


Community comment
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Rotary International Update

I became a member of the Arcata Rotary Club in 1984. I was asked to join by a member that I thought was pretty typical of Rotary. That is; he was a he, he was white, he was a successful business owner in the community, and he was middle to upper middle class in financial status. I was right about my perception of the type of person that was a Rotarian, but I was wrong about my perception of the group's goals. I quickly came to learn that promoting world peace was among their top priorities. While I thought I was a little out of place in this group, I was warmly welcomed. The more I learned about Rotary, the more I found my place in it. My perception of this being an old white guys group soon gave way to the reality. They were white and male to be sure. But they were one of the most generous groups of people I had ever seen. They did good things in Arcata and Humboldt County and they did peace building around the world. They provided for school equipment and wheelchairs in remote places in Africa and they exchanged high school students with other Rotary Clubs in dozens of other countries. ~~They called this World Peace one student at a time. I was hooked. This was a community of people I wanted to work with.~~ 

Having been around since 1906, and our club since 1926, the group was rooted in traditions. By 1984, it was also an international organization. This meant the rules for operation had to be acceptable to the international spectrum of cultures and traditions. In this context, the American Rotary was quite liberal in outlook. With our lead in the U.S., Rotary dropped the male only requirement in 1987. By the end of the 20th Century, I attended an International Convention in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I was surprised at the huge number of women that were in leadership positions from all over South America and beyond. This change took root quickly. Opening the door to women, which was long overdue, did what you might expect. Rotary is more energetic, more compassionate and more intelligent than we were. Rotary more than doubled it's ability to help people help themselves.

Since 1979, but with a concentrated effort since the mid 80's, Rotary has been focused on eradicating the Polio virus from the face of the Earth. This effort is almost complete. Two countries are left and good progress is being made in both. In partnership with the World Health Organization, and more recently with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, this goal will be reached soon. The implication of this accomplishment is obvious especially if you see the reality of polio in poor countries.

As an International group, Rotary is looking at which major issue to tackle next. An ongoing project that couldn't be more important right now is the Master's degree offered in peace studies. This is a real offering at top Universities like Duke-University of North Carolina. These are people in various businesses and professions that are dedicated to

advancing the cause of Peace in the world. They work in such areas as disease control, economic growth, and education. Rotary's next major focus worldwide looks like it will be clean water and wastewater around the globe.

~~Our club's international project is in the highlands of Cost Rica. We are developing a micro-loan program for small business opportunities that will be administered by the community for and by themselves. They will know best what they can do; we will help them help themselves.~~

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Rotary is an American idea that has gone global. Please support Rotary when you can.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.