



RI PRESIDENT-ELECT'S ADDRESS

Ian H.S. Riseley

14 June 2017

My friends, fellow Rotarians, and guests,

One of the many wonderful things about Rotary is that every time we near an end, we are already looking forward to another beginning. Today, as we get ready to say goodbye to Atlanta, to this convention, and to this Rotary year, we are already looking forward to the year ahead: to new roles, new responsibilities, and new possibilities in our Rotary service. I hope that, for all of you, this 108th Rotary Convention has been one of inspiration — that every one of you will leave here not only with warm memories, but with the ideas, connection, and motivation that will launch an even more successful year to come.

Throughout this week together, we've done so much more than celebrate here in Atlanta. We've heard from so many people, within Rotary and beyond, who have found their own ways to serve humanity: by forging partnerships, by giving back, by using their own abilities and gifts to make their communities, and our world, a little bit better than they were before.

And I think every one of you has been reminded, this week, of something that has been true of Rotary service from the very beginning — the idea that is reflected in our second motto, One Profits Most Who Serves Best. The idea that when we serve others, when we help our communities, when we do the best we can for the people who need it most, we aren't just doing good for others. We aren't just making their lives better. We're making our own lives better, as well.

Each of us came to Rotary for our own reasons. But all of us have stayed in Rotary because Rotary adds something to our own lives. It gives us much more than just good friends, which, after all, can be found in many ways. It gives those friendships a deeper meaning, and it gives us a stronger connection to our communities. It gives us an experience and an education that we can find nowhere else — as we explore each avenue of service, guided by the ethics and values of Rotary.

We stay in Rotary, because Rotary makes a difference in our lives — and because we know that through Rotary, each of us is making a difference in the world. And that knowledge, that feeling, is what keeps us coming back, meeting after meeting, project after project, year after year.

Because when you come right down to it, that is why we are all here, in Rotary. To make a difference: to our world, to our communities, in the lives of others, and yes, in our own

lives, as well. And in 2017-18, that will not only be our goal, but our theme: *Rotary: Making a Difference*.

What kind of a difference each club and each Rotarian chooses to make will always be their own decision. But we are united in our organization and its common principles: our insistence on ethics and our commitment to Service Above Self.

Our service will be guided, as it should be, by the three strategic priorities our Rotary International Board has set for all of Rotary in our current strategic plan: firstly, to support and strengthen our clubs; next, to focus and increase our humanitarian service; and finally, to enhance Rotary's public image and awareness.

So, how do we support and strengthen our clubs, our first strategic priority? We start by giving them the tools to be successful.

Thanks in part to the recently approved dues increase, we are now undertaking significant changes that will enable us to improve support for our clubs by a greatly enhanced array of online tools, in particular, a refreshed Rotary.org, a simplified Rotary Foundation grant process, an improved My Rotary experience, and a rebuilt Rotary Club Central, which will be faster, easier to use, mobile-friendly, and an essential tool for every club.

Ultimately, as we all know, the only people in the world who can make a Rotary club strong are the people who belong to it. Strong clubs begin with their members — with women and men who are qualified, who are ambitious, who are motivated to work together, and who bring a diversity of backgrounds and experiences to their club.

In Rotary, it is almost axiomatic that our diversity is our strength. That idea is the foundation on which our classification system was built. As an accountant, I would gladly be part of a professional organization of all accountants — but I would never want to join a Rotary club that consisted only of people just like me. Not only would it not be very interesting, it possibly wouldn't be very creative, either.

The greater the diversity in a club's membership, the more productive that club is likely to be. And when we talk about diversity in today's Rotary, we are not talking about diversity as it was in Paul Harris' day, but a genuine diversity in which the composition of our clubs reflects the composition of our communities.

It has been 28 years since our Council on Legislation voted, in a decision that was long overdue, to admit women to membership in Rotary. Twenty-eight years on, the percentage of women serving in our clubs is only just over 20 percent. That's up from about 13 percent 10 years ago. At that rate, it will take us another three decades to get to where we *should* be: full gender parity, with as many women in Rotary clubs as men.

Three decades is far too long to wait to achieve a Rotary that reflects the world in which we live. We need to make it a priority now.

Along with women, there is another enormously important demographic segment that is just not represented as it should be in our clubs. I am talking in this case about younger people. Paul Harris was 36 years old when he founded Rotary. Today, only 5 percent of our reported membership is under the age of 40. The great majority of members are

over 60. And that is just our reported membership — which doesn't even count the people who don't want to tell us how old they are.

Think about that for just a moment. Now consider what Rotary stands to look like 10 or 20 years from now if we don't get very serious very soon about bringing in younger members. It is imperative that we find new and better ways to consistently attract and engage younger members, so that we are constantly creating new generations of members and training new generations of leaders.

What about our second strategic priority of focusing and increasing our humanitarian service?

We have six areas of focus in Rotary. In all of them, one essential element is sustainability. We don't dig wells and walk away; we make sure communities can maintain and repair those wells. If we build a clinic, we make sure that clinic has a way to keep running without ongoing support from us. And when it comes to polio, we aren't just working to contain it; we're working to end it.

Eradicating polio is the ultimate in sustainable service. It is an investment that will yield not just a long-lasting but a *permanent* benefit, on a global scale. It is and must remain our No. 1 priority, until the job is done.

All of us heard here this week how very close we are to eradicating polio. All of us understand how much is at stake. And I hope all of us understand the responsibility that we now share: not only to raise the money we've committed to raise, but to raise the awareness that is so critical for success. We've come much too far to fail — and we won't.

Our third priority is increasing public image and awareness, which very naturally goes hand in hand with the first two goals. When we're better able to communicate who we are in Rotary, what we stand for, and what we do, we're much more likely to attract new members who will fit into our organization — and new partners who will help us leverage our service to achieve even more.

But it's never been easy for us to quantify the work that we do, to say to others that this is the impact that Rotary has. And that is why, in the new Rotary year, I will ask every Rotary club to provide us in Evanston with just two numbers: the amount of money, both in cash and in kind, invested in humanitarian service, and the number of hours of work performed in Rotary's name.

This is not a contest or a competition. We are not going to publicize or recognize the numbers reported by any individual club. What we are going to do is aggregate them, to have numbers that represent the work done by our organization. Numbers that we can present confidently in our public image work, and in our membership materials, and to our partners. Numbers backed by specific data, on the club level, that answer not only the question "What is Rotary?" but the question "What does Rotary do?"

Connecting all of these goals and all of these priorities is one word: sustainability. Sustainability in our service — for the greatest impact. Sustainability in our clubs — for generations to come. And I believe it is past time for Rotary to recognize the need for sustainability in everything we do, not only for the good of Rotary, but for the survival of our planet.

Today, environmental issues threaten us all. They are having a disproportionate impact on those who are most vulnerable, those to whom Rotary has the greatest responsibility. Yet environmental concerns barely register on the Rotary agenda.

The time is long past when environmental sustainability can be dismissed as not Rotary's concern. It is, and must be, everyone's concern. And so I am asking every Rotary club to raise awareness of this critical issue by the small gesture of planting at least one tree for each member.

It is my hope that the result of that effort will be far greater than the environmental benefit that those 1.2 million new trees will bring, which is itself most worthwhile. I believe the greater result will be a Rotary that recognizes our responsibility, not only to the people on our planet, but to the planet itself, on which we all live and on which we all depend.

For 112 years, Rotary has served. We've worked to answer the needs around us: the needs we see and the needs of those far away. Together, we've made a difference to more lives in more ways than we can ever count, or will ever know.

Today, each one of us bears that torch, its flame lit by Paul Harris and passed forward from generation to generation. Today, each one of us bears, as well, a responsibility: to ensure that that Rotary flame continues to burn brightly, for generation upon generation to come. So that next year, the year after, and generations from now, Rotary will still be serving humanity — still making a difference, to our communities, and our nations, and our world.