

Community Comment
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Rotary Does Term Limits

July first is new years for many organizations. Rotary International is among those that change leadership and enter a new budget year on the first. One of the many things I appreciate about rotary is the opportunity for new leadership, new ideas for community and international projects, and a fresh start with budget goals.

Rotary Clubs decide what kind of service they wish to do from the bottom up. Any member at any time can suggest an idea or a response to a need or crisis that they feel passionate about. Rotary International, especially through the foundation, commits all Rotarians to a major project that we all join in on. The beauty of this is that the major projects are mostly voluntary. Most members choose to participate but it is not a requirement for membership.

The most recent example of a major Rotary International project has been the ongoing effort to eradicate the polio virus from the face of the Earth. It sounds impossible but this effort has been incredibly successful. Thirty years ago, there were about 350,000 cases of polio across the globe. In 2016, 37 cases were reported. Rotary partnered with the World Health Organization to get started. Many Rotarians volunteered to travel across the globe to administer the vaccine. You can imagine the remote villages that had to be visited and the trust that had to be built to get access to some parent's children. You can imagine what they thought of this medicine when they had no history with modern medicines. As the countries with outbreaks of polio diminished, the problem of trust became a worry that these volunteers would be met with violence. In fact, many volunteers have been killed just for bringing the vaccine into some remote areas of Pakistan. Most of these were local people, often women, trying to make a better future for their children. More recently, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation has matched 2 dollars to one to end polio once and for all.

As this effort comes to an end, we are not done yet, Rotary International is looking at the next big effort. One which is often mentioned is the issue of available, clean water and corresponding wastewater conservation and treatment. This is something Arcata knows a little bit about.

But clubs generate their own projects based on the initiative and interests of members of the club. A few years ago, one of our Arcata club members wanted to do a fresh water project in Viet Nam. He had been a Marine there and was seriously wounded. Over time, he wanted to do something positive for reasons that were his and his alone. Our project taught local people how to dig a well, build a holding tank and run pipe to the front of every house in a number of villages. They learned how to charge for the service and the bookkeeping required. They learned how to do this for themselves. One member generated this successful effort.

As I end my year as President of the Arcata Rotary Club, a club established in 1926, I am humbled by the experience. My theme was These Friends of Mine. A big part of the success of Rotary is that we become friends. We leave politics and religion at the door and we get to work; as friends.

Thanks to all the members of the club and to all who donated to our fundraising events. Thanks to Rotarians around the world for the good that they do.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.