

RI President-nominee's Acceptance Remarks

Ray Klingensmith, 2010-11 RI President

Birmingham, England

24 June 2009

Thank you for your support of my election as president, and thank you also for permitting me to complete a circle in my Rotary life. It was 25 years ago, in this very building, that the delegates to the 1984 convention elected me as an RI director. Needless to say, this is one of my favorite places! That election in 1984 permitted me to become the youngest director on the RI Board as a result of my early exposure to Rotary as a college student, because I was a Rotary Scholar.

I am truly proud to be a former Rotary Scholar. What a wonderful experience it was! When I was sponsored by my hometown Rotary club in Unionville, Missouri, USA, and subsequently awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Cape Town, I was the first student from my small town to ever study abroad. And I had that good fortune because I was a Rotary Scholar.

At that time, it was still less expensive to travel by ship than by plane, and I booked passage on a Lykes Line freighter from New Orleans to Cape Town. As we left the Port of New Orleans and sailed under that giant bridge across the Mississippi River, I entered an exciting world of new countries, new continents, and new cultures. It changed my life and broadened my horizons in so many ways. And I had that good fortune because I was a Rotary Scholar.

I was befriended in South Africa by many Rotarians and their families, but particularly by Colin and Patsy King. Colin was a member of the Wynberg club, and he was my Rotary counselor. He gave me the opportunity to travel in southern Africa like a one-man GSE team, which was unusual at the time because Group Study Exchange did not become a Rotary program for four more years. I had the good fortune to travel 16,000 miles in Africa and to visit 35 Rotary clubs in four different countries and, therefore, am pleased to stand here today as a product of The Rotary Foundation because I was a Rotary Scholar.

Now as we look forward to the 2011 convention in New Orleans, it will complete still another circle in my life. The convention center is located at the foot of that same giant bridge in New Orleans, and when the 2011 convention is convened, I will celebrate the 50th anniversary of my departure for a monthlong trip that has lasted a lifetime. What a unique opportunity that convention will be to express my appreciation to Rotary for the scholarship that has provided 50 years of good fortune for me, because I was a Rotary Scholar.

Rotary International also will complete a circle of its own in 2010 because I will have the special privilege of serving as the 100th president of our great organization. Although this is the 100th convention, Paul Harris served as president for the National Association of Rotary Clubs during both of its first two years, so John Kenny will be the 99th president, and I will be the 100th. Clearly, that is more good fortune for me, and I hope it will be good fortune for Rotary as well. Rotary is still an exciting experience for me, and no one else owes a greater debt to Rotary. Therefore, I hope to combine my excitement, commitment, and 50 years of Rotary experience to be the kind of leader that Rotary deserves in its 100th president. After all, that is the least I can do, because I was a Rotary Scholar!