

Lara Quentrall Thomas Rewriting Rotary History

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Lara Quentrall-Thomas continues to be a phenomenal trailblazer for women. As the newly appointed governor of the Rotary Club for the entire Southern Caribbean (from Antigua in the North to the Guianas), at 42, Quentrall-Thomas has rewritten history as the youngest female to serve, as well as the second female elected to assume governorship for her district. As she continues to break barriers in an international organisation that is etched in tradition and convention, one quickly realises that her new post is simply an extension of the woman herself; giving and community service has always been a part of her. In her new capacity as governor, Quentrall-Thomas is now responsible for 69 Rotary Clubs in 14 countries including the 33 Rotaract Clubs and 30 Interact Clubs throughout the district. The governor is also expected to be the liaison between the district and the headquarters in Illinois. Although she has only been involved in Rotary for 12 years, it has been her vigour and unrelenting passion for helping others that has seen her quick ascension to governor over the years. “I was nominated to join the

Rotary Club of Central Port-of-Spain by a friend of mine Leslie Welch." As a great opportunity for fellowship and networking, she soon joined and quickly moved up the ranks.

"When I joined the club in 1999, I began to serve on the Board of Directors soon after, then I became President in 2005." Rotary International's perennial motto is "Service before Self" and has been part of Quentrall Thomas's family since she was a child. Raised in San Fernando to a father who served as President of the San Fernando Rotary Club and a mother who was a Soroptimist, Lara also followed suit as part of Amnesty International. While attending the University of the West of England in Bristol, she was an active member of the group which lobbied for human rights. She is also passionate about animals and seeks their best interest as well. As an active Rotarian Quentrall-Thomas served as the Roteract Chair specialising in Public Relations where she helped organise a Group Study Exchange to the U.S.A. In this program, Rotarians were entrusted with the responsibility of mentoring a select number of non Rotarians in another country. "That experience really cemented my commitment to Rotary. Never before had I been exposed to Rotarians at that level in the U.S. "As the Exchange Program came to a close, elections took an unexpected turn of events. Just before we left, the governor elect withdrew and my club asked me if I would like to go forward." As she emerged victorious, compulsory training began immediately, starting with five days of intense training in San Diego, USA. There, the theme of the year "Reach Within to Embrace Humanity" was unveiled, and she interacted with the incoming President and other governors from around the world. She attended various workshops and was given workbooks and materials needed to share with her fellow Rotarians in her district.

"I came back and trained all the Club Presidents in Barbados where I told them our new focus. " I was honoured to be selected to serve. I am also thankful to the late Astra Da Costa, the first female governor who was really committed to Rotary and very inspiring to others." As the incumbent governor, there are a few things that Quentrall-Thomas would like to revamp within the organisation. "I think it's time to change the image of Rotary of just old men who are professionals. I would like more women to join and I hope it's inspiring for young Rotarians too" she said, adding that only 20 percent of the Rotarian population of 1.3 million are women. " I would like us to be a district that encourages diversity. The more you have , the more you attract." As the youngest governor, she will also like to create another 'first' with the upcoming "Plant-a-tree" project throughout the district. " For the first time all clubs would be doing the same project, which will create a sense of cohesion." For Lara Quentrall-Thomas, governorship means much more than occupying the highest post of her district. " You are given the opportunity to not only serve mankind, but also to be part of a global family in a real way. It's about connecting with people of the same values and principles all around the world."