Past President’s Day – A Look Back at 40 Years

Today, we are reflecting back on the past 40 years of The Rotary Club of East Nassau and want to focus, in particular, on the 40 Presidents that have had a hand in leading this Club.

This truly has been an International Club.

- 27 of our Presidents have been Bahamians (including one Greek)
- 7 have hailed from England
- One came from Wales
- One was Scottish
- One was Guyanese
- One was American
- There have been two Canadians
- And next year, we look forward to breaking new ground with our first Jamaican President

Many of our Presidents have distinguished themselves in many ways:

- 3 have been knighted by the Queen; Sir Gerald, Sir Albert and Sir Durward
- 4 became District Governors, Keith, Al, Barry & John
- 2 have represented our District at the R.I. Council on Legislation
- 2 went on to become Presidents for a second time in other clubs; Edwin Deal was the Charter president of S.E. Nassau and George MacLeod, President of the Stornoway Club in Scotland. A third was invited to be President of The Rotary Club of Barbados and, although it was very tempting, I had to decline.
- One President won an Olympic Gold medal in Star Class sailing
- One was Governor General of The Bahamas (& we all agree was one of the best G.G.s the country has seen)
- One was President of the Grand Bahama Port Authority for several years
- One wrote History Books that, I believe, are still used in the School system
- Two have been awarded Rotary International’s highest honour, the “Service Above Self Award”. Those two outstanding Rotarians, of course, are PDG Barry Rassin and Sir Durward Knowles
- And, … at least one that I know of has fathered twin girls

I feel very honoured, to have been included in this group of Past Presidents.

Looking back a little more than 40 years, at what is now District 7020; Rotary started in this part of the world with the chartering of the Rotary Club of St. Thomas, USVI in 1957. Rotary was first extended to St. Croix, where the club was chartered in 1958. Next was Kingston, Jamaica in 1959 and then The Rotary Club of Nassau in 1961, now
commonly referred to as the “City Club”. The City Club sponsored it’s first offspring, giving birth to East Nassau, which received it’s charter on May 6, 1963 with 26 members and Si Amoury, founder of the Amoury Company, as Charter President.

Various Rotary Clubs around the world have become well known for various things. East Nassau, I venture to say, has become best known for fund-raising and thinking big. I can’t speak too much to the earlier years (being a young boy at the time), but one thing I can say for sure, is that this club has done a lot of Fun Raising in it’s Fund Raising projects over the years. You have been reminded of some of them at our last three meetings.

I recall hearing something about Rotarama, which must have been the first “BIG” fund-raiser. It started under President John Chaplin in 1967-68 and ran for two years as a joint project between the Nassau and East Nassau Clubs and, in the third year, included the new West Club. I am told it was a “glorified fair” and understand it was held at the Hobby Horse Race Track, included an air show by the World Famous Thunderbirds, horse races and “Casino-type” gambling. It raised about $50,000 the first two years, but after the second year it was discovered the gambling was “not quite legal” and had to be dropped, so proceeds were much smaller in the third & final year.

I also recall an event called an “Anything-a-Thon” in the mid 70’s that many organizations participated in. Some were riding bicycles, pushing baby carriages, wheel chairs, anything that could roll. East Nassau Rotarians took shifts in pulling this giant wheel around the track. I have no idea how much money was raised, but it was a lot of fun.

Horse Shows, held at Camperdown, were started by Pres. Durward and ran for several years, by which time Kiwanis and other organizations had started running them as well. We developed a race called something like “The Great Roving Rotarian Race”, where Rotarians had to run from one end of the track to another, drink a beer and run back. I recall winning a white ribbon one year. I think it was Alan Wilson and Heinz Wzolek that beat me, because of the beer lap.

Pres. Durward also started the Fairs at the Eastern Parade. These proved to provide some of the best fellowship events the club has ever experienced. Especially, in the days when we used to set up the stalls ourselves on the Friday evening and clean up ourselves on the Sunday morning. The club would have 100% participation, in some form or other at the fairs. As the years went by, we started hiring people to – first – clean up – and then to erect the stalls. After about 15 years of fairs, some of our members started voicing the opinion that it was “too much work” for what we got out of it. Personally, I never thought there was anything wrong with raising $15,000 in one day in a project that really enhanced fellowship and was very visible to the community.

East Nassau has pioneered many Fund-raisers that have been picked up by others. One was a $100 all-inclusive formal dinner – the brainchild of former member, Alex Knowles
(Geoff’s big brother). The $100 included dinner, drinks and a raffle on a car. One year we had a boat & trailer. That year, I collected 4 tickets, two for myself and two for Robert Pinder (Bob Thompson’s Brother-in-law). I asked Robert to pick 2 tickets out of the four in my hand and, of course, he won the boat. I never even got a ride in it. But the important thing was, it was a successful fund-raiser and a lot of fun, to boot. We dropped it after too many others started doing it and moved on.

Another fund-raiser – no doubt, our most consistently successful one to date – is our Golf Tournament, introduced by PP Sidney Sweeting during Terry Mosko’s year. Many other organizations, including other Rotary Clubs are running Golf Tournaments, but I think ours remains the most popular.

One that no service club tried to copy was a live concert and you heard about our one and only attempt with Gloria Estefan and The Miami Sound Machine last week. It was a great idea, but got detrimentally affected by outside influences.

One that no other service club has tried and I doubt, no group, other than a well organized Service Club could make a profit on was the Florida State University Flying High Circus, introduced by President Andy Gape. This was an event that needed and got 100% participation from the Club as well as some volunteer help (without asking) from some of the other clubs – the West Club, in particular. It was a lot of work, but also great fellowship and while it started as a fund-raiser, it was a Community Service project event in itself. We brought the FSU circus here 5 times. I will never forget the magic, the first time we did it in 1985 and the look on Rotarian Don Young’s face as he walked around the big tent. No doubt, in my mind the most spectacular thing that touched the biggest amount of people that we have ever done. Congratulations and thanks again to Andy for sticking with an idea he knew would work.

Other “Fun Raising” Fund Raising projects included the Bed Race, introduced by President Rick Lowe, where we got permission to block off Dowdeswell Street.

One that I think we are going to try and repeat is the “Duck Race”. PP Jeff Robertson and I tried to find a way to do this during my year, but couldn’t get it going. President Lindsey, though, found a way to do it with a little cooperation from Atlantis and some support from a certain PP’s daughter during his year.

Another of our most successful and certainly biggest fund-raisers started with an idea by PP Robert Brown that, although he got some pushback, he insisted would work, whether anyone wanted to help him or not. That, of course, was the Silent Auction that raised about $20,000 the first time and evolved into “Imagine” that has produced sums over $200,000 per event.

The biggest joint project that included all Rotary Clubs was “Hands Across The Bahamas” in 1987. This was a huge undertaking designed to bring attention to the scourge of drugs that had infiltrated our country and to try and do something about it, by
uniting citizens in protest and raising funds to help those who had been negatively affected.

A smaller fun/fund raising event – and one that is near and dear to my heart - partnered our Club with The Kiwanis Club of Cable Beach for a few years. When the first Antique Car Shows were held, the Antique Auto Club was very small and did not have the necessary manpower to properly run the shows. Rotary and Kiwanis joined together to assist and get these shows on their way. The proceeds were divided equally between the two Service Clubs for the first few years. My personal thanks again to both clubs.

A more exclusive – and not highly publicized – event were the Paul Harris Dinners that raised substantial dollars for Polio Plus. I don’t even know how many of these were held, but I know one was organized by PP Trevor and one by PP Rick.

And, of course, for the past 20-something years our Rotary Van has been used at fund-raising events and fairs for other organizations, too numerous to mention.

I’m sure I have probably missed a few, but hope this has served as a reminder of many of the innovative things we have done.

*******

And what has East Nassau done with all this money we have raised (that someone has calculated to be “over $3 million")?

We don’t have enough time to list all of them, but here are some of the larger ones:

- The purchase of “Hope House”, initially used as a Halfway House and held in Trust for a number of years. It was later given to the Drug Action Service, at the time headed by PP Philip Worrell, during PP Robin’s year.
- Construction of a building for BAPD, favourite charity of PP Sir Durward, who remains very active in this organization.
- Construction of the Salvation Army Building on Mackey Street (a joint project with the City Club).
- Improvements to the Girl Guide Headquarters.
- Purchase of a rescue boat for BASRA (another joint project with the City Club).
- Building a classroom & other additions to the Centre for the Deaf Building
- Repainting various buildings for other organizations
- Funded renovations at the Children’s Emergency Hostel, a project also strongly supported by Kiwanis
- Renovations and improvements to the “Persis Rodgers Home for the Aged”.
- A new roof for the Anglican Central Deanery Hostel (now the Dean Grainger Centre).
- Paid for training courses for Inspectors of the Bahamas Humane Society
- A “Detoxification Centre “ was built at Sandilands as a joint project from funds raised in “Hands Across The Bahamas”
• Probably our largest undertaking; Four years of Fund-raising funded construction of The Cheshire Home.
• Construction of the first of a four building complex at a new location for the Hopedale Centre.
• We have committed $100,000 to the Cancer Society of The Bahamas “Cancer Caring Centre”
• And the list goes on and on ……………

******

Now, I wouldn’t be me, if I didn’t take an opportunity to talk “just a little bit” about my year – 1990-91.

Each of the Past Presidents seated here at the Head Table were members of my Board. Eight PPs in all were on that board, including Warren Knowles, IPP, who sends his regrets. He was unable to attend today, but thanked me for the invitation. Terry Hilts, the other PP, is away on business and also conveys his regrets. Other members of my board were: Johnny Bethell, George Cox, David Jenner, Ozzie Moore, Gordon Pinder, Hubert Sands, Michael Thompson and Bill Thomson.

1990-91 was a very busy year. We had three separate major fund-raising events:
• The Fair (yes, we had the fair and great fellowship along with it).
• The Golf Tournament
• AND, The Flying High Circus, which was chaired by PP John Robertson. We included a Home Hospitality Night that year for the student performers that was well received. Keith Parker and I even convinced one of the trapeze artists to be the Page Three Girl in The Punch for some added publicity. A fun part (which intentions could probably have been misinterpreted) was in the two of us “checking them out” and unanimously deciding on who we would approach.
• PP Andy & I had first traveled to Tallahassee to preview part of the Circus performance and sign the contracts, etc. On the second day we were surprised by PPs John and Rick, who on a whim following a couple of beers had decided to fly to Ft. Lauderdale, rent a car and drive to Tallahassee to join us. It turned out to be a good Rotary fellowship weekend. But we found out weeks later that our honorary member, Dickie Brinson had gotten some flack, apparently related to some liquid refreshment in the trunk of our car. He probably would have been OK if we hadn’t taken it into the tent in Coca-Cola cups. (All John’s fault, I think).

There were also a couple of smaller events and, together with a contribution from Inner Wheel, led by President Debbie Krukowski, we raised roughly $110,000, the first time we went into 6 figures). That record remained for a few years, to be broken in 1995-96 by – who else? – President Rick Lowe.

Our Major Project for the year was construction of the first classroom for the Hopedale Centre – a school for children with special needs - at their new location at a cost of some
$78,000 as I recall. As a result of our commitment, matching funds were pledged by another organization to fund the second (of 4) buildings.

We also; funded a new roof for the Anglican Central Deanery; purchased basketball uniforms for a basketball team in Bain Town; and supported seven other organizations in a smaller way.

As a “Preserve Planet Earth” environmental project, we provided funding to The Bahamas National Trust for an educational poster that was distributed to schools and other organizations.

Of course, we also continued the Fox Hill Run, the Club’s longest running Community Service project. It was headed by Mick Guy at the time. I rode with Mick a few times and it was such a pleasure to see the love and admiration for him that was displayed at each home. I admit that I don’t know who started this project – I’m sure someone here does – but it certainly one of the better things that this club does. I remember on District Governor, in particular (I think it was Aadu Abel) who was more impressed with that project than the thousands of dollars we were spending on others.

I had the pleasure of presiding at the official opening ceremony of the Cheshire Home to which the four presidents before me had directed most of their fund-raising efforts. Those four presidents, of course, were Trevor Sunderland, Barry Rassin, Sidney Sweeting and Warren Knowles.

We started a road safety campaign that included a series of ads warning about the hazards and costs of fines for traffic offences. Unfortunately, to look at the streets today, one would never know that anyone had ever tried to do such a thing.

One thing the Board was very proud of, particularly PP Warren, was the formation of our first Interact Club at Queen’s College, thanks to the efforts of Gordon Pinder.

Thanks to Chairman George Cox, we increased the membership that year from 112 to 120. One of our inductees was President Elect Everod Peart.

We won the District Award for attendance with an average of 92%. 57 of our 120 members recorded 100% attendance for the year. And this was before the “Makeup” rules were liberalized.

We awarded four Paul Harris Fellows that year to: Valda Mosko (the first awarded to an Inner Wheel member), Warren Knowles, Arnold Shepard and Herbie Thompson. We also presented a multiple Paul Harris to Sir Durward.

I still refer to that year as the best year of my life and am grateful to have had the opportunity to serve as President of this Club.
I want to end with a sobering message now and I am probably taking a risk in doing so. We often hear references to East Nassau as “the best Club in the District and perhaps the World”. Gentlemen, I agree that we WERE, but I look around The Bahamas and the District and must say, we are no longer the best club in the District. And this comment should have no reflection on our President or Past Presidents, who have all done commendable jobs. My view is (and there may be some that will disagree) that, we are still GOOD and I am proud to be an East Nassau Rotarian, but if we don’t stop believing we are the BEST and resting on our past laurels, we will not get back to where we were. Think about it, fellow Rotarians and think about how we each contribute. We have some catching up to do and all need to do our part to get back there. We can do it.

It has been a pleasure chairing this 40th Anniversary Celebrations Committee. I give special thanks to the members of my committee for the support the past couple of months: Sir Durward, Keith Parker, Rick Lowe, PE Everod, Pres. Alan, Robert Brown, Brian Moodie and James Owen and Kathy Bancroft and Janet Moore of Inner Wheel (if I left out anyone, my apologies). Thank you all.

Murray Forde