

January 2012

My dear brothers and sisters in Rotary!



At Arlington National Cemetery outside Washington, D.C., stands a memorial to the Seabees, formally known as the U.S. Naval Construction Force. An inscription reads, "With willing hearts and skillful hands, the difficult we do at once; the impossible takes a bit longer."

In Rotary, we already have our own mottoes. If we didn't, I might be given to nominate those two lines. The power of combined effort, as Paul Harris once wrote, knows no limitation. When we work together, the impossible becomes possible.

I thought of this when I read, a few months ago, an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, the premier medical journal in the United States. Titled "The Polio Endgame," it outlined a strategy for a post-polio era, including managing post-eradication risks.

Thirty years ago, such an article could never have been published. Today, it is a testament to the power of dedication, of persistence, and of combined effort. The impossible has, indeed, become possible. A post-polio world, once the stuff of dreams, will soon be here.

My friends, the day that polio will be eradicated is close at hand. We have to be ready for it with a powerful Rotary – a Rotary of enthusiasm and confidence, of bold vision and clear ambitions. It is time for us to prepare by taking an honest look at our clubs. Are our projects meaningful, sustainable, and relevant? Are our meetings productive and enjoyable? Are our clubs welcoming to new members, and are our schedules and events friendly to young families? And once people join us, do we welcome them properly, involve them enough? Do we make them a part of the family of Rotary quickly enough?

The figures tell us that while enough new individuals join Rotary every year and everywhere, too many exit Rotary, on an ongoing basis. What unfulfilled hope do they leave with? What expectations are we not meeting? Can we do more and better?

Now is the time to focus our energies on our clubs, and on the way people see them. It is time to show our communities that the Rotary of today is not the Rotary of their preconceptions. Rotary is a way to connect, to do more, to be more – it is a way to take our idealism and our vision, and turn them into reality.

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