

November 4, 2006
Closing Banquet

John Eberhard address to closing banquet Population and Development – a Rotarian Action Group, conference – New York

Thank you and greetings from the great white north – Canada, that is!

I am privileged to say a few words about an incredible new development within Rotary – you are all an important part of it!

July 1, 2005 marked the first Rotary day in a new century of service. As a result, our beloved organization is poised to offer new and imaginative ways to “do good in the world”. For 100 years Rotary has recognized our clubs and districts as the means of implementing RI policy through world community service.

Let me say at the out set, that I am one who firmly believes that without strong and vibrant clubs, we would have little chance of making an impact on a world in need!

The longest serving g/s of Rotary – known as the “builder of Rotary” Chesley R Perry 1957 (extract from ‘the Rotary life of Chesley Reynolds Perry’ ©Rotary/one foundation 2006)

“Each club is a link in the great chain of Rotary. When one club does a service for its community, every club glows with the reflected radiance.”

Rotary clubs provide a bridge of hope to a world in need.

Our forth avenue of service is the core of Rotary’s profile worldwide! The Rotary network of local clubs is a powerful force for good and essential to any worldwide initiative!

The RI Board has called for an innovative approach to WCS. For the first time in our history, Rotary now recognizes a new program that relies on groups of individual Rotarians, all sheltered under a registered service name, to engage in international service programs in the name of Rotary.

These groups, while encouraged to work through the club and district networks, are not club centered. They work in harmony with Rotary international and its policies.

They are made up of knowledgeable and focused individual Rotarians who come together under the name of a Rotarian Action Group ----- or RAG, for short!

Rotary has a new program category called “global networking groups (GNG’s).” It includes the traditional as well as the growing class of service-oriented fellowships with an administrative structure that will better support the work that is their primary focus ----- that is very exciting!

The code of policy describes the service programs of Rotary international.

Rotary code of policies

40.10. Program terminology

The following terminology and definitions shall be used for RI programs:

Special program of RI - Polio Plus is a special program of Rotary international and has highest priority over all other programs until the certification of eradication is achieved.

Structured programs – organized activities recommended by the RI Board for clubs and districts that include a policy framework and guideline. These include: rotary community corps, Rotary volunteers, world community service, youth exchange, interact, rotaract, Rotary youth leadership awards, Rotary friendship exchange.

Menu of service opportunities - issues and concerns identified by RI as recommended service priorities for clubs and districts for a specified period of time. These include: children at risk, disabled persons, health care, international understanding and goodwill, literacy and innumeracy, population issues, poverty and hunger, preserve planet earth, urban concerns

The code of policy was changed (effective July 1, 2005) to now allow for a fourth program classification:

Global networking groups – groups of individual Rotarians organized to focus on shared topics of interest on an international basis.

A Rotarian Action Group (RAG) is one of these

Like a “RAG rug” to which many people and resources contribute, we see emerging a beautiful and functional mosaic.

Imagine a simple RAG rug – consisting of:

- **A significant tapestry of warm materials,**
- **Lovingly contributed and**
- **Stitched together by many people.**
- **Colours and patterns resonating with each other**
- **Goods from diverse sources –**
- **Carefully patterned by skilled hands –**
- **Experts focused passionately on a particular service initiative!**

The result is a stunning art form of love and service – providing comfort and functionality in a pattern of order and sustainability!

By definition, a Rotarian Action Group is a voluntary association of Rotarians who unite themselves for the purpose of conducting international service projects that advance the object of Rotary.

The November 2006 R.I. Board meeting will act on a report submitted by the RAG's study committee that met in August. We do not know the results of these deliberations but it is hoped that RI will continue to support and enhance the inspired potential of this new program. It is my hope that the Board will specifically address issues that include:

- Limiting the number of RAGs ensuring high quality programs and
- Ensuring the capacity and internationality of a RAG by a rigorous recognition process
- A presidentially appointed R.I. resource (or committee) group structured in a way that includes Rotarians knowledgeable in international development and with longer staggered terms made-up so as to ensure consistent policy recommendations to the Board.
- A recommendation that will foster a close working relationship between RAGs, TRF, clubs and districts on funding and human resource potential
- Enhanced opportunities for cooperative relationships with kindred organizations both government and NGO.

At the moment, Rotarian Action Group activities must be conducted independently of RI, but must be in harmony with RI policy, including the use of the Rotary marks.

This is consistent with our historic position that Rotary is not used to promote religious beliefs, political issues, or simply raise money for other organizations.

Let it be said that Rotary acts from time to time in a revolutionary way that Paul Harris said was:

“Essential for the growth and continuing relevance of our evolving organization”

The creation of the GNG's is a fundamental shift from our 1922 policy affirming the autonomy of clubs. It is a revolutionary and I dare say, visionary step for RI.

It provides for a new paradigm of service delivery, to be sure. It is consistent with Rotary's strategic plan.

Perhaps, inadvertently, RI has defined the action groups delivery vehicle in the context of the strategic plan's objectives adopted at the 2004 COL. of:

- Refining our governance,
- Sharpening our program focus,

- Enhancing our public image and
- Approaching a new corporate program.

Some fellowship groups have migrated from the fellowships category to the action category:

Excellent examples include:

- Population and development– a Rotarian Action Group!
- Rotarians fighting aids – a Rotarian Action Group!
- Humanitarian service resource fellowship- a Rotarian Action Group
- Fellowship for mine action – a Rotarian Action Group
- Rotarian dental volunteers – a Rotarian Action Group

We have heard Rotary leaders extolling the virtues of “cooperative relationship” and “partnering” in its broadest sense for many years now. There is a detailed statement of how these relationships are supposed to evolve in the Rotary code of policies.

But it took the fellowships groups to give meaning to this expression!

Of the dos and don'ts of partnering, the Rotary code aspiration has often, arguably, been in conflict with the Board's resolve. Some have suggested that the conflict has paralyzed corporate Rotary into inertia.

The dynamic leadership coming from our service fellowship groups have “taken action”, Frank!

They have not been deterred by the overly cautious “nay-sayers”. They have done something about it! I don't have to tell this audience how meaningful and significant these initiatives have been!

RFFA is a good example:

- Rotarians from over 60 countries with a focus on OVC (orphans and vulnerable children)
- Focusing on club activity in many countries but major partnerships in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Working partnerships with:
 - USAID - \$ and reporting requirements
 - Hope worldwide – on the ground NGO support working with local Rotary clubs
 - Emory university – monitoring and evaluation
 - Coca cola Africa – corporate resources
 - CRCID – clubs and financial support from Canada

Clearly, Rotarian Action Groups will use the Rotary network to implement their programs with many clubs and districts in the world. RAG's will fill a market niche – they will be much more programmatic in their application of the 4th object of Rotary.

They will have far greater capacity than individual clubs with significant international contact with long-term leadership and expertise that enable them to compete in their specialized fields while assisting clubs and districts to engage their members in meaningful localized related service initiatives.

And, we will see many new service initiatives emerge that implement these important partnering principals.

An example of the way a major RAG program can function is seen in the Rotarians Against Malaria – a Rotarian Action Group! The Board recognized this group last year.

Taking the lead from Rotary 2006 Copenhagen convention keynote speaker Dr. Jeffrey Sachs' "the millennium promise group" has encouraged the "nothing but nets" program.

This a recently formed partnership the current members of which include the action group along with:

- UN foundation,
- The United Methodist church,
- Sports illustrated magazine and
- The National Basketball Association.

The "Nothing But Nets" partnership seeks to create awareness of malaria and malaria control efforts and to raise money for malaria control. Donations to date have been added to the measles and malaria campaigns seeking full coverage of vulnerable populations in sub-Saharan Africa with insecticide treated mosquito nets.

And in the best of all worlds this group of specialists will use the club and district network to mobilize Rotarians and local partners on the ground to implement their programs.

The Rotarian Action Group has established a donor advised fund at the Rotary Foundation that is able to receive donations made to the Rotary Foundation for the cause of malaria control.

In the end it is all about results!

We all have the priority interest of insuring that Polio Plus is successfully completed.

If and when RI decides on a new corporate program to follow Polio Plus, I believe the Rotary action groups will have evolved to an operational quality that the trustees will see as being worthy of support.

Indeed, the Rotary world will be looking at them with great interest.

While undertaking a major sectoral medical action plan, for example, the Rotary leaders need to be mindful that their RAG carries the reputation of all Rotarians with it. It necessarily follows that each recognized RAG has an enormous responsibility to bring the considerable business and professional expertise that Rotarians apply in the “other lives” to build the necessary credibility for their action groups.

This will take careful planning, hopefully under a corporate umbrella (which is encouraged by the RI Board) to ensure:

- Consistency in management,**
- Planning,**
- Implementation,**
- Accountability,**
- Evaluation and**
- Reporting of the specific long-term sustainable program activity for which the group is formed.**

Only in this way will the Rotary action groups acquire the reputation and credibility that accompany the best known of the international NGO’s which these groups have the potential of emulating.

Our best partner should be the Rotary Foundation of Rotary international. I believe that in the not distant future, this will happen.

The Rotary Foundation’s ability to raise funds from non-Rotarian sources would be enhanced significantly. It is well known that it is far easier to raise charitable dollars when a specific and worthy cause is targeted.

The Foundation is not structured to raise money for such programs and until RI recognizes new corporate programs, there will be little interest in private foundations or governments to simply give money to the Rotary Foundation to support the educational and humanitarian program delivery mechanism that Rotarians have been supporting since 1947.

The RAGs have it right. But the RI Board must give up some central control and find an appropriate way in which a RAG can raise money for its own programs in a way that does not prejudice the operation of the foundation. This is not rocket science. As the RAGs mature, the Board and the foundation will assume much more confidence than has been evident in the recent past in these Rotary entities.

The relationship with TRF may well be on the radar scope if the Trustees want to reach out and engage these groups as examples of how the synergies of RAGs, clubs and districts can work with other cooperating agencies in the delivery of larger and more efficient world community service initiatives.

It is not inconceivable that the service being done by a RAG is of such note as to think that the Rotary Foundation will regard them as an attractive potential service partner:

- **A matching grant perhaps?**
- **A restricted fund?**
- **3-H grant**
- **A policy even that could allow for funds raised in the name of Rotary by the RAG might flow through the foundation and allow for the engaging of staff professionals who are tasked to manage or work on specific programs initiated by the action group?**

Why not? This would be a win-win for both and make the balance sheet of the foundation look that much better.

Unlike most clubs, a RAG has the capacity within their memberships of individual Rotarians with specialized interest and expertise!

Through the strategic planning process, new ways of identifying partners will evolve. Rotary action groups will play a key role in this vision of invigorating clubs with meaningful WCS.

These groups of Rotarians will be “on the ground” and capable of recognizing local needs and priorities. These will be seen in the context of locally recognized strategic interests and relationships with local governments and NGO’s operating in the framework of Rotary’s programmatic interests.

Rotarian Action Groups are already seen as functioning at a high level of competence in program writing, planning, transparent reporting and management skills ---- assisting clubs to do more sustainable world community service.

The degree of guidance to be provided by the RI Board over the next few years will be a function of the quality of organization that develops in each Rotary

action group. The level of acceptable “behavior” and organizational integrity of these emerging groups of Rotarians will predict the extent of the oversight required.

At the same time, I predict that R.I. presidents will want to appoint a high level committee to assist the Board in dealing with RAGs. Indeed, perhaps in the not distant future, the COL will direct that a standing committee be appointed with the necessary continuity for policy development and monitoring.

RI task forces in the field of WCS will be obsolete. Resource groups should deal with strategic issues and assist the RI Board with policy suggestion for guidelines in sectoral service areas.

At a well-attended workshop at the recent centennial convention participants cited a primary goal of having action groups undertake WCS programs that are consistent with the Rotary areas of emphasis and the millennium goals.

International development experts all agree that the development of organizational and managerial capacity is a necessary starting point.

Rotary does not need one-year task forces. We need enduring professional entities that can implement the Rotary model in diverse humanitarian outreach just as we have done with the Polio Plus program.

Undertaking a programmatic approach to international development is preferential to a project-by-project approach. Hand-in-hand the Rotary club-to-club model fits usefully into the RAG model!

The measurable results must necessarily tie into the poverty reduction strategies of the countries and the sectors in which the action group is focusing its attention.

The Rotary action groups have the potential to “behave” like operational NGO’s and perform in a much more effective manner because of the relationships that can be built through the club and district networks with congruent guidance from the international RAG entity.

In a way, we are on the verge of re-inventing ourselves! Rotary is on the cusp of a new adventure in service! But care and business prudence is necessary as we move forward.

Rotary has spent 100 years cultivating an internationally recognized reputation for humanitarian projects and valuable intellectual property.

Care must be taken in the oversight of these emerging groups to ensure consistency of the operational integrity and compliance with the time tested object of Rotary. The Board will necessarily have to closely monitor the implementation

and recognition of each applicant action group to ensure a business plan that understands the need to observe Rotary's fund raising and cooperative relationships policies as well as the principals of high quality, effective international development.

There are many other Rotary related groups that will now be able to find a home under the RI policies. These include non-club organizations that are not registered but functioning outside the policies of multi-district activities or administrative groups.

These independent not-for-profit organizations with loose Rotary affiliation (in many cases started by Rotarians) are often incorporated in their own jurisdictions for tax and liability reasons. Many have been benignly functioning for a long time and may or may not wish to come under the umbrella of the official Rotarian Action Group program. Some of the many include:

- Rotoplast
- Shelter box
- Thirsting to serve
- Water aid
- Hunger plus
- Aquabox
- Free the children
- The growing connection
- Earthbox
- Etc.

And then there are multi-district organizations (some of which are functioning pursuant to Board policy) doing service work similar to that in some of the RAGs. They may wish to take advantage of the new program classification and become a RAG. Included in the group would be:

- Australian Rotary corporate alliance program
- Australia WCS
- Disaster relief programs such as the TRF donor advised funds
- Programa rotablind del Rotary Club Santiago, Chile"
- CRCID
- Etc.

Paul Harris mused to himself as recounted in his book (this Rotarian age, p. 37)

"If one standing on the promontory of time could have donned his metaphysical spectacles revealing thoughts and deeds standing out in the affairs of men, as stately trees stand out in landscapes, he would have observed a memorable struggle for

existence - persistent and irresistible "will to be" of an ideal,
which eventually found expression in Rotary----.")

Rotary represents the simple idea of people sharing a common belief - seeing what has to be done and doing something!

Paul Harris said of vision:

"The yearly, daily, hourly spirit of Rotary should be the spirit of renaissance. We need men of microscopic visions who will explore the molecules, atoms and electrons, but we also need men of telescopic vision who will explore the unknown".

A new dawn of service delivery has risen on the Rotary world. – A world on which the sun never sets. Rotary has indeed taken a giant leap of faith into the future of Rotary service delivery –

We have set our course. It is now up to the Rotary world to do its best with the tools it has and don't look back!

Rotary international -- service above self -- fellowship and service!

**We cannot do everything but
As individuals, we can do some thing**

It is perhaps trite to say:

We will each be known forever by the tracks we leave,

- **You will be remembered for having shared the Rotary spirit with others!**
- **You will leave a legacy in good works and in helping others through the TRF**

I am reminded of al sharps poem:

**Isn't it strange that paupers and kings
And clowns that caper in sawdust rings,
And common folk like you and me
Are builders of eternity?
To each is given a bag of tools,
A shapeless mass - a book of rules.**

**And each must build ere life has flown
A stumbling block or a stepping stone**

RAGs are stepping stones!

Remember what Winston Churchill said:

As an individual: “That you make a living by what you get – you make a life by what you give!”

Your Rotary entity and this conference are contributing greatly to the growing professionalism increasingly required to implement effective international development.

Population and Development – a Rotarian Action Group is:

“Leading the way”

And, is providing an enviable example to all other RAGs of that which a world in need expects of Rotary International.

For that, I congratulate you and thank you for what you are doing for the future of our beloved organization!