



ROTARY FOUNDATION KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Paul A. Netzel, Rotary Foundation Trustee Chair
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Good morning, my fellow Rotarians, members of the family of Rotary, and guests!

Toronto has been a fantastic host for this convention. But the city also holds a special place in Rotary history because it has been a center for milestones in global health.

Let me take you back to the 1950s, to scientific discoveries which would lead to the most ambitious project in The Rotary Foundation's history, polio eradication.

As we all know, Dr. Jonas Salk was the first to develop an effective vaccine against polio. But Salk had a problem. He did not know how to mass-produce his vaccine for medical trials or large-scale distribution.

But here in Toronto, a Canadian scientist, Dr. Leone Farrell, was working on a method to produce the vaccine in large quantities.

Dr. Farrell was already a trailblazer in many ways. In 1933, at the age of 29, she obtained a PhD in biochemistry at the University of Toronto, becoming one of a small group of women in her generation to earn a doctorate in the sciences.

She had pioneered a new method of vaccine production for other diseases by gently rocking cell cultures to stimulate growth. She adapted this method for the production of poliovirus, making it possible for Dr. Salk to have the volume of vaccine he needed to conduct the largest medical experiment in history.

During 1954-55, Salk's field trials reached 1.8 million children in the U.S., Canada, and Finland and confirmed the safety of his vaccine.

Although Dr. Farrell led the team of researchers which produced that vital vaccine against polio, she was an unsung hero for many years — much like so many others in our effort. While Jonas Salk appeared on the cover of Time magazine, Dr. Farrell faded into relative obscurity.

There are hundreds — maybe thousands — more unsung heroes in our fight against polio. But today, we remember those unsung heroes, and we hope to honor their memory.

We can do this in two ways. First, we can honor their legacy through finishing what

we promised by delivering a polio-free world. And second, we can build Rotary's future by positioning ourselves to be ready for a postpolio era following the world being certified polio-free. When that time arrives, we Rotarians will have almost unlimited opportunities to further change the world for good. A decade ago Bill Gates Sr. told us, "When it comes time to decide what will follow polio — you Rotarians need to think big! Anything less would be a waste of Rotary's potential."

This is why I believe this is an amazing time to be a Rotarian. You see, the finish line for polio is within sight. Only 11 cases of polio have been reported halfway through this year. This is the lowest in history. And *when* that finish line is crossed — before the world can be certified polio-free, we will need at least 36 consecutive months with no poliovirus found in a person *or* in the environment.

In the past year, Rotary and global leaders pledged \$1.5 billion to end polio. This total includes Rotary's pledge of \$450 million.

Today, I can tell you that, through our End Polio Now: Countdown to History campaign, Rotarians are very near to achieving this year's \$50 million goal. In fact, several days ago, Mrs. Birla from Mumbai, India, confirmed another gift of \$1 million from The Aditya Birla Group. This brings her total giving to PolioPlus to over \$11 million. We are so fortunate to have Mrs. Birla as a donor from a country that has been polio-free for over five years.

We have also received the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's 2-to-1 match, resulting in their \$100 million contribution to The Rotary Foundation.

As we know, eradicating polio is far more than fundraising. Last October our members organized 3,671 global World Polio Day events — twice as many as the year before.

For over 100 years, Rotarians, through Our Foundation, have pioneered new ways to make a difference. Any of *you* in this audience could be the next pioneer. It starts with one idea.

And you do not need to limit yourself to our groundbreaking PolioPlus program to find inspiration.

If we look back at almost any decade during our first century, we can find innovations which adapted our service to a rapidly changing world.

Think of the first Institutes for International Understanding, which Rotarians launched in the 1930s to help illuminate global issues.

In the 1940s, we launched our first program of scholarships for graduate study. We even had a seat at the table at the 1945 San Francisco conference where the United Nations charter was signed.

In the 1960s we launched our first program to pair Rotary clubs and districts from different countries.

In the 2000s, the Rotary Peace Centers program began equipping the best students from all continents for careers in peacebuilding — conflict prevention and resolution. And, today, this program has 1,162 graduates, with up to 100 new Rotary Peace Fellows being added each year. Plus we will be adding up to four new peace centers over the next decade.

Rotarians have devised new ways to fight disease.

And in some areas of the world, public health strategies will be forever changed thanks to the global partnership model and tactics Rotary helped create and refine for polio. In addition, Rotarians have created better education opportunities as well as pathways to economic empowerment.

Today we are also serving those deprived of the basics that sustain life: clean water, good hygiene, and modern sanitation.

As we have heard over the past few days, all of these are within our six areas of focus. These six areas are the building blocks for peace.

Rotary's commitment to these six areas of focus, plus our emphasis on building peace, is the central reason Our Rotary Foundation has been able to raise and invest more than \$4.4 billion in programs over the past century.

Last year when we celebrated The Rotary Foundation's centennial anniversary, we had a challenging comprehensive goal of \$300 million. Well, the total raised was just over \$304 million. This was possible *only* because of *you* and other Rotarians and clubs worldwide.

Even though some thought we might encounter a letdown in fundraising following the successes of our centennial year, Our Foundation's Trustees were united behind the idea that 2017-18 would be the first year of The Rotary Foundation's second century.

Further, they believed that *you* Rotarians would respond to the challenge — because the needs around the world are more pressing now than ever.

We established an ambitious comprehensive fundraising goal to raise \$360 million. The top two funding objectives were polio and the Annual Fund. Polio — as our No. 1 corporate priority — had a goal of \$150 million. And the Annual Fund — which makes possible many of our life-changing programs — had a goal of \$135 million.

Thanks to your generosity and that of Rotarians around the world, I am excited to announce that together, as of today, we have raised a new one-year all-time record for Our Foundation of \$372,600,000.

Our Foundation's successes in fundraising allow more Rotary clubs the opportunity to implement bigger, better, and more sustainable projects through global grants. Over 85 percent of our districts worldwide are participating in global grants.

As of last week, nearly 1,200 global grant applications have been approved this year — along with 487 district grants — involving 168 countries overall.

Another major priority is our initiative to build The Rotary Foundation Endowment: 2025 by 2025. We are aiming high to build an Endowment of \$2.025 billion by the year 2025.

When our “2025 by 2025” Endowment goal has been fully funded, The Rotary Foundation can reasonably anticipate receiving — in today’s dollars — approximately \$100 million each year from investment earnings. These funds will help ensure that future Rotarians will have the resources they need to design and implement projects which will make a difference.

The achievements I just highlighted have been accomplished through the teamwork and partnership of the three parts that comprise Rotary: Rotary clubs, Rotary International, and The Rotary Foundation. These three parts working together are *why* we can say Rotary is making a difference.

As I close, let me tell you about the kind of difference *you* are helping make happen through Our Rotary Foundation.

I share this story because, as we talk about all that happens through Our Foundation, we frequently talk about numbers of people and dollars — and many of the numbers are very large.

This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to personalize, and to humanize the impact and the difference we Rotarians are making.

When I was district governor, I led a team of Rotarians who traveled to India to provide polio survivors with corrective surgeries.

The program was a great success. More than 750 children were given a chance to have long, productive lives.

While I was in one village, I met a 9-year-old boy named Pareek, a polio survivor who was on his way for corrective surgery. Some of the surgeries are a relatively short 20- to 30-minute procedure on certain tendons in the legs, followed by 45 to 60 days of recovery and rehabilitation.

As I stood near a doorway to the wooden building used for the surgeries, I watched as Pareek navigated a dirt path on his hands and knees. Soon, I saw his mother and father coming my way, as well.

It was Pareek who reached me first. I wasn’t dressed like a doctor, but he must have known that I was part of this group of outsiders who had come to help. Because when he had crawled all the way over to me, he did something that utterly astonished me. He bent his head down and kissed the top of my shoe.

For me, time virtually stopped! All I could feel were chills going up and down my spine. And then his mother came over to me. And she knelt down and did the same.

Next, Pareek's father approached, and he also knelt down and kissed my shoe.

I was speechless! I just stood there until a local Rotarian came over and whispered in my ear. He said, "This is their way of saying thank you for changing their son's and their lives forever and for giving him back his life."

As I have looked back on this experience, I have often wondered what ever happened to Pareek. Well, thanks to the assistance of one of the local Rotarian physicians who participated in that corrective surgery camp 21 years ago, we are able to share with you a brief video with a special message from the young man we believe is Pareek — as well as two others who were also beneficiaries of those surgeries. But perhaps Pareek's voice speaks the loudest because of the personal story you have just heard.

[Video plays]

This is just one story about Our Rotary Foundation! Thank you for your contributions — both financially and in service — and thank you for what you will do in the future.

The next time you think about the level of your gift to Our Rotary Foundation, please think of the Pareeks of the world. Thank you!