

Community Comment
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Service clubs and vaccinations

January has been Rotary Awareness Month for this International service organization. Founded in the early part of the last century, Rotary has grown to some 200 countries around the globe. My favorite part of the Rotary world is that each club leads and the International leaders change every year. Except for the Rotary Foundation, there is virtually no administrative overhead. That means the money contributed goes to the projects and programs each club chooses to do. While there is leadership from Rotary International, each club is free to select the activities they want to do. Most clubs have some balance between community projects and international projects.

The Arcata Noon club, of which I am a member, has been around since 1926. We do a number of local community projects and focus on youth. We also like to do an International project when we have a specific interest. Some years ago, one member wanted to do a project that would bring clean water to individual houses in Viet Nam. This project meant that for the first time in the history of this place, local people wouldn't have to walk miles to a river to get water. The people were taught how to drill a well and build a storage tank. How to run pipe and arrange a spicket at their front door. How to bill themselves and add in for maintenance and capital improvements. Now, many thousands of people benefit from the project we initiated.

~~We enjoy sponsoring a youth exchange program. We receive a high school student and send one of ours to that students club. We think it fosters world peace one student at a time.~~

One program we are all very proud of is the polio plus program. This is an International effort to eradicate the polio virus from the face of the Earth. Along with the World Health Organization and, recently, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, we are two or three countries away from completing this task. It is impossible to know the number of people that have made this happen. There are those that contribute money. There are those that organize how to get the medicine to where it is needed. And then there are those who actually administer the vaccine.

Maybe you see the occasional news article about the workers who do this work. Sometimes they are volunteers from Rotary Clubs. Sometimes they work with other groups like Doctors without borders. Sometimes they are trained people who are native to the area that understand the benefit of such a program. The vaccine is easy to administer. But all too often, violence gets in the way. A number of people, many of whom are women, are targeted and killed for this simple, life saving act. Often because of ignorance and distrust.

I applaud Rotary for its effort with Polio. But ignorance doesn't just occur in distant countries. Too many of us here at home are failing to vaccinate their kids from many preventable diseases. Measels and whooping cough are in the news today. We can do better; and we must.

Thanks Rotary and the many other service clubs for your work.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.