

General Secretary-elect's Remarks

John Hewko, General Secretary-elect

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I can't tell you how absolutely thrilled I am to be joining the Rotary community next month as your new general secretary, and I would like to thank the Board of Directors and the Trustees for your faith and trust in me.

With the frequent change in leadership in Rotary, the general secretary represents, in many ways, the link between administrations and the vehicle for institutional continuity. This is an enormous responsibility, and I want to assure you that I will do all that I can to fulfill that role with integrity, good judgment, and enthusiasm, and with a deep appreciation of our past, yet coupled with a keen desire to explore and implement new, bold, and innovative measures to take Rotary into its second century.

I would also like to thank my wife, Margarita, and my 18-year-old daughter, Maria, for their steadfast support and enthusiasm as we embark together as a family on this new and exciting adventure. Margarita — or Marga, as we affectionately call her at home — will be my partner on this journey. She is originally from Argentina and brings to our relationship a broad international perspective, and is very much looking forward to using the platform of the general secretary's spouse to make her own unique contribution to this great organization.

And finally, I would like to recognize my parents, Lu and Natalie Hewko, who are able to join me on the stage today, and thank them for all they have done for me. I could not have asked for better and more loving parents. Although they currently live in Clarkston, Michigan, a small town north of Detroit, they came to the United States after the Second World War from Ukraine by way of a displaced persons refugee camp in Bavaria. The example of their lives, and their ability to overcome the hardship of that terrible war, the tragedy of losing everything, and the fear of coming to the United States with nothing — the values of honesty, decency, and hard work that they instilled in their three children — these are the gifts they have given to me and for which I am deeply grateful.

Now, I am particularly thankful for the opportunity to address you, the members of Rotary. The number and diversity of Rotarians at this gathering is in itself a testament to the strength and global reach of one of the world's great institutions. I am well aware that I have a great deal to learn, to absorb, and to understand, and I would like to thank Ed Futa for his assistance in educating me about the many facets of Rotary and in making the transition as smooth as possible. Ed has done an absolutely fantastic job over the past 11 years as your general secretary, and I look forward to building on all that he has achieved.

During the past several months, I have received a large number of e-mails and calls from family, friends, and acquaintances — and also from Rotarians around the world — with their congratulations. A number of the messages asked why I would leave the world of law and move

to Evanston to assume this prestigious, yet challenging, opportunity. Although the reasons were many, there are five that were particularly meaningful and relevant.

First, the mission of Rotary and its focus on integrity, and the promotion of goodwill, peace, and understanding through fellowship. For me, this will not be so much a job as a passion.

Second, there is not an organization in the world better positioned to carry out that mission. The 1.2 million leaders and 34,000 clubs in over 200 geographic locations create an incredible and unmatched platform to make the world a better place. What this organization, what you as Rotarians, have been able to achieve over the past 106 years is simply extraordinary.

Third, Rotary has been a part of my family for many years. My father has been a committed Rotarian for almost 30 years, and my mother has been a steadfast supporter of his life in Rotary. My dad is a past club president and a four-time Paul Harris Fellow, and was very active in helping to establish the first Rotary clubs in Ukraine after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was thanks to him that I became a charter member of the first club in Kyiv. My mother continues to be active in a number of community service efforts, both in Clarkston and the Ukrainian American community, and was also recently named a Paul Harris Fellow. Thirty years of watching my parents practice Service Above Self has had a profound impact on me.

By the way, as an interesting aside, I first found out about the position when my father sent me a copy of an announcement in *The Rotarian* magazine that Rotary was looking for a new general secretary. I think the lesson here is clear: Very good things happen when you read *The Rotarian* magazine.

Fourth, this, quite frankly, is a very exciting time to be coming to Rotary. The goal of eradicating polio is close at hand. Rotary International has just launched a new strategic plan, and The Rotary Foundation is rolling out the Future Vision Plan. There is a saying that “timing is everything,” and for me, the timing for joining Rotary could not be better.

And finally, the internationality of Rotary dovetails with my own professional and personal background and experience. My many years as a partner with Baker & McKenzie, a global law firm; studying and working in the UK, Ecuador, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Russia, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic; serving as a senior official in a U.S. government agency charged with delivering development assistance funding to the world’s poorest countries; writing extensively on international issues — these experiences give me a perspective on the world that will allow me to better serve Rotary and its tremendously diverse membership.

Now, as I have gotten to know Rotary more intimately in the last four months, I am struck by how little many Rotarians know about the function and work of the Secretariat, and its talented professional staff in Evanston and in the seven regional Rotary offices outside the United States. My team — the Rotary professional staff — is vital to the success of this organization. I want to assure you that one of my top priorities will be to better connect Rotarians with the Secretariat, to increase awareness as to what the Secretariat can offer, and to make sure the Secretariat is an effective, efficient, and useful resource for the clubs, so that clubs are able to grow and carry out the mission of Rotary.

I look forward to supporting President-elect Kalyan Banerjee and Trustee Chair-elect Bill Boyd in their service to Rotary. The new strategic plan and Future Vision Plan strike the right balance between maintaining continuity with the past while outlining a unified, coherent, and ambitious roadmap for measured change, and I look forward to working with all of you to implement these plans.

The future for Rotary is bright indeed. We *will* rid the world of the terrible scourge of polio — we *will* rid the world of this terrible disease — and then we will be bold and aggressive and identify and conquer the next big global challenge. We will redouble our public relations efforts to enhance our brand and image so that the world better appreciates and understands the great works of Rotary and the value of connecting through fellowship. During this second Rotary century, we will successfully use the power and passion of Rotarians to bring water, sanitation, and basic education to millions, to reduce child mortality, to prevent disease around the world, and to promote peace and sustainable economic development.

More and more, we will partner with others in order to better leverage our resources. We will make a meaningful contribution to the current ongoing global debate on how best to address the needs of those less fortunate. We will promote the ideas of community service and volunteerism among our youth and bring the world closer together through our scholarship and exchange programs. New technologies will strengthen our image among the world's next generation of leaders. We will work hard to strengthen clubs and increase Rotary membership around the world, with a particular focus on attracting a younger and more diverse membership. And we will do all of this in the spirit of friendship, goodwill, and fellowship that has been the hallmark of Rotary.

So again, thank you for the opportunity to be here. Marga and I have been privileged to meet so many of you this week and have been deeply moved by the warm welcome that you have extended to us. As I look out from this stage and see the faces of thousands of Rotarians, united by the call to service and good works, I feel a sense of wonder and amazement at who you are and what you have accomplished. And today I pledge to you that, as your new general secretary, I will invest every ounce of my energy to ensure the Rotary flame burns ever brighter so that, working together, we can continue to make the world a better place — for our families and friends, for our communities and countries, and for future generations to come. Thank you.