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ROTARY'S SECOND HUNDRED YEARS

The past couple days we have heard glowing reports of the life and achievements of Rotary in San Francisco over the past 100 years. It is an impressive record. It is the story of how the seeds of a great idea planted here in San Francisco blossomed into the premiere service organization in the nation. The inspirational quotations of Paul Harris, Homer Wood, and many of the great leaders of the past have been repeated many times during this significant celebration. Nearly all of the platitudes and accolades which I might have used have been covered by an eloquent line up of previous speakers.

So, your Chairman asked if I would say something different, and just give a few predictions about Rotary in the next 100 years. I figured that wasn't too much of a job – since I certainly won't be around to defend my predictions – and I suspect only a few of you will be to check my accuracy.

In the initial glance in my crystal ball, there is no question that Rotary will continue as a strong and vital activity in the community and the world. We may grow to an organization of three or four million members – especially if the Chinese government opens the doors freely to Rotary. We will be found in every segment of the globe. Rotary could easily become a household word and be known by millions of others who will be the beneficiaries of Rotary service around the world. But, on a much closer look, there may be a few amazing changes in our organization – some because of evolution, and some because of necessity.

My first observation is the critical necessity for Rotary to return to one of its basic roots – Vocational Service. That may sound like a rather tired and hackneyed concept. But, I assure you that Rotary was built on the belief that business and professional persons must be honest, ethical and responsible individuals. The early Rotarians did not believe that “truth” is conditional, or “honesty” is circumstantial, or “ethics” were transitory. In these days when the world suffers from ethical bankruptcy, some Rotarians may urge that the “Rotary Code of Ethics”, which we scrapped in 1980, should be resurrected and preached from the rostrum of every Rotary Club. A Code of Ethics should be delivered to the CEO of every major corporation and hung on the walls of every governmental and congressional office. The lack of ethical principles and self-serving deals have destroyed, and continue to erode the economic and leadership fabric of the world.

What a rare opportunity we have for Rotarians to become the ethical spokesmen to the world. But, we can't wait a hundred years to start. If corporate, legislative, business, media and other professionals are unable to differentiate the meaning of truth, fairness, honesty and decency – then Rotary has an obligation and opportunity to lead the world – and it can start here in the United States. A new Rotary Code of Ethics could be that beginning.

The next vision I see in the crystal ball, is the expectation which the world may place on Rotary for even greater service. Let's recognize it: Rotary International has a new reputation in the world. There is no doubt that the world looks and marvels at Rotary's achievements in our Polio Plus program. Within the next few years, Rotary will be held up as the organization which proclaimed a dream of a polio free world and stayed the course until the dream was real.

And now, the world will expect so much more of Rotary. Hundreds of non-governmental organizations will seek the support and partnership of Rotary to achieve monumental humanitarian goals. There is hardly a task which is too small for the volunteer army of Rotarians and the generous financial support given to The Rotary Foundation. So, in the next hundred years, we can expect a clamor for Rotary to take up the eradication of malaria; the defeat of water borne diseases; the urgency of basic education, especially for girl children; the elimination of measles; and the defeat of persistent hunger.

Perhaps Rotary could take the lead in quelling the devastation from HIV/ AIDS by offering a \$25 million prize for an effective vaccine or cure. What an impact we could have on the world if Rotary could send a thousand teachers a year from the industrialized nations, along with school supplies, into the poverty areas of the world to conduct training programs for local teachers and build a worldwide education network. Education may be our greatest contribution to the peace of the world in the next century.

Perhaps Rotary could declare war on illiteracy, or cancer, avoidable blindness, child abuse and other conditions which reduce the useable lives of so many people. Rotary's future achievements are almost beyond our vision to comprehend. And the world is looking to us – because Polio Plus has given us a reputation of achievers.

As I look into the crystal ball, I see Rotary taking a new role in creating world understanding, good will and peace. It is tragic that the term "peacemakers" has become associated only by kooks, radicals and street marchers. The world needs responsible men and women to undertake positive steps to strike at some of the basic causes of strife, conflicts and civil disruption – poverty, sickness, hunger, illiteracy, and hopelessness. Rotary has an historic record of meeting such needs – but we can do more – one country, one village at a time.

Fifty-four years ago, here in San Francisco, the nations of the world gathered to write the United Nations Charter – and 49 Rotarians served as delegates and advisors. Rotary was invited as an official participant in the initial meeting and has since retained a valuable status with the United Nations. Of the first 12 presidents of the General Assembly, 5 wore the badge of Rotary.

I see in the crystal ball, an opportunity for Rotary to exercise its official status in the U.N. far more vigorously in the future. Rotary can only continue missions of mercy of humanitarian assistance when nations cease unreasonable demands by customs officials, or those who occasionally thrive on graft and corruption, which thwart the good work of Rotary volunteers. If we are to deliver health care, food, water, education, and village development and sanitation – we need the full cooperation of the United Nations and the leaders of the world. I see Rotarians becoming bold enough to speak forcefully to the leaders of the United Nations – as we become even more effective ministers of humanitarian and educational services.

As Rotary moves into the second Century, there are many other areas which call for our attention. When we see large numbers of young people dropping out of a free public school system and we stand by and say nothing – we are abetting the deterioration of our future workforce of our business and professional economy. Rotary Clubs must become exponents of sound and effective education, and not stand by wringing our hands while half of our potential adults are wasting their opportunity to become productive citizens. Rotarians cannot only promote literacy in undeveloped countries; we must make it socially unacceptable for free educational opportunities to be squandered. This is a challenge to every Rotarian, especially in North America.

As we accept greater activities of humanitarian service, I suspect that one of these years, some Rotary leaders will recognize that the real future of The Rotary Foundation is in promoting the potential of The Permanent Fund. As you know, we have two funds, the Annual Fund which we spend to maintain the yearly activity of grants and scholarships -- and the Permanent Fund, which is not spent, but is held as an endowment which earns annual income. I see the potential of the Permanent Fund growing from \$200 million to \$5 or 10 billion dollars, which will earn far more than the Annual Fund, could possibly collect from Rotarians each year.

Some of you will recall the Shrine East West Football game which began back in 1925 in Kezar stadium. Shriners began an endowment back then, which in 80 years has reached over \$10 billion dollars and supports the 22 children's hospitals. There is no reason that Rotary, with its much larger member-ship, could not build a \$10 billion dollar Permanent Endowment Fund to provide real financial substance to The Rotary Foundation which would be far greater than relying on the annual giving of Rotarians.

I see in this crystal ball so many other calls for Rotary attention in the next century. There are urgent calls for Rotary Action Groups to bring a halt to drug and substance abuse, provide microcredit, prevent blindness, be ready for disaster relief, create concerns for growing populations and offer aid to polio survivors and work in so many other areas. Rotarians can bring clean water, sanitation and adequate food to millions of people whose basic health is in daily jeopardy. Rotary Action Groups may become the primary service device of this century.

In these coming years there will be far greater involvement of our women Rotarians. There is no need for women to be given a back seat – because they are frequently driving the bus. As the years go by and the gender balance becomes more even, I'm certain that women who are Rotarians will be given the full respect by all Rotary clubs that is deserved and required of a dual gender organization.

With the continued explosion of telecommunication technology, I see unbelievable systems bring instantaneous and exciting programs, with multi language capability, to the Rotary Clubs of the world. In even the most remote Rotary meetings we will be able to see and experience Rotary in action. A new vitality will energize club meetings and attract men and women who have a passion for service.

Over on the cloudy side of the crystal ball I see many of our old and historic Clubs declining in influence, membership and some just dying a natural death. Sadly, these are the clubs which lagged behind in seeking new and energetic members. These are the clubs which have substituted “check writing” to other action organizations for “hands-on” service activities. These are the Clubs which are just not relevant to their community. These are the Clubs which held so tightly to the outmoded rules or old fashioned customs, and failed to recognize the dynamic changes in the business and professional world which effect their members. They made no adjustments and tried to live in a world which no longer existed.

The only other dark clouds I see on the horizon are those which come when our dreams are too small. If Rotary seeks leaders with vision, imagination and courage to dream huge dreams, there is no limit to the achievements Rotarians can make. In fact, the next hundred years may be even greater than any crystal ball could ever predict. The great movement which has spread around the world in 100 years could be merely the prelude of what is to come. Our challenge is to dream great dreams – then make dreams real. What we actually do is far more significant than what we say we do.

In the next hundred years, the world needs Rotary – because Rotary can build a better world. And the amazing thing is – this movement was launched right here in San Francisco.

So, those are my predictions for the next 100 years! It's up to you to make them true.