

I've Seen Miracles of Rotary

**A speech presented at the Breakout Session titled
"Alumni Associations and Activities: From Association to Rotary Club and Beyond"
on June 14, 2008**

Alumni Celebration, Los Angeles International Convention

by

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Distinguished guests, Rotarians, and my dear Rotary family,

It is my great honor and pleasure to be here to share some of my experiences and thoughts as charter president of the first alumni club in Japan. First I will talk about how our club started, and some of our service projects. Followed by my message to Foundation alumni, I'd like to share with you an oath that we took when we started our club by singing our club song together, because Rotary sings, and Rotary shares.

Kanagawa Shonan Rotary Club was chartered in year 2004 to celebrate Rotary in its centennial year. Of the 23 charter members, 11 had once been ambassadorial scholars, 9 were past GSE members, and 3 were former youth exchange students. We had as many as 12 women members, and our average age was 38. In a country where the majority of Rotarians are men and their average age is around 60, our club was and still is really unique. I believe there were two factors that made our club possible.

The first was a large pool of prospective members who had benefited from the new generations programs of Rotary. Each program has its own, highly active alumni association, and our District has always got the alumni involved with Rotary. The second was the outstanding leadership with vision from our special representative, now RI director Kazuhiko Ozawa. When I was first asked to join Rotary, I hesitated, because my wife has a full time job and my children were small. It was Director Ozawa who changed my mind with his passion. You never know how glad I am now that I changed my mind.

In the centennial year of Rotary, we organized two charity concerts with our district and Alumni Association, which raised 60,000 dollars for the Foundation. We gave another charity concert and started a unique matching grant project. It involved Mandaluyong,

Pasig, San Juan RC, the first alumni club in the world in the Philippines, their District and District 3220 in Sri Lanka, which also has an alumni club. Together we constructed 3 deep wells and fixed one pump, which are now providing water to more than 10,000 pupils and students every day.

We also bought Batik handkerchiefs made by Tsunami victim children in Bangkok, sold them and helped a Japanese NGO build a library in a small Thai village hit hard by the tidal wave. We cleaned city streets together with children living in an orphanage. A former GSE team member went to Brazil as a GSE team leader. We hosted a Yoneyama student from China. We organized orientations for inbound youth exchange students. I am now a counselor to an ambassadorial scholar studying in Boston. None of these things would have happened without our club, and it was my greatest honor to serve this club as charter president.

Ever since we started Kanagawa Shonan Rotary Club, ladies and gentlemen, I've seen miracles of Rotary. Through Rotary, we can achieve far more than you can imagine. And the more you serve, the stronger your fellowship becomes. I am glad that I joined Rotary because I can see my club members every week. I am glad that I joined Rotary because I was able to meet wonderful club members of Manpasan RC and their special representative, my Filipino Big Sister PDG Lina Aurelio. I am glad that I joined Rotary because I can see all of you here in Los Angeles.

If I ever had a chance to talk directly to all the alumni who have not joined Rotary, I'd encourage them to do so, because I've never regretted it, and they don't know what they are missing. If you are already a Rotarian, do everything you can to get alumni involved in Rotary. Convince your district leaders to see if it is feasible to start an alumni club like ours. Be a counselor to an ambassadorial scholar and share with that person the way of life called Rotary just like my counselor, my US DAD, PDG Bill Skinner did some 20 years ago. You never know how I wish he was here with us today.

Why am I telling you all this? Look at that Rotary Wheel up there. That wheel represented HOPE when I applied for the scholarship. My father's company had gone bankrupt when I was in high school, and Rotary was my only hope to study abroad. Without the scholarship, my life would have been totally different. I want each and every one of you to think what your life would have been without Rotary.

We learn to love by being loved, and we learn to serve by being served. We all have the spirit of service instilled in us through Rotary, and it is our responsibility to make sure that wheel keeps sending the same message, HOPE, to millions people who are suffering from hunger, illiteracy, poverty and life threatening diseases.

When we started our club, we expressed our determination for action in the form of a club song. Rotarians must act with vision, for Rotary itself was started by a single man with vision. The original was written in Japanese, and I wrote its English version for Past President Boyd when he visited our club. The music was composed by our President Elect Hiroaki Tokunaga. I would like to sing it together with all of you to renew our oath. I hope you will take the same oath as we sing along. It's called "the Centennial Oath."

The Centennial Oath

Words: Naoyuki Takagi

Music: Hiroaki Tokunaga

**Yes, I am only one, and yet I am one
I cannot do everything, but there's something I can
Whatever I can do, I've got to do
By the grace of Mighty God I'll carry it out
Once I start to LEAD THE WAY with what I can do
Someone will LEND A HAND cause ROTARY SHARES
Together we can make come true anything we wish
If it's true, if it's fair, good for everyone
Hand in hand, let's walk on
There's no hurry, but we should never stop
Let's act and show we care
Keeping SERVICE ABOVE SELF always on our minds
Someday peace will prevail upon this earth
Realizing at last Rotary's eternal dream**