

Presentation for District 1390

I am often asked 'why did you join Rotary?'

It's very simple – I wanted to connect with the key businesses and local authority people in the town where I was to work – Ware in Hertfordshire England as a Church Minister

And I bring you greetings from my own Club President Stuart.

So in 2001 I was made a member of Rotary International and I proudly wore my Rotary pin, but I didn't become a Rotarian until I went to India – not with Rotary but with my church to assess some projects that we had been working on with the Church of South India.

One afternoon we were working with a group of disabled children, teaching their mothers, grandmothers and aunties how to give basic physiotherapy to help with spasticity and spasms. One lady took me by the hand, holding her other hand was a little girl of about 3 years. The mother pointed to a big banner on the fence of the compound – then she pointed to my badge. Put her hands together and said 'thank you – thank you, my daughter doesn't have polio because Rotary came'

In that moment I became a Rotarian – I suddenly knew what Rotary was about and what Rotary was capable of.

It was the badge the lady had recognised, the sign of trust, honesty and commitment – and I know we will eradicate polio – if we keep up the momentum of raising awareness and raising funds.

One way I raise awareness is by wearing this purple crocus – and it was great to see them at the exhibition this morning.

On world polio day in October, Rotarians and friends planted 25,000 crocuses at Stoke Mandeville Stadium – the home of the Paralympics. When the crocus corms flowered in the spring we held a coffee morning and cake sale, raising funds and reminding people that polio has not yet gone from the world.

And we gained a new Rotary Club! The head groundsman had seen how we connected with each other and to the community and wanted to get involved – and get others involved!

You see projects inspire people to ask questions, to get involved and once involved want to do more, and every year in the spring all who walk along the tree lined pathway by the tennis courts to the running track will be reminded that it is Rotary who paints children's little fingers purple as a symbol of vaccination – and in time it will be the symbol of a polio free world.

But back to the Rotary Wheel – the symbol of our organisation, our sign to the world – and now with the word 'Rotary', it tells people who we are – and it speaks of our inherited values of trust, honesty, integrity and 'getting the job done' – if we make sure our branding is consistent in all forms print, social media and internet platforms everyone will know that

it is Rotary that is providing clean water and toilets – especially for girls

it is Rotary that is teaching children to read

it is Rotary that is preventing mothers dying in child birth

it is Rotary that is supporting economic development through micro credit and social enterprise

it is Rotary that is providing health care and disease prevention – including polio

it is Rotary that is creating peace – through the peace centers and in everything we do.

Peace in the household where the children can go to school instead of collecting water (often dirty water!)

Peace in the heart of a young girl who can fulfil her dream to become a doctor because there are toilets at her school.

Peace for the farmer who now has milk and vegetables to sell as well as feeding his family.

Because at the heart of all we do is an amazing transaction.

When the recipient receives that which will change not only his or her life but also the lives of those around them – they also receive something much more, they realise that someone cares enough to make a plan and deliver what is needed, they are not forgotten – they are a person of worth of integrity.

And for us – the joy when we know we have made a difference – it is smiles on both sides !!!!

And its when we share in those moments that we become Rotarians – not just members of our Rotary Club

And that, my friends, is the key to growing Rotary, the key to retaining members.

When individuals engage in Rotary led projects they become passionate about what they are doing and so become the inspiration for others to get involved and so the cycle of People doing Projects and creating Publicity begins – then reaches more people to do more projects to bring more publicity.....this is the 3 P circle – if we create the momentum then we can grow Rotary!!

But we have to acknowledge that the people coming to join us may not want to do Rotary as we do! So we have to create room where groups of people can get together and create Rotary in their way – because Rotary is a people shaped organisation and with new model clubs – from e clubs to satellite and passport there is no reason why we can't cater for the new generation of Rotarians who will lead this amazing organisation forward. It will be Rotary – but not quiet as we know it!

As Rotarians we see a world where people come together to take action that brings lasting change to our communities, across the world and in ourselves. And if we are not changed by what we do in Rotary we are either doing the wrong things or we are in it for the wrong reasons.

I was changed by my experience in Bangalore I became a Rotarian, but it was my experiences in London on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2005 that shaped the way I do Rotary

I was in my office just 20 meters from where the Number 30 bus exploded

I spent the day tending the injured and saw every colour, creed nationality and faith caught up in the bloody mess caused by hatred and ignorance.

I knew then my work in Rotary (and in my paid work in Healthcare Chaplaincy) was to bring people together so that myths could be dispelled, and trust built – and its wonderful to see that in the group of youth exchange students here today – they are doing just that.

One project that is also doing ‘just that’ is the Indus peace project on the broader between India and Pakistan. I was privileged to be at the launch event when Rotarian Tony (District Governor Elect) a Hindu, and Rotarian Mo (Club president) a Muslim, stood side by side and pledged to bring the project from plan to reality and create a beautiful space where wounds may be healed and peace built.

Many people say to me – you must have made many sacrifices to ‘do Rotary’ my reply is simple and echoes the words of Maggie Alphonsi, who when interviewed after she had led the English Women’s Rugby team to World Cup victory. The young reporter said ‘you and your team must have made many sacrifices to get here and to win’ – Maggie replied ‘We haven’t made sacrifices we have made life choices – life choices to be the best we can be!

I thank you on behalf of our President Barry for making the ‘life choice’ to be a Rotarian.

And I bring you a thank you from of all those people in whose lives you have made a difference, in whose lives you have created peace, hope and opportunity.

Continue to be the inspiration that connects the world and makes lasting change in our communities, across the globe and in ourselves.

Kiitos – thank you!

Debbie Hodge