

A PAUL HARRIS FELLOW



"Recently, I joined in a discussion about the importance of the dignity in the presentation of a Paul Harris Fellow (PHF). You know the recognition that includes that beautiful medallion on a blue and gold ribbon, along with the certificate and lapel pin to show that it is an event of special significance.

When someone commented that the presentation itself "gives a PHF its true value as a recognition of exceptional service," I felt that a little more explaining should be made. Certainly, to recognize a person as a Paul Harris Fellow should always be an honor to the individual, because it demonstrates significant support for the wonderful work of The Rotary Foundation.. But, just as a Paul Harris Fellow can be a "recognition of exceptional service," it can also be many other things, as well.

To describe a PHF only in terms of "exceptional service" is far too limiting for the entire Rotary world, and totally disregards the historical background of the expression of appreciation for a very generous contribution to The Rotary Foundation. If we did not think much broader in describing a Paul Harris Fellow, and realize it is primarily a magnificent way to raise money for The Foundation, I assure you that **The Rotary Foundation** would not be one of the great humanitarian and educational foundations of the world. What is the historical fact?

Ironically, in those clubs which chose to limit the Paul Harris Fellow recognition to a form of an "award for exceptional service," many Rotarians were discouraged from making large personal gifts to The Rotary Foundation since it might be interpreted as giving merely seeking or buying an "award." So, the per capita giving in those areas of the world is much lower than those areas where the concept of a Paul Harris Fellow is the original expression of appreciation by The Rotary Foundation Trustees for an individual, or in whose name, a gift of \$1000 is given to conduct the work of The Foundation.

Has the Paul Harris Fellow recognition by the Trustees been successful as a fund raising scheme? Absolutely! Prior to the PHF, in 1956, less than \$500,000 was raised annually by The Foundation.

Today, more than \$80 million is raised per year -- and about 80% of those funds come from individuals being named Paul Harris Fellows, or are naming other persons Paul Harris Fellows. The last time I checked, there were about 1,000,000 Paul Harris Fellows, and multi-Fellows in the world. They are the backbone of the annual support to The

Rotary Foundation, and those donations are the only reason that enables Rotarians to carry on a world-wide program of educational and humanitarian programs.

So, what is a Paul Harris Fellow? Think for a moment of this statement: "A Paul Harris Fellow means whatever you want it to mean." Should The Rotary Foundation accept a \$1000 contribution as a way to honor a person for exceptional service? Certainly.

Should The Rotary Foundation accept a gift of \$1000 as an expression of happiness for 20 years of marriage, or a new grandchild, or success in one's vocation or family life? Of course.

Should The Rotary Foundation accept a \$1000 contribution in memory of a friend, relative or associate who has been an important asset to your life? Certainly.

Should The Rotary Foundation accept \$1000 if you really believe in the tremendous value of the humanitarian work of TRF in developing parts of the world and thereby express appreciation for your gift by naming you a Paul Harris Fellow or multi-PHF? Absolutely.

So, I suggest that a Paul Harris Fellow can mean whatever you wish it to mean. The Rotary Foundation benefits from your contribution and demonstrates this appreciation through the mechanism of a Paul Harris Fellow. That is the way I see it."

[Written by RI President Cliff Dochterman, 1992-93; condensed by Governor Gene](#)