my father, and almost all the other leading businesspeople in town, walking across the city square every Thursday at noon for the weekly Rotary meetings at Yount's Cafe. It was a very clear indication to me at a young age about the importance of Rotary. Little did I know at that time that I would become a Rotary Scholar or that I would be standing here today as president of Rotary International, one of the world's premier organizations. It has been an incredible journey of Rotary experiences for me!

When Richard and I came to New Orleans in 1960, we arrived at midnight on Friday night, and I was ready to call it a day. But Richard had been here before, and he said the night was just starting in New Orleans. So we spent the entire night in the French Quarter, and at daybreak, we went to the Cafe Du Monde for chicory coffee and beignets. We heard Al Hirt and the other great Dixieland musicians on Bourbon Street, and we found the nightclub that has become my favorite place, Pat O'Brien's. In fact, we had such a good time that we spent the whole night in the French Quarter again on the next night. Needless to say, this has been one of my favorite cities ever since, and I am so pleased this convention is here in the exciting city of New Orleans!

The RI Convention committee, the RI staff, and the Host Organization Committee, better known as the HOC, have worked diligently to organize a great convention, and we want you to have a good time here in Cajun country. The House of Friendship next door is a splendid place to meet new friends and to explore the myriad service projects conducted by Rotarians around the world. The amazing fact is that no one will ever know all the good deeds performed by our 34,000 clubs around the world, because they are so numerous. However, there is an impressive sample of Rotary projects on display here, and this is Rotary's version of the teaching tool for children called "show and tell"!

Bill Gates, a founder of Microsoft, will be here on Tuesday afternoon to discuss his foundation's assistance to help us eradicate polio, and we have many other excellent speakers as well. There are five sessions of workshops on Rotary topics to help your clubs become bigger, better, and bolder, and I hope you will take advantage of the ideas that will be provided to continue our efforts to make the world a better place by *Building Communities — Bridging Continents*.

Rotarians ask me occasionally why I have two themes, when other presidents have utilized only one, and my answer is simple. My theme for this year is to highlight what Rotary clubs do best around the world, which is *Building Communities — Bridging Continents*. My appeal to make Rotary even better by helping our clubs to be "bigger, better, and bolder" is merely a slogan. Which is convincing proof that I am a lawyer, and that I am willing to make meaningless distinctions to prove a point!

As many of you know, I am truly proud to be a former Rotary Scholar and thereby a product of The Rotary Foundation. I joined Rotary about two weeks after returning to Unionville from my year of study at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and I attended my first Rotary convention in St. Louis in 1963. I have attended many Rotary conventions since that time, and there is one aspect of Rotary conventions that I want to emphasize to those of you attending your very first convention. These wonderful assemblies are marked by an incredible atmosphere of fellowship, friendship, and networking that is rarely found outside of Rotary!

You do not need an introduction to talk with other people here! You are free to converse with anyone and everyone, and as your conversations continue, the usual exchange of names and business cards will occur somewhere along the line. And regardless of where you are from, you will eventually meet someone who can help you with a project or who knows someone you know. It is difficult to believe, but it's true! That is the magic and the power of the Rotary network!

Let me give you a personal example. Judie and I attended the first Birmingham [England] convention in 1984, and as we moved into some empty chairs at a table in the House of Friendship, we introduced ourselves to a Rotarian and his wife from Sweden. When the Swedish couple moved on, a Rotarian from Michigan at the next table said to us, "I heard you say that you are from Missouri. Have you ever heard of the small town of Unionville?" Well, as you learned in my earlier remarks, I was born and reared in Unionville. As it turned out, the Rotarian couple at the next table had spent their childhoods in the same area of my home county where the families of the Klingensmith clan had lived and farmed for almost a century, and they knew several of my relatives! What a small world it is through the network of Rotary!

So my request is for you to greet everyone and to talk with as many people as you can during this convention. You will be astounded by the friendliness and helpfulness of the Rotarians and their guests, and it takes no introduction to get started. All of us have stories to tell, and many of our stories are about the successful service projects in our clubs and districts. So let's get on with the show! This is going to be a great convention, and I want all of you to enjoy it as we exchange ideas about helping our clubs to become bigger, better, and bolder.

We are making the world a better place, and we have so much to be proud of as Rotarians. We are now on the world stage due to PolioPlus, and there is little doubt in my mind that the best days of Rotary are still ahead. So let's celebrate Rotary this week while we are here together in this special place! After all, that's cowboy logic!