

The Essence of Rotary  
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District Governors Elect gathered at the International Assembly in San Diego this past January and were addressed by RI President-elect John Kenny, who unveiled his theme for the 2009-2010 Rotary year: *The Future of Rotary Is in Your Hands*. “**THE FUTURE OF ROTARY WILL NOT BE SHAPED AT RI HEADQUARTERS -- IT WILL BE SHAPED IN EACH AND EVERY ROTARY CLUB,**” Kenny said, “**BECAUSE IT IS FOR EACH OF US -- AS ROTARIANS -- TO DO WHAT IS NECESSARY TO KEEP ROTARY STRONG.**”

As we prepare to assume new roles on July 1, we must focus on what Rotary is, and what it is that makes each of us Rotarians uniquely qualified to fulfill our calling to make a difference. We must not lose our world view of Rotary as we become caught up in the day-to-day operations of our clubs. We must remember that Rotary is a volunteer organization of 1.2 million business and professional leaders of high ethical standards in all vocations, spread throughout 32,000 clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas, united worldwide to provide humanitarian service and help build goodwill and peace. We must remember that Rotarians conduct projects worldwide to address real needs — including illiteracy, disease, hunger, poverty, lack of clean water, and environmental concerns.

A key phrase in this description is “high ethical standards.” This was a cornerstone of Paul Harris when he founded Rotary in 1905: professional individuals who had impeccable character and ethics. When each of you was asked to become a Rotarian, you were asked in part because you are known as an individual of outstanding character and high ethics. In order to best fulfill our commitment and responsibility as Rotarians, it is incumbent on us to have a thorough knowledge of basic principles developed to guide Rotarians in achieving the ideal of service and high ethical standards.

The **Object of Rotary** was formulated in 1910 and has been adapted as Rotary’s mission expanded. The **Object of Rotary** provides a succinct definition of our purpose as well as our responsibilities. Hear again these guiding words:

The **Object of Rotary** is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise and, in particular, to encourage and foster:

**FIRST** The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service;

**SECOND** High ethical standards in business and professions; the recognition of the worthiness of all useful occupations; and the dignifying of each Rotarian’s occupation as an opportunity to serve society;

**THIRD** The application of the ideal of service in each Rotarian's personal, business, and community life; and

**FOURTH** The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service.

**The Four-Way Test** was created by Rotarian Herbert J. Taylor in 1932 and was formally adopted as a code of ethics by Rotary in 1943. The test has been translated into more than 100 languages. I hope everyone one of us in this room today knows **The Four-Way Test** by heart, which asks the following:

Of the things we think, say or do

Is it the TRUTH?

Is it FAIR to all concerned?

Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?

Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

With the **Object of Rotary** and **The Four-Way Test** always leading and guiding us, each club relies on the classification system. Just like Paul Harris in the founding days of Rotary, our goal through classification is to achieve professional diversity, which enlivens the club's social atmosphere and provides a rich resource of occupational expertise to carry out service projects and provide club leadership.

The **Avenues of Service** are Rotary's philosophical cornerstone based on the **Object of Rotary**, and form the foundation on which all club activity is based:

**Club Service:** strengthening fellowship and ensuring the effective functioning of the club.

**Vocational Service:** encouraging us to serve others through our vocations and to practice high ethical standards.

**Community Service:** the projects and activities we undertake to improve life in our communities.

**International Service:** encompasses actions taken to expand our humanitarian reach around the globe and to promote world understanding and peace.

President-Elect Kenny told us *The Future of Rotary is in Your Hands*. Through our complete understanding and commitment to the **Object of Rotary**, **The Four-Way Test**, fully implemented classification and strong, active **Avenues of Service**, our future will be strong and sure.

We talked a lot about The Rotary Foundation at Pre-PETS and PETS, and today we are only focusing on specific deadlines and procedures necessary to ensure success in various programs. Having said that, however, I want to review just a few highlights of The Rotary Foundation's history that I think are worth keeping in mind as we move forward.

In 1917 RI President Arch C. Klumph of Cleveland proposed that an endowment be set up “for the purpose of doing good in the world.” The first donation received was \$26.50. In 1919 the fund made its first grant of \$500 to the International Society for Crippled Children, which later grew into the Easter Seals, still going strong ninety years later.

The endowment fund Klumph began was formally named The Rotary Foundation in 1928 and became a distinct entity within Rotary International.

The Great Depression and World War II both impeded the Foundation’s growth, but the need for lasting world peace generated great postwar interest in its development. After Rotary’s founder, Paul P. Harris died in 1947, contributions began pouring into Rotary International, and the Paul Harris Memorial Fund was created to build the Foundation.

Also in 1947, the first Foundation program was established, what we now know as Ambassadorial Scholarship program. The Group Study Exchange and Matching Grants programs were established in 1965-66.

Since 1917, the Foundation has received contributions totaling more than \$1 billion. More than one million individuals have been recognized as Paul Harris Fellows.

Rotary has played a major role on the international stage for decades. During World War II, many clubs were forced to disband, while others stepped up their service efforts to provide emergency relief to victims of the war. In 1942, looking ahead to the postwar era, Rotarians called for a conference to promote international educational and cultural exchanges. This event inspired the founding of UNESCO.

In 1945, 49 Rotary club members served in 29 delegations to the UN Charter Conference. Rotary still actively participates in UN conferences by sending observers to major meetings and covering the United Nations in its publications.

“Few there are who do not recognize the good work which is done by Rotary clubs throughout the free world,” former Prime Minister Winston Churchill of Great Britain once declared.

In his address to the Governors Elect, Kenny said, **“EACH ONE OF US IS STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GENERATIONS OF ROTARIANS PAST, AND IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO DETERMINE ROTARY’S FUTURE.”** He acknowledged the foundation established by past Rotary leaders and laid the responsibility for building upon that success on every Rotarian.

**“EVERYTHING BEGINS AND ENDS WITH OUR CLUBS,”** he said. **“OUR CLUBS CAN AND DO WORK TOGETHER; THEY WORK THROUGH THEIR OWN DISTRICTS, IN COOPERATION WITH OTHER CLUBS AND DISTRICTS, AND WITH THE SUPPORT OF OUR FOUNDATION.”**

**“BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, EVERYTHING THAT WE ACCOMPLISH IS DONE THROUGH THE STRENGTH OF OUR CLUBS. AND SO EACH CLUB MUST HAVE AUTONOMY TO SERVE WHERE AND HOW IT CAN SERVE BEST.”**

Kenny also highlighted the importance of the RI Strategic Plan, adopted by the RI Board of Directors in 2007, as an essential tool in providing continuity. **“THE PLAN IS DESIGNED TO STRENGTHEN AND PROCLAIM THE CORE VALUES OF ROTARY: SERVICE, FELLOWSHIP, DIVERSITY, INTEGRITY, AND LEADERSHIP,”** Kenny said.

The Strategic Plan begins by stating:

The mission of Rotary International, a worldwide association of Rotary clubs, is to provide service to others, promote high ethical standards, and advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through its fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders.

The vision of Rotary International is to be universally recognized for our commitment to Service Above Self to advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace.

The Plan outlines our core values that represent the guiding principles of the organization’s culture, including what guides members’ priorities and actions within the organization. All of the core values are reflected in the **Object of Rotary** and **The Four-Way Test**, which inspire us to foster and support the ideal of service for developing and maintaining high ethical standards in human relations. Our Core Values are **Service, Fellowship, Diversity, Integrity, and Leadership**.

The plan includes seven priorities, each supported by a set of goals. To determine these priorities, RI surveyed grassroots Rotarians and senior leaders from many parts of the world, asking them what issues would be most important to Rotary in the coming years. The priorities are:

1. Eradicate polio
2. Advance the internal and external recognition and public image of RI
3. Increase Rotary’s capacity to provide service to others
4. Expand membership globally in both numbers and quality
5. Emphasize Rotary’s unique vocational service commitment
6. Optimize the use and development of leadership talents within RI
7. Fully implement the strategic planning process to ensure continuity and consistency throughout the organization

At our induction to Rotary, we committed to share in responsibility for four key elements: expanding membership, participating in service projects, supporting The Rotary Foundation, and developing leaders capable of serving Rotary beyond the club level. As the leaders in your clubs, you can set the example by living **The Four-Way Test**. As the leaders in your clubs, you have the awesome and important responsibility of implementing the **Object of Rotary**, and of leading each member towards their full potential as a Rotarian. Why? Because *The Future of Rotary is in Your Hands*.