



Dear fellow Rotarians,

As Rotary's first century draws to a close, I am nearing a personal milestone as well: the end of my presidential year. It has been an incredible century for Rotary and a truly wonderful year for Mary and me.

No RI president really knows what awaits him when he accepts the presidential nomination. Even after many years of involvement at the club, district, and international levels, it's hard to comprehend the full scope of Rotary without seeing it in action around the globe. Now, having had this experience, I can truly say that Rotary puts Service Above Self in every corner of the 168 countries where it has a presence.



Everywhere I have visited, I have been struck by one trait common to Rotarians worldwide: an overwhelming desire to be of assistance. That desire to help others is what unites Rotarians everywhere, far more than their diverse languages and cultures set them apart. Their commitment to help is what, in the end, has the most impact.

As I've visited clubs on every Rotary continent, I've seen projects involving tremendous financial input and projects involving very little. But as local Rotarians know, what's most important is choosing a project that provides a real solution to a problem in the community. To those of us in North America, a project to add a girls' bathroom onto a primary school might not seem life-changing. But in a part of the world where girls traditionally do not attend school, it can have an enormous impact. There, it epitomizes Rotary's unique understanding of the local community and its needs. Building that girls' room means welcoming girls to school - and to a lifetime of literacy. The strength of Rotary International lies in its members. Where other humanitarian agencies must travel hundreds or thousands of miles to bring aid, Rotary, in most cases, is already there. When the tsunami of 26 December 2004 hit South Asia, Rotarians and Rotaractors were in action within a day, putting their local knowledge of needs and resources to work. Because a Rotary club is made up of community members, not only is help already there - help never leaves. It is a hallmark of Rotary service that we not only respond to emergencies but provide the long-term humanitarian assistance that allows communities to recover from disaster and move forward.

Long after the news crews have gone home and the tsunami victims have faded from the world's consciousness, Rotarians will still be there, rebuilding shattered schools, roads, and lives. As Rotarians, we have a responsibility to our fellow members, and their communities, all over the world. In the months and years ahead, I ask you to remember that the need in countries devastated by this natural disaster has not disappeared just because we no longer see it on our television screens.

As I prepare to turn the presidency over to President-elect Carl-Wilhelm Stenhammar, many people have asked me what I have learned about Rotary in my time as president. I reply, without hesitation, that I have learned that the dedication of Rotarians exceeds anything I could have imagined. Together, as we begin a new century of putting Service Above Self, I ask you all to remember the words of Paul Harris at the last convention he attended: "The pioneering days of Rotary have just begun. There is as much to be done today as ever."

Thank you all for a wonderful year, and for being 1.2 million reasons to Celebrate Rotary!