

General Secretary's Report  
2004 Rotary International Convention  
Osaka, Japan

The 2003-04 Rotary year has been one of opportunities and challenges. The major challenge was economic, with budget cuts forcing a reduction in staff at the beginning of the year. While these cutbacks naturally impacted our service to Rotarians, staff worked to streamline operations and minimize the adverse effects as much as possible. We also worked to maximize our opportunities as we prepared for the Rotary Centennial and the possibilities it offers for enhancing Rotary's public image, increasing membership, and strengthening support to our Foundation.

#### Preparing for the Centennial

One hundred years of service is a milestone to celebrate, and Rotary International has been working to help clubs make full use of the centennial spotlight in promoting their activities in the community. We have produced a wealth of materials designed to inspire and support your centennial efforts. I encourage all Rotarians to visit our centennial Web site, where you'll find resources, information, and downloads to help you celebrate this special year and publicize Rotary's 100th anniversary throughout your community. Continue to visit the site often during the coming year to download monthly historical PowerPoint presentations, track the progress of the centennial bell, and read about club centennial projects worldwide.

We have already reached one centennial milestone with the completion and production of *A Century of Service: The Story of Rotary International*. This centennial history book commissioned by the RI Board and written by Rotarian David C. Forward provides an encyclopedic view of Rotary's first 100 years—including photos illustrating all aspects of Rotary, both yesterday and today. Filled with fascinating anecdotes and little-known facts, the book is now available in English and Japanese and will be published in French, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish in July. This is a book that should be in the library of every Rotarian and every club, as well as the public libraries of every community Rotary serves.

#### Strengthening Membership

The centennial spotlight should be a powerful draw for membership during the coming year. During the current year, membership has remained relatively stable overall. With retention as the main focus, staff initiated a pilot project designed to learn about successful membership retention strategies throughout the Rotary world. As we gather more information, we will share these strategies with Rotarians through our publications and the Web site.

The three-year New Model Pilot Project is now in its final year. Designed to allow clubs more flexibility with their constitution and club operations, the project was developed to

strengthen recruitment and retention efforts. Currently, there are 182 clubs participating, and initial results indicate that about 60 percent have maintained or increased their membership. Legislation will be introduced at the Council on Legislation to extend the pilot project to six years so that more detailed information can be gathered before recommending changes in club operations to a future Council on Legislation.

To help Rotarians better address membership issues, staff conducted regional surveys, including a demographic and cost of membership survey; developed and updated publications, working to provide information on CD-ROM and on the Web as well as in print; and communicated membership issues and trends through various RI publications and the Web site.

### Enhancing Rotary's Public Image

Rotary's public image plays a key role in attracting new members. Although budget cuts forced the deferral of the public image campaign begun last year in Australia and Canada, a smaller effort was carried out in Brazil this year, with 375 outdoor billboards highlighting Rotary's focus on education, the upcoming centennial, and the polio eradication program. Brazil was chosen for this outdoor campaign because of its solid Rotary infrastructure and potential for membership growth. Located in a number of major metropolitan areas throughout the country, the billboards aimed to publicize Rotarians' great humanitarian work as a way of supporting Brazilian clubs' membership development and fundraising efforts.

Plans are now underway for a major multimedia campaign during the centennial year, with a focus on the United States as Rotary's birthplace. In addition to the advertising component of the campaign, materials are being produced for use by clubs in promoting Rotary with their local media. Next December, all clubs will receive a CD that includes television, print, radio, outdoor, and Internet elements—many of which can be easily localized. Targeted toward professionals and business leaders, the centennial public image campaign is designed to increase awareness of Rotary, highlight its many contributions to society, and encourage the general public to find out more about joining Rotary.

### Increasing Foundation Support

Another centennial goal is encompassed in the Every Rotarian, Every Year initiative—an effort to attain the minimum US\$100 per capita Annual Programs Fund goal endorsed by the Trustees and the 2001 Council on Legislation. As investment income declined substantially in recent years, the Foundation has been forced to make cuts in its vital programs—programs that clubs and Rotarians depend on to carry out humanitarian projects and to participate in educational programs. Through Every Rotarian, Every Year, the Trustees are working to bring the programs back to their full capacity and provide Rotarians and clubs with the means to address many of today's critical problems. Addressing these problems will succeed if every Rotarian and every club contributes to the Annual Programs Fund every year. Therefore, every club was asked at PETS to

establish a per capita annual giving goal. To support this initiative, a success kit has been developed and distributed to every club. The kit includes a variety of materials that explain the initiative and its marketing strategies and clearly illustrate how Rotarians' contributions are being used to meet essential humanitarian and educational needs.

### Eradicating Polio

Of course, Rotary's primary centennial goal has always been global polio eradication. As we come into the centennial year, we are optimistic on many fronts. Only six countries remain polio-endemic—Afghanistan, Egypt, India, Niger, Nigeria, and Pakistan. According to global health officials, India presents the greatest opportunity for an early breakthrough in polio eradication efforts in 2004. Last year, India dramatically improved its immunization campaigns, and as a result, reported 223 cases of polio—down from 1,600 cases in 2002. That success is largely attributed to a renewed commitment from the Indian government and a strategy of involving elected officials and opinion leaders at all levels, as well as the continuing efforts of Indian Rotarians and others in supporting National Immunization Days (NIDs).

The major challenge remains in Africa. Rumors that the oral polio vaccine contains harmful substances led to the suspension of immunization activities in key northern Nigerian states, which, in turn, resulted in polio outbreaks in several polio-free countries. With global eradication in sight, RI President Jonathan Majiyagbe has appealed directly to African communities to immunize their children, and Rotarians have joined together to assist in NIDs across west and central Africa to help meet the important centennial goal of a polio-free world.

### Planning for the Council on Legislation

In addition to preparing for the centennial, Secretariat staff have also been involved in preparations for the 2004 Council on Legislation coming up next month in Chicago. Some 600 pieces of legislation were received and processed by staff. The legislation was translated, printed, and mailed to all members of the council, district governors, and Foundation Trustees. The proposed legislation is also posted on Rotary's Web site, along with a new logo for the council and discussion forums in six languages where Rotarians can offer their opinions on the legislation. In addition, staff have also been working on the many logistical details that accompany an international meeting of this size. For daily updates on council action, visit [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org), beginning 14 June.

### Providing resources for clubs and districts

In an effort to help clubs and districts handle Rotary business more efficiently, RI purchased the Rotarian rights to the Clubmate software product and made it available to clubs and districts. RI-CAS 1.0 (formerly Clubmate 6.0) and RI-DAS 1.0 (formerly District 3000) can be downloaded at no cost from the Member Access area of the RI Web site. Rotarians may also order a CD-ROM version of the software for \$19. RI-CAS and RI-DAS support forums have been established in the Member Access section of the Web site for Rotarians to share information.

The RI Web site continues to evolve as the staff works to make the site more timely and user-friendly. In April, a revamped “News” section debuted, designed to integrate news stories into one part of the site and link them with related information in other sections. The News section is updated several times a week with all the latest information from RI and The Rotary Foundation and interesting feature stories about Rotary club activities worldwide. I encourage you to visit it often to keep abreast of Rotary news.

#### Planning for the next century of success

This year, work continued on the development of a strategic plan. Under the direction of the RI Strategic Planning Committee, Rotary senior leaders and RI staff are creating action plans for the seven strategic goals approved by the RI Board. These goals—based largely on responses from 23,000 club and district leaders—are: eradicating polio, attracting and retaining members, enhancing Rotary’s public image, refining the organization’s governance structure, selecting the next corporate project, sharpening the program focus, and improving training.

A solid strategic plan is Rotary’s best defense against the economic uncertainty that exists in so many parts of the world today. It will help to ensure continuity in an organization where leadership changes on an annual basis, preventing Rotary from changing directions midstream and wasting financial resources. The plan will also be a valuable tool in our budgetary process, giving staff and senior leaders the knowledge they need to allocate funds more precisely and, ultimately, to measure success and increase accountability.

The goals of the strategic plan are directly tied to the request for a dues increase that the Board will present to the Council on Legislation next month. The need for this increase is clearly outlined in the Treasurer’s Report to the Convention, and I encourage you to read this document carefully.

Let me give you one example, however, of how effective strategic planning is dependent on sufficient financial support. One of the top priorities identified by the grassroots Rotarians we surveyed was to “enhance public relations and improve public perception.” Here are some of the messages they gave us: “Our out-of-date image of old, conservative, white, male, elite businessmen affects our ability to attract new members and achieve our goals;” “Remember that perception is reality to those outside of Rotary;” and “Focus on Rotary’s achievements in messages to outside.” These members believe—as do I and the Board—that if more people were aware of Rotary and the benefits of Rotary membership, they would want to join, thus greatly expanding Rotary’s ability to do good in our communities and the world.

As I mentioned before, we began a targeted public relations campaign in 2002-03, but when budget problems emerged, we were forced to defer this year’s plan. Raising public awareness of an organization like Rotary is a complicated process, and certain aspects of it require the investment of sizeable sums of money. If we do not invest that money

now—and take full advantage of the spotlight of our centennial year—we cannot expect to reach our strategic planning goal.

This is just one example. Reaching the other six strategic goals as they were defined by Rotarians may require us to make additional investments—improve our information systems, for instance, or hire staff with specific skills. In the long run, however, your Board believes that a strategic plan is essential to Rotary’s future. I encourage you to visit [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org) where you’ll find more information about the plan. And as always, I welcome your input on the strategic plan as well as any other subject related to Secretariat operations.