

The Rotaract Pre-Convention: A Life-changing Experience

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I've been involved with Rotaract for just about two years now, and I learned very quickly how great the Rotary International organization is. But nothing could have prepared me for the experience that I had at the International Convention in Montreal. After stepping off the plane in the Montreal airport, I was first amazed at how welcomed I felt. There were signs, banners, and even LED screens welcoming Rotarians to the great city of Montreal, Canada. I can remember thinking to myself, "wow, I'm a part of this."

After exchanging my U.S. currency, I took the RYLA bus from the airport to McGill University New Residence Hall, where the Rotaract Pre-Convention was going to be held. The bus ride was great! I met about 12 people from all over the world and we all had a great discussion about our jobs and involvement in Interact, RYLA, Rotaract, and Youth Exchange. Each person had a unique story, and it was fascinating to hear how each of us, coming from such different backgrounds, all came to end up at the same place. However, it was not until we arrived at the RYLA convention, that I realized there were two different McGill University Locations. But not to worry; I along with another Rotaractor from our district, and another one from Mexico coaxed the bus driver into driving us to where we needed to go – For free of course!

Following another quick bus ride, we arrived at our Hotel, where the convention was also going to be held. We checked in, got settled into our room, and then headed off to dinner. There was an international welcome dinner, which unfortunately, we did not attend – one mistake we won't repeat in the future for sure. The lobby was filled with Rotaractors from all over the world, each sporting their country's flag and attire proudly.

The feeling of connectedness was slightly overwhelming, as the realization set in that I was a part of a global organization. In just the first few hours of arriving in Montreal, I met dozens of people representing 8 different countries and spanning 4 continents. And the convention had not even started yet! It's really hard to describe the feelings that I had while talking and interacting with so many people from around the world.

I guess it can only be described as pure, raw excitement. Excitement so emotionally overpowering that your body feels like it can hardly contain all the joy and happiness, and must burst to relieve the pressure building up. So I knew early on that I was in for a great time at this Rotaract Pre-convention!



The first day of the Pre-convention was fantastic. The Rotaract Pre-convention works just like the International Rotary convention in that there are plenary sessions combined with smaller workshops and breakouts. One highlight of our second plenary session is that both John Kenny (PRIP) and Ray Klingensmith (Current RI President) came to speak to the Rotaractors. It was nice, because they were more candid and intimate with us, rather than delivering a textbook speech. In fact, President Klingensmith seemingly scraped his prepared remarks, and had more of a discussion with us, fielding questions and taking suggestions from Rotaractors around the world. It was inspiring to hear both RI leaders talk and take such an active interest in our success.

I was also asked by the RI Rotaract committee to lead one of the workshops, which was an honor. I felt privileged to lead a 70 minute workshop on practical public speaking, where I was able to share my tips and tricks on public speaking with Rotaractors around the world. I too was also able to attend several workshops and breakouts led by other Rotaractors on topics ranging from "Organizing District Events" to "The Dynamic Rotary-Rotaract Relationship."

I not only learned a tremendous amount of valuable information that will help Rotaract grow and flourish in our district, but I also made contact with Rotaractors from several surrounding districts and districts around the world. These relationships have already proven to be a valuable resource for comparing ideas and developing effective strategies. Now I could go on and on about the wealth of information that I learned while at the Pre-convention, but I want to continue sharing the experience and how truly life-changing it was for me.

I mentioned that I got to meet Rotaractors from all around the world, but one thing that I failed to mention is the instant fellowship that exists upon meeting each other. No matter if from Germany, Australia, France, Austria, Haiti, Switzerland, or Denmark, we all were instant friends and acted as if we had known each other for our entire lives. We got a lot of time in the evenings to hang out and really get to know each other.

In the coming pages, I'd like to share with you some of the experiences that we had as more of a slide show format, rather than simply describing them in words. Because, as I mentioned earlier, it's hard to put into words how amazing every moment of this experience was. But pictures, as they say, are worth a thousand words....





OPENING PLENARY SESSION



The Opening Ceremonies of the International Convention were, with out a doubt, one of the most amazing things I have ever seen. The only comparable event that might come close to explaining the nature of this ceremony is the Olympic Games. In a stadium filled with 15,000 people, there was singing, lights, cheering, and a flag ceremony in which every country present was represented. Then following a presentation by RI president John Kenny, we were provided with entertainment which can only be equated to a professionally produced concert. It's an indescribable feeling sitting in that stadium filled with Rotarians from 168 different countries, and knowing that you've all committed to "service above self" and working together to make the world a better place.



Service Project in Montreal

We also got the opportunity to work together with Rotaractors from Around the world on a service project! We all met in the morning to clean up a Public Park in the city. This was a great experience, and really showed our shared enthusiasm and desire to “do good” and make our world a better place!



We even made it on the Rotary International Website! We're Famous!



International Connections

Above all the amazing experiences of the convention, I would have to say the most memorable and impacting element is all the friendships that were made. I now have upwards of 40 friends that live all around the world, and we're staying in contact! The opportunities that these friendships will open in terms of traveling, joint projects, and lifelong fellowship are virtually limitless. And this is the part that is most difficult to put into words. There are no words for how truly amazing it is to meet so many people that are so diverse and different, yet at the same time, the same as you!



In closing, I must reiterate that the international convention experience truly changed my life. Holding down a full time job while at the same time finishing up my MBA is a lot of work, and I don't have a lot of free time. However, I'm proud and truly happy to dedicate my free time to volunteering through Rotaract and Rotary. I now have a true understanding of what it means to be a Rotarian (or in my case a Rotaractor) and I am happy to be a part of this amazing family.

I would like to thank PDG Floyd Lancia for his support and encouragement of the Rotaract Program in our district. I would also like to thank Assistant District Governor Lisa Waterman from the downtown Rotary Club. She has acted as my mentor and friend throughout the process of developing our districts first community based Rotaract Club, and I could not have done it without her. And finally, I would like to thank our current District Governor Steve Van Scoik – despite the fact that I still can't pronounce his name correctly. He has pledged his continued support of Rotaract and the other youth programs both financially and through action, and it's going to be a great Rotary year!

I hope my convention experience has given you just a small glimpse of the magnitude of Rotary, and that you are excited and inspired to attend an international convention in the future. I would highly encourage it, because not only will you become a Rotarian for life, but it will truly change your life. See you in New Orleans -2011!

