

Face to Face with RI President Wilfrid Wilkinson

What is the health of Rotary worldwide?

Amazingly given the times we live in, the health of Rotary is extremely good. Our recognition as a humanitarian leader has never been greater and more and more organisations are anxious to partner with us. In some areas of the world, including North America we have experienced over the last two years, a decline in membership but this has been offset by other areas of the world including India and Korea, where we have had substantial growth.

Will we conquer Polio in the next 3 years?

I would like to say that the answer is a definite “Yes” but I must be realistic. Wars, political uncertainty and natural disasters could all extend this time frame. The one certain thing is that we must conquer this dreadful disease and keep our promise to the children of the world.

What can Rotary do to stop membership attrition? Why have we stopped growing?

When one looks at our membership it is important to recognise that our organisation is more than 100 years old and as a result, members get sick, grow old and are no longer with us. As a result there is some substantial natural attri-

tion that most clubs must anticipate. The attrition however, that we must guard against is a loss of members due to not making our meetings and programmes attractive to members whether they are young or old. Rotary clubs that carry out important community projects, that stress ethical

conduct and care for both the young and the old while all the time enjoying fellowship, continue to win the battle against attrition. Besides, carrying out projects that members can become involved in, it is also very necessary to maintain interest. A club must also never forget the impor-



tance of involving the member's family in both the social activities and the projects that the club undertakes. A club made up of satisfied members will not lose them.

Youth is our major hope for the future. Do you envisage any major thrust by Rotary to spread Rotary ideals in the youth?

I am very anxious that Rotary expand its programme for youth. Today's youth will be the leaders in our organisation when I'm no longer around. It is essential that we "Lead the Way" and ensure that they understand the importance of voluntary service and community development. In Rotary, youth is part of the Family of Rotary, and will be given special emphasis in 2007-08.

Will the Rotary Foundation evolve new strategies to promote Peace?

Rotary Foundation has a slogan for its most recent initiative which is "Peace is Possible." This slogan captures the thrust of our recently developed Peace and Conflict Resolution Programme. This programme which is now in its 6th year has generated a tremendous amount of interest and already we are seeing the benefits. The graduates are assuming leadership roles in government and in non-governmental organisations where they are able to influence decisions based on the training which they derived from their Rotary sponsored studies. It is my opinion that we are developing strategies that promote peace.

Is Rotary geared to promote ethics? In today's world of dwindling values can Rotary overcome the stiff challenge posed?

The promotion of ethical behaviour particularly in business and government is probably the greatest challenge that our world faces. Rotary is an organisation that has incorporated ethical behaviour as one of its objectives. It has suggested "The Four Way Test" as a

What are the major challenges Rotarians will have to face in the coming year?

The challenges vary, to a large extent, in various parts of the Rotary world. Every club has the challenge of increasing its membership or sharing Rotary with other communities. Polio eradication remains the biggest challenge. This is an important challenge for every club but particularly for the four remaining polio-endemic countries. India as the largest of those four countries provides its Rotarians with the greatest challenge but one which I'm confident that we are capable of surmounting.

guiding principle for its members to follow. I believe that in the years ahead it must continue to speak out for the establishment of codes of ethics for all businesses and government.

Does Rotary have any plans to make "Rotary families" stronger and more effective?

Rotary International, on the other hand, has a responsibility to maintain communications with its family that includes Interact, Rotaract, RYLA, the beneficiaries of the Rotary Foundation programmes and particularly with Inner Wheel and youth groups. These are all part of the "Family of Rotary" and should be recognised and supported by Clubs, Districts, Zones

as well as by the International Board of Directors.

If more women are to join Rotary, has R.I. any plans to relax classification rules for the housewives?

I would have to state I would personally oppose the further relaxing of our classification rules. Rotary clubs are able to do what is best for the communities because they represent a cross section of the business and professional life in their towns and cities. It is absolutely essential that membership of a Rotary club includes those leaders. If it becomes primarily a family organisation, it will be only duplicating other organisations and that would be detrimental to both them and to Rotary. Rotary has a special role to play because of its membership restrictions through the classification system. However, it must be open to women and men, minority groups and those of every religion who represent the various classifications of a given community.

Will Rotary remain "relevant" two decades from now? Will we be active and strong at the end of our second century?

The answer to this question is in the hands of the current membership and those who come after us. If we continue our efforts to promote world understanding and peace, if we continue to "Lead the Way" and if we continue to demonstrate that "Rotary Shares," I am utterly convinced that by the end of the next 100 years, the future of Rotary will be so great that the whole world will be amazed. Just think of what has been accomplished in 100 years by four people coming together in 1905. Can anyone envision what 12,00,000 Rotarians working together could accomplish in another 100 years?

*Rtn. Ashok Mahajan
Rotary International Director
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