



Lead the Way

William B. Boyd
RI President-Elect

One of my favorite pieces of Rotary reading is a book that I am very fortunate to own because is not easy to come by these days. It's called *Rotary Mosaic*, and it was written by fellow New Zealander and Past RI President Harold Thomas. As I was thinking about what I wanted to talk about here today, I picked up that book and read what Harold wrote about his own International Assembly, held at Lake Placid, New York, in 1959. At that assembly, Harold told his incoming district governors: "We cannot possibly administer an organization with the ramifications of Rotary International, or even a Rotary club, without mechanics, techniques, and procedures. If, then, we are to have such machinery, let us have the best possible. But it is important to know and remember that the machinery is not an end in itself — it is a means to an end. The objective is better Rotary, and better Rotarians." And that is our objective as well, almost half a century later: better Rotary and better Rotarians.

All of you are here today because you love Rotary and want to see Rotary grow and thrive. All of you are Rotary leaders, and you know what being a Rotary leader means. Being a Rotary leader means putting the clubs and the Rotarians first. It means recognizing that, in Rotary, no member is ever any more important than any other member. Some of us have greater responsibility, but no one has greater value. Each club member, club president, district governor, and director — and each RI president — is equally a part of Rotary and equally a part of Rotary's future.

In the last 101 years, Rotary has grown tremendously in size and visibility. It has gone from one small club to a vast international network of volunteers, people with both the will to work hard and the ability to make a real difference, in their own communities and far beyond them. As Carol Bellamy, executive director of UNICEF, put it: "Rotary has won a place of respect in the global village; in fact, Rotary has helped make the world a global village." Rotary today is an incredible example of how the obstacles of bureaucracy and intolerance can be overcome through good sense and goodwill. It is proof that great things can be accomplished when enough people set their minds to it.

Rotary is a leader in the global village. And in the coming year, I ask each of you to take your places as leaders in your districts and your communities. I ask each of you to lead in the Rotary way, by living as role models of tolerance, unselfishness, and integrity. And because the best leaders have humility, I ask you to do all of this with friendliness and a smile, so that others will be happy to walk beside you.

In my many years as a Rotarian, and especially during my year as president-elect, I have seen over and over how the simple lessons of Rotary transform lives. I have met so many

Rotarians all over the world, and I have seen just how much quiet leadership, true decency, and a desire to help others can accomplish.

In the days and weeks after the devastating tsunami in South Asia, Rotarians came from all around the world to help. They came and were able to get to work immediately because they joined their fellow Rotarians who lived where the tsunami had struck, people who knew exactly what the needs were and how best to meet them and who were able to bypass local governments. Unlike the other aid workers, who stayed in distant hotels and flew into the affected areas every morning, the Rotarians stayed with the people. Lorna and I visited the area a few months ago and saw how homes and livelihoods, destroyed in moments, had been rebuilt. Today, the television cameras are gone, but Rotary is still there.

In Thailand, we saw an informal education center in a library that had been flooded in the tsunami and is now refurbished. The center is training young people in computer skills, using its 10 modern computers — the ones that Rotary gave. In the Philippines, in a city where there had never been a school to serve the needs of autistic children, I saw the school that stands there today — the one that Rotarians built. Every community has needs, and Rotarians are skilled at recognizing those needs and assembling the resources to address them. Whether the need is for a blood bank or dictionaries for third graders or leadership courses for teenagers, Rotarians rise to meet each challenge.

Around the world, since before any of us here were born, Rotary has been changing lives in too many ways to count. As Rotary leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure that Rotary remains strong and able to help for many years to come. New Rotarians join our clubs every day. Unfortunately, every day, some of those Rotarians leave. I know you all know this, because it's a message you've heard many times before.

Whenever anybody gets up in front of a room of Rotarians and starts talking about membership, you see a lot of eyes start to glaze over. The truth is that our time is not best spent talking about how to attract new members. Our time would be far better spent in strengthening our clubs. Because Rotary, working properly, is attractive enough to retain existing members and attract new ones. New Rotarians leave because of poor leadership, cost, and a lack of service opportunities.

That's what they tell us. So I ask all of you to focus on strengthening the clubs in your districts in those three ways: making sure that there is a strong and effective club administration, that the cost of membership gives good value, and that every club runs a variety of engaging, useful, and productive projects, both in its own community and with partner clubs.

There are so many ways to make Rotary more accessible and more friendly to new members. A meeting doesn't need to involve a hotel meal; breakfast meetings are both more affordable and easier to fit into a busy schedule. Encourage your club presidents to listen to their members and value their opinions. Encourage your clubs to break out of their established routines and to explore new ideas for projects, using the coming year's emphases as their starting point.

And what will the coming year's emphases be? Like President Carl- Wilhelm, I believe in continuity. I believe in cooperation. And I also believe in something else, something just as important — sustainability. As Rotarians, we understand the truth of the old saying that when you give a person a fish, you feed him for a day; when you teach him to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. So how do we make our communities better places for a lifetime?

We start with the very basics. We start with water. Without clean water, little else is possible. You can't raise food without water to grow your crops. You can't have healthy children without clean water for them to drink. You can't have literacy, either, if your children are ill with waterborne diseases or walking miles to the nearest well instead of going to school. Water is life. If you are thirsty, nothing else matters. And so one of my emphases will be water management. What happens when you have abundant clean water? When you are no longer thirsty, you begin to think of your other needs. And hunger — though you might not see it here in San Diego — is a tremendous problem throughout the world. Every year, 11 million children die, most of them in developing countries. Seventy percent die from preventable causes, with the leading causes being malnutrition and waterborne illnesses. Without food, there is no health. And without health, there is no hope. And so another emphasis will be health and hunger.

Because a healthy family can look to the future — to a future beyond poverty. And to escape poverty, there is only one path, literacy. Because a literate child becomes a literate adult, who knows that there is a world beyond her own village, and that a better life is possible anywhere and everywhere. And so another emphasis will be literacy.

Literacy has always been particularly close to my heart, partly because I grew up in a family that owned a bookshop and partly because I have seen over and over again what a tremendous difference literacy makes in a family and a community. Literacy, more than anything, is the escape hatch from the cycle of poverty. Literacy empowers women, in particular, in communities where their value is not recognized as it should be. And literacy enables communities to take care of their water resources, address their own health and hunger issues, and teach the next generation. Literacy is the goal, and it is also the first step.

Rotary cannot take responsibility for fixing all of the world's problems. But as Rotary leaders, we can and must ensure that our clubs and our Rotarians have the ability to do the most they can for their communities — and the tools to do it sustainably — so that everything we do will have a lasting impact.

Rotary is in it for the long term. And so, as Rotary leaders, we must think ahead, not in terms of weeks and months or even years. We must also think in decades. The Rotarians who will be sitting in these seats long after we have left them are the newest Rotarians today. They are our young professionals, many of them working parents who are balancing their careers with their family's needs. Today, with dual-income families the norm and lives busier than ever, we cannot ignore their call to make their families a part of Rotary. And for that reason, I will also have an emphasis on the family of Rotary. While a formal dinner dance at a nice restaurant can be a wonderful night out, it represents something very different to a retired Rotarian than it does to one with a young family. To that Rotarian, it means more time away from the children, a significant expense for the meal, and probably the cost of child care as well. It is likely to be more of a burden than a pleasure. A weekend barbecue, a

picnic, or a service project that can involve the whole family costs less for everybody, leaves more money for other needs, and makes our clubs more hospitable to their newest members.

In the year ahead, I ask all of you to work to make our clubs welcoming to those of all ages and to remember the importance of our programs for youth: Interact, Rotaract, Youth Exchange, and many others. These young people are our future. And as Rotary leaders, we must remember that what is truly important to the future of Rotary is not what happens in this room or what happens in the boardroom in Evanston. It's what happens every week, all year long, in the 32,000 clubs around the world. As Rotary leaders, we must remember that the future of Rotary is with our clubs and our members, each one, individually, all around the world. Your job, and your function, is and must be with them. Your job is to strengthen your district by knowing your clubs, knowing your club presidents, and helping them to succeed.

As Rotarians, we are not content to let matters stay the way they have always been, in our clubs or in our communities. We are not content with the status quo, and we do not look at a problem only to say someone else will solve it. We are the ones who ask why not us? We are the ones with the skills and the desire to build a better future. And we are the ones who must **Lead the Way**.

In the 2006-07 Rotary year, I will ask all of you to **Lead the Way**.

This will be my theme and an affirmation of my belief in the power of Rotarians to change the world, one positive act at a time. We need every Rotarian and every Rotary club to be active, vibrant, and achieving. Every club should feel your support behind them as they find ways to serve. Your encouragement and leadership will make the difference as you show each club how to **Lead the Way**. Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, said some years ago: "Things get better when enough people decide that they should get better. Things change when ordinary people come together in a common purpose."

Today, all of us are here together in a common purpose, the same purpose that Harold Thomas had almost half a century ago. That purpose is, and always will be, a better Rotary and better Rotarians. All of us know that it is not enough to wait for it to happen.

Together, all of us will **Lead the Way**. Thank you.

Source: International Assembly Speechbook