

## Rotary and Volunteerism

Founded in 1905, Rotary International (RI) has a rich heritage of public service. Today, the nearly 1.2 million members of more than 29,600 Rotary clubs in 163 countries serve as volunteers in their local and world communities. Rotarians initiate community projects that address many of today's most critical issues, such as violence, drug abuse, AIDS, hunger, the environment and illiteracy. They also support programs for youth, educational opportunities and international exchange for students, teachers and professionals, and vocational and career development.

### **A history of volunteerism**

Rotary's history provides outstanding examples of what a few concerned citizens can do. In 1919, Rotarians from Ohio, USA, established the forerunner of the National Easter Seals Society. In the 1920s, Rotary launched programs to counter child labor in sweatshops. After World War II, many clubs initiated service projects to help refugees and former prisoners of war. From 1980-1997 hundreds of Rotary volunteers worked in refugee camps around the world.

Rotary International was a participant in the April 1997 **Presidents' Summit for America's Future**, convened in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. Participants at the summit, representing service groups, politicians, business leaders, and 140 US communities, gathered to present commitments to help the nation's youth. The more than 7,400 US Rotary clubs pledged to conduct activities to benefit more than six million young Americans by the year 2000. The US clubs will initiate mentoring and tutoring projects, vocational training, leadership development and urban peace initiatives to meet this goal.

### **Volunteering through PolioPlus**

Rotary's most ambitious undertaking to date is its effort to eradicate the polio virus. Working with the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and national governments, Rotarians have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars and countless volunteer hours to the effort through the **PolioPlus** program. At national immunization days in numerous polio endemic countries, Rotarians have mobilized millions of volunteers to transport the polio vaccine and health workers to immunization posts, support health workers and officials on site, and promote public awareness of the event.

The volunteer efforts of Rotarians were instrumental in the eradication of polio from the Western Hemisphere, which was certified polio-free in 1994. Rotarians expect to celebrate the certification of a polio-free world by the year 2005, Rotary's centennial year.

### **Volunteer opportunities for youth**

Several Rotary programs help young people continue Rotary's tradition of volunteerism. **Interact** (for high school students) and **Rotaract** (for young adults 18-30) are Rotary-sponsored service clubs which provide opportunities for service and leadership development. Many Rotaract and Interact service projects focus on issues of importance to young people such as AIDS, the environment, homelessness, urban peace, and drug abuse prevention. Argentinean Rotaractors helped implement a national AIDS public awareness campaign. Interact clubs in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia initiated a drug and alcohol abuse awareness campaign, distributing educational materials to classmates and organizing discussion groups. Rotaractors and Interactors have also volunteered during polio immunization campaigns.

### **The Rotary Volunteers Program**

As professional men and women from almost all vocations, Rotarians possess a broad spectrum of skills of potential benefit to their home and world communities. The Rotary Volunteers program provides opportunities for Rotarians and other skilled professionals to offer their services and expertise to projects sponsored by their own Rotary club or district, or to international projects requiring volunteers and expertise from abroad.

### **Rotary Volunteers project examples**

- Some 1,200 dentists and doctors from around the world have served at medical and dental clinics in Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Jamaica, Kenya, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- An engineer and surveyor from Belgium made three trips to India to help construct a primary school and dispensary in an area where there are no roads and no doctors.
- Teams of Australian volunteers joined Filipino Rotarians in building more than 30 schools, libraries, and other community buildings and providing disaster relief after a volcanic eruption and a typhoon.
- A town planner from Northern Ireland and a vocational training teacher from Finland served at a community development project in Romania, sponsored by a Rotary club in England.
- A farmer from the United States received a grant for his service at a project in Paraguay, which involved planting vegetable gardens near schools and assisting farmers to improve food quality and increase the income of poor families.
- An engineer from Canada helped develop a five-year management plan for the construction of a sewer system in Honduras.

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