When you join our club, along with the fellowship and service opportunities you get upon becoming a member, you are also joining an organization much bigger than this club: You are joining an organization consisting of 46,000 clubs with over 1,400,000 Rotarians living in virtually every corner of the globe….more than 150 countries….. and you have become part of an organization that is backed by the amazing Rotary Foundation.

The Rotary Foundation is a charity that spends hundreds of millions of dollars per year in order to improve the lives of people all over the globe. You probably won’t have the opportunity to personally help people in Zambia, Pakistan or Mozambique, but through the Rotary Foundation, and its members who live in those countries, you can …… effectively and efficiently.

Over the last 36 years, the foundation has been focusing half of its considerable resources on ending the scourge of Polio throughout the world. This was a project that began a year prior to my joining Rotary in 1980 with the immunization of 6 million children in the Philippines, which was followed in 1988 by a formal commitment to rid the world of polio, working with the World Health Organization, The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF and The Gates Foundation.

For those of who are long-time Rotary veterans, it can seem, at times, to be an insurmountable challenge. After all, they have been “this close” to ending Polio for more than a decade, only to be set back by wars and corrupt or barbaric governments. On the other hand, when one remembers that when Rotary began its quest there were 1,000 new cases of polio each and every day, or 1 million cases every 3 years, one realizes that because of Rotary and its foundation there are tens of millions of people on this planet who are not only alive but are able to spend their lives free from this crippling disease.

The truth is, this time, today, in 2024, Rotary really is “this” close to ending polio: In 2020, there were 140 cases of “wild” polio world-wide. Thus far this year, in 2024, there have been 18: 9 in Pakistan, and 9 in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, because of the success in vaccinating billions throughout the world ….. Rotary is fully or partly responsible for immunizing, since 1988, nearly 3 billion children …. there exists in the world some cases of so-called “vaccine derived” polio. It is something that can happen, over time, when a child is immunized in a part of the world where few other children have been vaccinated and the areas’ hygiene is very poor: The vaccinated child can leave traces of the vaccine in their poop, which can end up immunizing another child, which can and leave their poop behind, and so on and so on, until, at some point, there is a mutation and instead of becoming immunized from being in contact with another child’s poop, that child, instead, can become infected with polio.

No, the anti-vaxxers are not right …… the polio vaccine has saved tens of millions of lives ….. but it has also created a tiny number of vaccine related cases. How many? Well, in 2020 there were 1,113 world-wide. But here too the numbers are also falling: In 2020, as I mentioned, there were 1,113 cases. In 2021, that number was down to 688. Thus far this year, only 100, with half of them in Nigeria and Yemen.

As I said, about half of the Foundation’s spending goes toward the final steps necessary to eradicate Polio. The other half is spent on global grants, district grants, disaster response grants and programs of scale grants. Grants for projects like the eradication of Malaria in Zambia, helping part of the Philippines rebuild after a cyclone, Puerto Rico after a hurricane, or Ukraine during the ongoing catastrophe they are suffering from.

To encourage Rotarians to contribute to the foundation, Rotary set up giving levels shortly after Paul Harris’ death in 1947, and created the Paul Harris Fellow recognition in 1957, an honor bestowed on anyone giving $1,000 or more to the foundation. For better or worse, they did not tie that amount to inflation, or otherwise the amount of giving required to become a Paul Harris Fellow today would be a bit over $10,000. That should take nothing away from the significance of a member of this club becoming a Paul Harris Fellow. Its attainment means you have bought into Rotary fully, and care deeply not only for your neighbors but for people you will never have the opportunity to meet. The real difference between 1957 and today? Back in 1957 becoming a PH Fellow was a destination; today it’s, hopefully, for most of you, a step on a journey.

Over the years, Rotary has created additional levels of recognition, starting with Paul Harris Fellow Plus pins for every additional $1,000 gift made by a Rotarian throughout his or her life, culminating with a crystal for becoming a Major donor, someone who’s given at least $10,000.\*

Our club has seven Paul Harris Fellows. Of those seven, five are multiple Paul Harris $1,000 donors, and of those, two are Major Donors---Rotarians who have given at least $10,000 over their lifetime to the Rotary Foundation.

All of us have an opportunity to contribute to the Rotary Foundation when we pay our dues, or anytime, for that matter, by simply logging into your account on the Rotary International website. [https://my.rotary.org](about:blank) Or, if you are not computer literate and/or don’t want to learn how to log-on to your Rotary International account, you can give me a check anytime made out to the Rotary Foundation and I’ll see that it gets to Rotary International, your account is credited, you get the tax deduction letter and you receive your proper recognition at the appropriate time.

In case you are wondering: The Rotary Foundation currently takes in around $360 million per year. With 1.4 million members world-wide, that comes to, on average, $257/Rotarian. So, IF you think you want to give an “average” amount to the RI Foundation this year, your “nut” is $257. Of course, if you happen to feel that living in paradise in Park City in the US puts you financially ahead of an “average” Rotarian throughout the world, feel free to give a bit more. ☺

Thank you!

Bill Bloomfield, Foundation Chair

Rotary Club of Park City Twilight

Ps: Feel free to call or text me if you’d like to know how much you need to contribute to become a Paul Harris Fellow or to reach your next giving level.

(310) 292-2484

\*There are many levels of major donors. The first level is for a lifetime gift of $10,000. The 2nd level is for a lifetime gift of $25,000, and so on.