

Rotary Foundation keynote address

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Good morning!

It is a tremendous joy and honor to be addressing you today on a topic that is so close to my heart, and that is our Rotary Foundation.

I came to Rotary more than half a century ago, in 1962. Back then, our Foundation was so small that a lot of Rotarians didn't even know we had one! We had one program, and that was our Ambassadorial Scholars. And even though Rotary was international, back then, most of our service was local.

But a few years after I joined, things started to change. Rotarians started thinking beyond their own clubs and districts — looking for new ways to work with other Rotarians, to partner with clubs and districts in other countries, to really serve in new ways. Humanitarian service, and international service, started to be a viable option in Rotary. And Rotary began to change, and our service began to grow and expand. The scope of our international work became far larger, and far more effective, than it ever had been before.

It happened because our Rotary Foundation made the tremendously important decision to launch two new programs: Group Study Exchange and Matching Grants.

I think we can all look back in our lives at moments where a single decision — one that might not have seemed so momentous at the time — shaped everything that was to come. For me, that moment came when I decided to join Rotary. And for our Foundation, the moment came with the decision to support Rotary service with Foundation grants.

It was a way of leveling the field, of letting clubs in wealthier countries lend a hand to clubs in places where there was more need. And it was a way of letting every Rotarian in the world be a part, and feel a part of, all of Rotary's service.

But it was also something else, something I don't think we fully realized at the time. It was a springboard for our own ambition. It let us see just how much more we could do when we worked together, when we pooled our resources, when we took those fundamental ideas of Rotary service and took them to the next level.

It made us realize that in Rotary, the only thing that really limits what we can do is the size of our ambition, and the scope of our own imagination.

We never looked back. Today, we've got a Foundation with well over \$800 million in net

assets. It's well and carefully managed, and we are exceptionally scrupulous about what we do with all of that money. And because our work is all volunteer service, a dollar that you give to The Rotary Foundation has got some pretty long legs. It can go much farther, much more effectively, than any other dollar you've ever donated.

I've been incredibly fortunate not just to have been a Rotarian for more than 50 years but to have been more, and more deeply, involved with Rotary in every passing year. And I will tell you honestly that the more I do in Rotary, the more I realize that Rotary is the closest thing on this earth to magic.

I was born a pretty ordinary kid into an ordinary, big, Canadian Catholic family. I did all right in school; I became a chartered accountant; I married my wife, Joan; and we raised four wonderful boys. And if I hadn't become a Rotarian, we all would have gotten along just fine.

But because I decided to join Rotary, our lives became extraordinary. Because of Rotary, my Canadian kids met people from all over the world. They didn't just grow up with school and hockey — they grew up with a Rotary family, and they grew up with Rotary service. And when they got older, they didn't just call to say hello on a Sunday afternoon. They called us to find out where Rotary would take us next. And the year I went up the Khyber Pass to help immunize Afghan children against polio, they called for another reason: to say, "Dad, we can't tell you what to do — but where are you taking Mom?!"

As RI president, I had the chance that not many Rotarians get: to see the work of Rotary, and of our Foundation, firsthand, all over the world.

And I can tell you, it's one thing to write a check and know that it's out there Doing Good in the World. It's another thing entirely to go to a mobile eye clinic and see a little kid walk up to a table full of glasses, to see him get handed the pair that fits him and put them on — and then see him look up at a tree with a face full of wonder, and then turn to his mother to say, "Mama, I can see the leaves."

That one moment — and countless thousands like it — happened because, 50 years ago, Rotarians decided that it was time to think bigger. They decided that it was time to go beyond what they were doing already, even though they could have said it was good enough.

Because of their ambition, I can look back with all of you at 50 incredible years of achievements through our Foundation — of lives that we have touched, lives that we have saved, lives to which we have brought health, education, and hope. We can look ahead, in just a few years now, to a world free of polio.

All of that happened because of the ambition of the Rotarians that came before us.

Standing here in Lisbon, I wonder what will be said 50 years from now about the Rotarians of today — the ones with the vision, the wisdom, and the ambition to launch Future Vision into reality.

We are saying just what we said in Rotary 50 years ago: that we can do better, and we will.

We will accept the challenge of making all of our work count in the long term, with larger projects that will have a greater impact. We're going to focus on sustainability in our service, so that the work we do is work that will last. And we will be guided in our service by our six areas of focus, so that we can concentrate our efforts where we know we can do the most good.

And we will accept the challenge of Every Rotarian, Every Year, so that every time our Foundation does good in the world — every time a child puts on those glasses for the first time, or learns how to read, or drinks clean water, or is made safe from polio — you will be able to say, "I helped make it happen."

My friends, I thank you all for the part you have played in making Rotary International and our Rotary Foundation the incredible forces for good that they are today.

And I wish you all the best in your Rotary service — in your clubs and through our Foundation, Doing Good in the World.

Thank you.