

a silent **army**

WRITTEN BY **JEANNE AGUIRRE**

If you ever have the opportunity to speak with a Rotarian, bring a pencil and paper. Ideas, energy and excitement start to fly and you would be remiss not to try and catch them.

I had the opportunity to join the Buffalo Grove Rotary club for lunch during one of their regular Thursday afternoon lunch meetings at Lou Malnati's. Over Lou's pasta and chicken wings I was regaled with narratives and details. Try as I may to keep up with these Rotarians, the attempt to capture their enthusiasm and pride and write it down was nearly impossible.

A Rotarian is a member of Rotary International (RI). Rotary International is the world's first service club organization founded in 1905 by four Chicago tradesmen wanting to join their resources and contribute their services to help in their community, their motto being, "Service Above Self". They rotated their club meetings between their offices—hence the name, Rotary. Since then, these nonpolitical, nonreligious clubs have spread internationally and there are over 32,000 Rotary clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas. Its nonpartisan position is why the Rotary is often times first in and on the front line to help in crises. The more than 1.2 million members focus their time and talent to help alleviate poverty, improve global health, and support education worldwide. That's just a simple sentence, but read it again. There is a lot involved in that statement - imagine what these men and women are trying to accomplish.



Mother and daughter in India after receiving the polio vaccine.



Rotarians Steve Balinski and John DeRocher at an annual Pancake Breakfast fundraiser.

Rotary International has been recognized for forging a battle against polio since 1985 and has helped bring the crippling disease to its knees. "It is a blessing that most of American kids these days do not even know what polio is" Martha Weiss, a Buffalo Grove Rotarian told me. Martha's father fell victim to polio when he was 17 and this inspired Martha's passion to fight. She traveled to India in 2005 to participate in the National Immunization Day, an event the government dedicated for volunteers to seek out children five years and younger to administer the oral vaccine. "Why do we use our financial resources to go to the polio 'hot spots' instead of simply donating it to the local Rotary clubs to use?" she asks. "We go not only to participate first hand in the project, but also to give the local volunteers a 'shot in the arm' which they could use after so many years of fighting the battle". In the 1980s, the disease infected 1,000 children every day in 125 countries. Thanks to the Rotary's program Polio Plus, in 2007, fewer than 2,000 cases were reported worldwide. To date, Rotary and its partners have contributed nearly \$700 million to the eradication effort, an amount that will grow to more than \$850 million by the time the world is certified polio-free.

Rotary International is trying to encourage peace by teaching peace to our young adults, worldwide, through their Youth Exchange program. Students apply to attend schools in different countries and live with different host families. They learn at a critical age the diversities of cultures while sharing their own traditions. The Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) program sponsors weekend leadership training programs for high school students, many from Interact (Rotary's high school age service organization) to encourage leadership of youth by youth.