



2013-14 PRESIDENT'S CLOSING REMARKS

Ron D. Burton
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Sydney, Australia
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G'day!

Have you all had an amazing convention? So have I.

You know, up on the 18th floor of Rotary headquarters, right outside my office door, there's a globe sitting out on a table. And a couple of weeks ago, as we were making our final preparations for this incredible convention here in Sydney, I stopped by the globe and I found Sydney, Australia. And then I spun the globe around, to find my hometown of Norman, Oklahoma, USA.

They are about as far apart from each other as you can possibly get. But there's a saying we have in Oklahoma that I think is very fitting here in Sydney. And that's that wherever you go in life, whatever job you set out to do, you should always leave the woodpile a little higher than it was when you found it.

And I hope that that has been true of my work as president in this Rotary year. I know that it has been true, for all of you, because I've seen the work that you've done, and I know that the Rotary woodpile is going to be more than a little higher this coming 1 July than it was one year ago.

And it is an incredible feeling to know that I could pick up that globe there in Evanston, and spin it, and put my finger down just about anywhere — and touch a place where lives are being changed by Rotary. They're being changed, by all of you.

As I reflect back on the last four days, I hope that your experiences here in Sydney have exceeded your expectations. I hope you found old friends here and made new ones; I hope you made connections, shared ideas, and had a fantastic time. And I hope that the excitement we've all felt here this week will follow you home, as you begin a new year of Rotary service — ready to engage Rotary, more than ever before.

All of us have seen this week how much good work Rotary is doing, all over the world. And we've seen as well, how much more we could be doing — if we brought in more members, if we supported our Foundation more generously, if we devoted more of our time and energy to our Rotary service.

We could be doing so much more, if all of us chose to engage Rotary. Because when we engage Rotary, we change lives.

We change lives through education, by bringing children to school, by teaching adults to read, by sharing our vocational expertise.

We change lives by making childbirth safer, by making water cleaner, by making sure that more children have nutritious food and better health care.

And we will change the life of every child who will ever be born on this earth — by eradicating polio.

My friends, there are so many people in the world who need our help. Sometimes, it's easy to focus on how many of them there are, on how great the needs are, and on how many of them we will never be able to reach. It's easy to get discouraged — and that's what a lot of people do. They say, whatever I can do is just a drop in the bucket, so why try at all?

But that's not how we think in Rotary.

In Rotary, we know that everything we do makes a difference. No, we can't fix the whole world, and I wouldn't suggest that we try! But that doesn't make what we can do any less valuable.

Because every life in this world, whether it's across the street or across an ocean, is just as real, just as valuable as the lives of the people who mean the world to us.

So if you find yourself thinking, what I do is only a drop in the bucket — try looking at one of your own kids or grandkids and saying to yourself, well, since I can't feed every child in the world, there's no point in feeding this one!

That's not an attitude that makes a lot of sense.

If we help one person to live a better life, a healthier life, a life with more hope — then we've done more good than a lot of people do in a lifetime.

But we all know that through Rotary, we can do so much more than that. Together, we can dream big and we can achieve. We can change whole communities for the better, not just for a day, but for a lifetime. And that ability is the incredible gift that Rotary has given all of us. Our responsibility is to take that gift, and be worthy of it. Rise to it. Do the most that we possibly can, with the chance we've all been given.

That's our goal. That's why we're here. That's why it isn't enough for any of us to just go through the motions, to show up at our clubs, to do just the minimum needed and no more. And it's why each of us has to remember, every hour of every day, what a responsibility we have.

Being a Rotarian isn't about our own achievements, it isn't about our own careers, it isn't really about us at all.

It's about the people we help.

At the end of the day, the only thing that matters in Rotary, is how much better the world becomes — because Rotary is in it.

In a few hours, this convention will be over. We'll pack our bags, we'll head out to the airport, and we'll say goodbye for another year. We'll carry the warmth and the glow of our experiences with us. But we still have a little time left, and I hope you don't mind if I use these last few minutes to tell you a story.

Back in 1987, when I was a district governor-elect, it was a very, very challenging year for me professionally, as head of the University of Oklahoma Foundation. I was excited to be elected district governor, but there was also a little feeling at the back of my mind that maybe, just maybe I'd bitten off more than I could chew. I worked as hard as I could at my International Assembly, and I did my PETS and my district assembly, and every week that went by I became more and more convinced that I was just not going to be able to pull it off. I didn't see how I could be a good district governor and still do everything I needed to do for the University of Oklahoma.

And that's how it got to be 10 p.m. on the night of 30 June, two hours before I was set to become district governor. I told my wife, Jetta, "I cannot do this. I'm going to have to resign." We had a past director in our district and I picked up the phone to call him. We had rotary phones in those days — I know all of you remember how those worked — and I dialed the area code and then the first six digits of his number. And I sat there for 10 full minutes with my finger in the last digit of his number, not letting the dial turn back, just looking at that phone and thinking.

And then I put the phone back on the hook, and I said to Jetta, "I may not have a real job at the end of this year, but I made a promise to Rotary and I'm going to keep it." And I did.

I guess I don't have to tell you how it turned out. It was a busy year — I won't ever say it was an easy year — but it was an incredible year. And I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt, that the decision I made in the space of those 10 minutes changed my life, and my family's life, completely — in too many ways to count.

That was the night I made the decision that has shaped the rest of my life. That was the night I decided to engage Rotary.

Today, I cannot even imagine how different my life would be, if I had not made the choice to put Rotary front and center for that one year. I can't even count the friends I wouldn't have made, the places I wouldn't have gone, the experiences I wouldn't have had. No matter how much I do for Rotary, no matter how hard I work now, I can never repay Rotary for how much it's done for me — for how much it's

changed my life. I chose to engage Rotary — I set out to change lives — and the life I changed the most was my own.

And I can tell you all, from my heart, the one thing that I know to be true: that the more you engage Rotary — the more you pour your heart into the joy of Rotary service the greater your own joy will be.

My friends, thank you for an unforgettable year. I wish you the best as you look ahead to 2014-15 — when together we will *Light Up Rotary*.

Thank you very much.