

THE ROTARY FOUNDATION AND IT'S ROLE IN WORLD COMMUNITY SERVICE

**My perspective of World Community Service
By Cliff Dochterman RI President, 1992-93**

For those of us who have been around Rotary for half a century or so, we recall that 30 or 40 years ago, all Clubs were encouraged to get involved in World Community Service. If a Club wanted to have an international project, we called it World Community Service. Frankly, most of the projects were relatively small in scope. Occasionally we would send medical supplies and equipment, or perhaps educational or library books to another part of the world. It generally was Club to Club activities but occasionally districts got involved. .

In the early days, The Rotary Foundation was not actually involved in World Community Service, since all of the awards of the Foundation from 1947 until 1965 were scholarships. In 1965, the idea of Special Grants for humanitarian purposes was introduced – and these were later called Matching Grants. Even with the new humanitarian grants it was not a very significant activity of The Rotary Foundation, since the total contributions to the Foundation in 1965 were just over a million dollars.

It was about this time, 1966 and 67, that Rotary International President, Richard Evans, introduced the idea of “matched districts” and “matched clubs” which created a new interest in humanitarian activity as clubs sought some kind of relationship with their matched club.

By the early 1970s, we began to see Rotary clubs and districts getting involved in humanitarian help for flood victims in Bangladesh, earthquake relief in Nicaragua, and relief for drought, flood and earthquake disasters in Africa, Asia and South America. In 1976, many clubs responded to an appeal for victims of a huge cyclone in Darwin, Australia. Rotarians were beginning to see that World Community Service could be initiated in all parts of the world.

By the Presidency of Clem Renouf in 1978-79, the introduction of the Health, Hunger and Humanity program brought humanitarian service to a totally new level for Rotary. Huge humanitarian grants and major projects were totally new for Rotarians but this major activity was an instant success story – and kept the Health, Hunger and Humanity program alive.

The first 3-H program was a success, this was the idea of a mass polio immunization of 6 million in the Philippines. By the 1980s, Rotarians were thinking that nothing was too small or too large in the way of humanitarian service for Rotarians to undertake and in 1985 Rotary launched the PolioPlus program, and the story of Rotary's corporate project success is now a well known story. In the past 20 years, we have all seen humanitarian services become the major thrust of Rotary in the world – certainly equaling our former emphasis on scholarship awards, and perhaps surpassing that significant activity of our early Foundation.

I have recalled these historic references because it is important to realize that Rotary International has gone through various phases in our concern for World Community Service.

When I became R.I. President in 1992, I visited dozens of clubs and districts which were doing amazing things to provide medical equipment and care in other parts of the world. I saw clubs building schools and libraries. I saw highly technical equipment being shared with some of the most poverty stricken nations of the world. I saw individual volunteers giving their most precious gift – their time and unique talents. I saw burn units and blood banks created in hospitals, and literacy programs developed and eye clinics operated.

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I had occasion to visit the United Nations and to attend the annual meeting of several hundred Non-Governmental Agencies at the UN, all working to provide food, medicines, clean water, environmental protection, educational opportunities and dozens of other humanitarian services around the world.

The thing which amazed me the most, was the duplication of effort, the waste of valuable resources, the dearth of cooperation, the lack of sharing information or any effort for a clearing house of information, skills or know-how. All of these hundreds of wonderful agencies have fantastic experiences – but so little was available for the benefit of all. And even more tragic, how much greater the benefits could be in caring for the poor, the helpless, the hungry, the sick, the illiterate in the poverty pockets of the world.

I'll tell you that it is pretty difficult to do much when you are the President of Rotary International. The days are flying by. You are completing one visit, and getting ready to get along to the next nation, meeting, or project observation. The time to plan or initiate a new idea has already passed you by.

As I served as a Trustee of The Rotary Foundation, these ideas kept coming back. What could be done to obtain greater cooperation among the many Rotary groups who are doing such great humanitarian work? Can we share the experience of those who know how to ship containers of equipment, food, blankets or clothes to needy areas? Is there some way that Rotary International could create a clearing house of valuable information and opportunities for training for those Rotarians and Clubs who want to reach out with humanitarian hands – but spend their time wonder around in the darkness, just trying to feel their way to a successful humanitarian project or World Community Service.? How can we share the expertise of those who have taken a school bus or medical equipment or a fire engine across the border into a developing nation? How could Rotary retain its identity, and still cooperate and work through other NGOs? I came to the conclusion that our Secretariat staff, although certainly willing to help, frequently lacks the practical experience or the processes available to assist Clubs and Districts in complex World Community Service tasks.

That expertise is held by those dedicated Rotarians, working in the field, who have learned the hard way – through trial and error -- with practical on the job experience. I kept wondering if there couldn't be a more orderly way that this great experience and knowledge could be shared with those clubs and districts which had desire to do more – but just did not have the know-how.

It was at this point that I talked with Jack Maxwell with the Medical Supplies Network at the Tulsa Rotary Club and Jim Johansen who had experience in Santa Barbara and a few others, and concluded that we should create a pilot project over a 3 year period to see if some coordination, cooperation and expertise could be collected for the benefit of all.

I had the dream of a clearing house which would give information to Clubs and Districts. Perhaps there might be some workshops to help clubs. This information could be dispensed at Zone Institutes, PETS, and International Conventions.

In 1997, the Chairman of The Rotary Foundation had the authority to make a grant, with the approval of the Trustees, of up to \$30,000 for one or more projects.

With this opportunity available, I created a grant of that amount to create the World Community Service Resource Network. For a three year period a clearinghouse of information was established with an individual providing part time staff assistance to collect information and provide assistance in collecting and shipping a variety of goods to overseas locations.

Out of that effort grew the Matching grant database which Rotarian Jim Johansson established as Hands Across the Sea as well as the Rotarians on the Internet Fellowship developed.

This concept was again reinforced by the efforts of R.I. Pres. Frank Devlyn when he created the World Community Service Resource Task Force in 2000-2001. Other Task Forces have grown out of these efforts, including the Humanitarian Services Resource Fellowship and the Humanitarian Service – Rotary Action Group.

I realize that I have certainly not covered a good many other groups which have similar interests ,so, here we are, 10 years have passed since we had a dream of some coordinating, cooperating, clearing-house activity to enhance our World Community Service activities. Some strides have gone forward. Some assistance has been available at the Secretariat. But the major issues as they pertain to clubs wishing to undertake more World Community service are still unsolved.

Within Rotary we have seen Rotarians create Hunger Plus to provide dehydrated food; we have Gift of Life providing lifesaving surgery for children; we have Rotaplast, providing cleft palate surgery; we have Medical Supplies Network; and Medical Equipment and Supplies Abroad; Clean Water initiatives; Rotary Doctors Bank; Shelter Boxes for disaster relief; Water Aid; Safe Blood Africa, and dozens of other humanitarian activities started and operated by Rotary clubs and districts.

There are hundreds of other Rotary Clubs working with the Wheelchair Foundation; Care International; World Vision; Paxton International; Doctors Without Borders; Direct Relief International; Project HOPE; CURE; Surgical Eye Expeditions; Trees for the Future; Heifer Project; Grameen Fund; and hundreds of other Non-Governmental Organizations. Along side these groups stand our Rotary Action Groups dealing with Blindness Prevention; Fighting AIDS; Literacy Providers; Land Mine Removal; Malaria Prevention and so many more. All of these are complimented by several outstanding district web sites connecting clubs to humanitarian needs and regional project fairs matching club with practical projects. All of these are the 21st Century version of Rotary World Community Service.

My dream is simply this: That the time has come for some kind of Rotary mechanism to assist in coordination, cooperation, collaboration, and networking with separate organization both in and outside of Rotary International -- with the primary goal to assist Rotary Clubs put their resources and energies into the most practical humanitarian services. I am convinced that the long term effect of a worldwide clearing house of information and readily available practical advice and assistance, would expand the World Community Service activities of thousands of Rotary Clubs and Districts.

We talk about governments and nations working together to achieve world understanding and peace. But we have hundreds of separate agencies and organizations which are striving to relieve poverty and disease and illiteracy in the world – but with hardly a shred of cooperation or coordination, or sharing of information and expertise. So much of the humanitarian service in the world, as well as in Rotary, is like the Tower of Babel – with virtually no correspondence, cooperation or communication.

During the 2006 –2007 Rotary year a new web site was created by Rotarian and Governor for District 5340 Philippe Lamoise that has become the number 1 web site on the internet to place or find Matching Grants for Rotary clubs all over the Rotary world, it is located at this easy to remember web site www.matchinggrants.org