

Final Essay, Rotary Leadership Academy

By Audrey Wilson, member of the Rotary Club of South Hilo

It was “Bring A Friend” Day for the Rotary Club of South Hilo. I had invited my friend Linda to be my guest at this special membership meeting. She admitted to me that she had to google “Rotary” to find out what she was getting into, adding, “I learned it is a service organization like Lions.” Google “Rotary”!?? Needless to say, I was shocked that she did not know what Rotary is, what it does at home and around the world!

Perhaps in this intimate community of Hilo, we proud Rotarians are not “tooting our horns” enough. Our neighbors should know what Rotary is all about, that we have been working to rid the world of Polio. They know it in the endemic countries, but not in our corner of the world. In countries such as India and Thailand, Rotary is well known and respected for the good work it does in polio eradication.

We bring in Group Study Exchange teams from around the world to share vocations, learn our culture, eat our food, stay with our families. Our neighbors don’t know about the value of this vocational exchange, which also sends our own young professionals abroad.

We have youth exchange students from foreign lands attending our high schools and staying with our local host families for an entire year. Rotary also sends our students abroad .

The Rotary Club of South Hilo sponsors an active Interact Club of more than 40 members at Saint Joseph High School. The kids attend state conventions and are leading sessions and bringing back awards.

Our neighbors take for granted that the Department of Water Supply gives us one of the cleanest, best tasting water. They are not aware that Rotary is going to many communities around the world and treating muddy, unsafe water and turning it into clean, drinking water. I visited a hospital in Thailand this year and found out that the high incidences of renal problems would not be an huge problem if the people were drinking clean water.

Students at the Volcano Charter School of Arts and Science received donated school supplies, furniture, equipment, and other support through a Rotary Matching Reserve Grant. Ask the students at that school about Rotary, and most say, “oh, yeah, they pick up rubbish on the highway.” They don’t realize who gave them the chair and desk they use every day.

We have an obvious challenge. We have to build awareness, so that every Hiloan, young and old, knows about all that Rotary International is doing to change the world for the better, and has an up-close-and-personal appreciation of what Rotarians do in their own back yard. We must share the thrilling opportunities for Service Above Self that come with membership.

We have the largest privately founded international scholarship program in the world. Since its inception, 34,000 students from 100 countries have become Rotary’s cultural ambassadors.

We have teamed with six universities around the world to offer a master's degree program in peace and conflict resolution. Imagine, a service organization promoting peace in the world. Unheard of!

Rotary clubs around the world initiate thousands of international humanitarian projects every year and we are eradicating Polio from the face of the earth. .

Wow! I am certainly proud to be a Rotarian!! Now, how to we transfer the enthusiasm of Rotary Club members in Hilo to the general public, and share the Rotary story with our neighbors?

First, we must start at "home" with the Ohana of Rotary. We must share the pride and prestige of being a Rotarian within the family unit. Do Rotarian Bob's five children know about Rotary and understand the honor of their father's Rotary membership? Do they know what Rotary does in the community and around the world? Rotary awareness must begin at home, and grow within the ohana and follow through to the schools.

Most high schools on the island have a Rotary sponsored Interact club and many Rotarians are involved in Youth Service. The Interact Club of St. Joseph, its President and its advisor are great resources to reach out to our youth. To encourage more sponsor involvement, each Rotarian should attend at least one Interact meeting a year and get involved in at least one of their activities. There could be an award system developed, maybe a special pin made when this is accomplished. Sometimes mentoring needs a push and what better way than having a Rotarian rub shoulders with an Interact student.

Rotarians could go campus and talk to the students about Rotary. They are the future of Rotary. Rotarians are a great resource for our youth. They can be mentors and set good examples to children who may need that little bit of push. Just think what a wonderful, good feeling it would be to change the life of just one youngster!

In 2011, our club will be in charge of the Rotary Youth Leadership Award, (RYLA) . It will be a great opportunity to further demonstrate Rotary's respect and concern for our youth, teach them fundamentals of leadership, ethics of positive leadership, the importance of communication skills, problem solving, building self-confidence, self -esteem and global citizenship. And all this in one weekend! Rotarians volunteer to spend their weekend at the Kilauea Military Camp dorms with a bunch of motivated high school students. All members of the club need to take an active role in one way or another in making it a very successful weekend.

The East side of the island has a great media resource...the Hawaii Tribune Herald. We must be more consistent in filing photographs and stories, when we entertain and house Group Study Exchange teams yearly, when we sponsor a Youth Exchange students, and when Rotarians do volunteer work in a third world country. Rotarians should take advantage of the column space in the Hawaii Tribune Herald. To encourage more coverage, I propose The Assistant Governor for East Hawaii select a member from each of their clubs to form a Public Relations committee. This committee would be part of the monthly presidents meeting where story ideas and photo opportunities would generate.

The Public Relations Committee could suggest a contest , whereby businesses would use their window displays to feature Rotary. If the Rotarian does not have a window, we will ask for a section of a wall in his or her office for a display. We will have a photo of the winning window or wall in the local press.

All Rotarians should have the plague of The Four Way Test hanging in their office. I have one that was given to me by Rotarian Peter Shayne on July 2, 1996, my first day as president of the Rotary Club of South Hilo. I felt very honored that Peter, a longtime Rotarian, would think of me, as he presented the plaque, and said it had been hanging on his wall since October 26, 1964 and 32 years later, wanted me to have it for my wall.

Because it is a well-known fact that the youth of today do not regularly read the newspaper, we have to get to them via their favorite access...social media. Rotary International already is using U-Tube, Twitter, Face Book, etc. and there are CDs to give to the local television and radio stations for PSAs. Public Relations chairs for all clubs should be aware of these options.

The Rotary Club of South Hilo has a fantastic website: southhilorotary.org, with a lot of information about Rotary, about what our club does. It tells a lot of stories with photos and slide shows. When the membership committee does the pre-induction orientation, one of the first duties they will insist is that the potential new member check out our website.

Community visibility is important and there should be a large banner at every community service project, whether it is Rotarian at Work Day, or any project the club has taken on.

Even at a funeral, there can Rotary information. I developed a Rotary Necrology speech when I was District Director for Family of Rotary. We used it, family willing, when we attended the funeral of our members.

The Rotarian Necrology recalls the member, club activities, highlights their Rotary career, stories of fellowship and his or her name badge is retired and offered to the family as a remembrance of Service. (Rotary Necrology is attached.)

I would like it to be adopted by Rotary International as a standard for all Rotarians when we honor them at their funerals.

If we take more time telling the Rotary story at home, at school, and to the public via the media, then no one who is invited to a Rotary meeting here in Hilo will have to google "Rotary" ever again. Hilo residents, young and old, will be as familiar with the mission of Rotary, as they are with the Boys Scout creed.