Welcome to Rotary!

Today is your day

You’ve joined Rotary

And you’re well on your way!

You’ll join up with friends

Who work hard all day long

And you’ll meet up each week

To share stories and song

You have brains in your head

You have feet in your shoes

You can steer yourself

Any direction you choose

Is it youth?

Is it club?

Is it all ‘round the world?

Or is it just something in your own little ‘hood?

You’re now on your way

And you know what you know

And YOU are the one

Who’ll decide where you go!

Out there make things happen.

You frequently do

As people as brainy

And footsy as you!

You’ve now with a band

Of great folks and new friends

Who’ll make change in the world

And start some new trends.

So welcome to Rotary

We’re so glad you’re here

And we can’t wait to see

When your way becomes clear.

So…

Be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray

Or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O’Shea,

You’re off to Great Places!

Today is your day!

The whole world is waiting.

So…get on your way!

[SLIDE] I hope that Theodore Geisel will forgive me for modifying his beautiful words from his Dr. Seuss book, Oh, the Places You’ll Go.

It struck me as I looked back over my years in Rotary that I would have never imagined all the places I would go thanks to Rotary. And that is what I want to share with you today. When you think about how to excite potential, new and current members about your club, all you have to do is tell stories about the blessings that you receive through your membership.

[SLIDE] Before I head off in that direction though, I want to send warm greetings from RI President Ian Risely and his wife PDG Juliet. Our theme this year of [SLIDE] “Rotary Making a Difference” rings true, doesn’t it. After all, that is all that we do when we are “Building Bridges, Goodwill and Friendship”.

[SLIDE] In Kolkata, India, the alarm goes off at 3:30 am. It will be hours before daylight. The team had a restless night, each one on a box springs, no mattress, one sheet, no blanket. But that is luxury in comparison to what some people have. As they dressed, they wondered what the day would bring. Little did they know that it would be a day they would hold close in their heart for the rest of their life.

[SLIDE} As dawn breaks, they ride past villages and fields bustling with activity and energy. These are hardworking people that always seem to have a smile on their face. Mid-morning, the bus pauses for a stop and they get out to stretch. Even though this is a long ride, no one seems to mind.

At last they arrive in the northern part of West Bengal. A case of polio broke out the prior week near here and they are going to stop that nasty virus in its tracks. [SLIDE] Each member is given instructions and form small teams as they go through the village door to door. Each raises their little finger and asks “Polio?”

Let’s stop here for a minute. You know what this scene looks like.

But imagine your own neighborhood. Maybe it looks like this. [SLIDE] Maybe nearly everyone speaks English. Maybe nearly everyone looks the same. Suddenly, a busload of strangers shows up. They don’t speak your language. They look different in many ways from the people in your community. They bustle around searching for all the children under 5 years old on your street. They are going to give them some drops of something. Who are they? What are they giving our children? Is it safe? Would this make you nervous? Would you let them give your children or your grandchildren those drops?

[SLIDE] Even though the locals don’t speak English, they understand. Mothers bring their little children. Smiles are everywhere. Fortunately, in India, everyone knows about polio immunization days.

The group moves forward. Everyone in the group wants to deliver the precious drops. Will I get a turn? Most of the children were immunized yesterday. We are there for clean-up.

Finally, we come to a family that was missed. They have two small children, a boy and a girl. Sue immunizes the little girl. I take the photos for her. [SLIDE] As I watch the little boy, I say in my heart, “He’s mine!” Gosh, he is so scared. I practically push others out of the way so I can immunize him.

[SLIDE] His mother holds him. We all open our mouths as I try to give him the drops. I’m so nervous. I squeeze the bottle and nothing happens. I squeeze harder. Still nothing. What a dope I am. I forgot to take off the cap. He finally gets his drops. He is safe!

[SLIDE] The day continues as we go up one lane and down the next. [SLIDE] We hand out school supplies to the children. They swarm around us like flies.

Finally, we get on the bus for the nine hour ride back to our hotel. Eighteen hours of bus ride for two hours of immunizations. Time well spent.

What a day! I didn’t immunize 5 or 10 or 20 or 50. No. [SLIDE] I immunized just one. That little boy. That day changed the life of just one boy, just one mother, just one family, just one Rotarian. Oh, the Places You’ll Go!

[SLIDE] Sometimes you can inspire new Rotarians with other people’s stories. I heard this one after I was asked to serve on The Rotary Foundation Water and Sanitation Major Gifts Initiative Committee and it may be familiar to you as it comes from a district south of you.

More than 25 years ago, a Rotarian visited the Dominican Republic as part of his ministerial outreach. He observed the unsanitary drinking water and the impact on the children. 17% of the children died before the age of 5, all from viruses contracted from unsafe drinking water. He returned to his club and convinced them to fund three wells for three villages. This turned into a Rotary Foundation matching grant. Three years after the project was completed, he returned to the villages. He didn’t identify himself as a participant in the well drilling project. While visiting one of the sites, a woman saw that he was inspecting the well. She said, “You know, after Rotary drilled the well, the children stopped dying!” [SLIDE] Many Rotarians and other generous individuals donate to the efforts for clean water and safe hygienic facilities. Whether we are actually drilling the wells or donating to The Rotary Foundation, we are all examples of Rotary: Making a Difference.

[SLIDE] I hadn’t seen David in a while at Rotary. You know what happens. First he had to miss a few meetings because of work. Then they went on a vacation trip and after that he came down with a cold. Now a few months had passed since he last attended a meeting. It was getting easier and easier to find an excuse not to attend. He was thinking it was time to leave Rotary.

And then something happened. [SLIDE] On a Sunday in October of 2003, the San Diego region suffered from a massive firestorm. Our community was devastated by the damage. In my own neighborhood over 300 homes were destroyed in a matter of hours. I was evacuated and the flames came within 100 yards of my home. We had minutes, not hours to escape the rapidly advancing flames. Many were able to get out with only their pets and their photos.

[SLIDE] My club decided we needed to do something to support our neighbors and friends. At first glance all of our members were safe and untouched by the damage. However, we missed one person, someone we hadn’t seen in a while. David and his wife Liz had lost everything.

[SLIDE] Six days later, the club was on David and Liz’s bare lot sifting through the ash and debris looking for anything that could be salvaged. We found a coin collection, David’s first wedding ring, Liz’s wedding dress, some tools and dishes and a nearly intact pillow case given to them by the mother of a Samoan sailor that David had defended in The Philippines. [SLIDE] It was embroidered with the words “God be with you when life’s peril thick confounds you”.

David and Liz were overwhelmed with the outpouring of love they received. Some months later at club, David spoke about how thankful he was for Rotary. “I was thinking of leaving the club before the fire hit. It seemed that my life was getting filled up with other “more important” things. However, the love this club showed to me and Liz changed all that. I will never leave Rotary. I am a Rotarian for life. Thank you.” Everyone in the club became closer that day. What started as a community service project became a Family of Rotary project as once again we as Rotarians Made a Difference. Oh, the places you’ll go!

[SLIDE] I had the opportunity to be a Vocational Training Team leader for a group of Peace professionals who led a [SLIDE] workshop with 120 Rotaractors from 45 different Rotaract clubs throughout Uganda. It was my first trip to Uganda as well as the African continent.

[SLIDE] The purpose of the grant was to train the Rotaractors in peace building. [SLIDE] During the workshop they began to plan projects [SLIDE] for their communities. [SLIDE] On Sunday, eight of the Rotaractors presented their projects to the workshop and we provided feedback on ways to improve them. They have completed their projects, presented them to the local Rotarians and the best were given financial awards for them to use on future projects.

I wanted you to hear from Ceasar directly about what the workshop meant to him, but the sound isn’t that good.

[SLIDE]

So here is what Ceasar essentially said. Uganda is not a peaceful place. We are at war. There are many young people here who want to make a difference. Thank You, Rotary for coming to Uganda. Thank you for teaching us how to become a peacemaker. Thank you for giving us the skills we need.

[SLIDE]The Rotarians from the Rotary Club of Kampala Ssese Islands were terrific partners and hosts. I would work with them again and encourage you to partner with them if you want a successful project in Kampala.

As a “small world” or rather “Rotary world” side story, I was at a Rotary Foundation Water & Sanitation Major Gift Initiative Luncheon on Bainbridge Island near Seattle, Washington the day before I departed for Kampala. As I was sitting across the table from a couple who started talking about Uganda, my mouth fell open as I learned several members of their club in attendance at the luncheon were headed for Kampala in the next few days. And not just Kampala, but to spend time on a project with their Rotary friends from Kampala Ssese Island RC. [SLIDE] We took a photo together and when I arrived at Kampala Ssese Island RC later that week, I shared the picture. It was their turn for mouths to fall open! What a small world Rotary is! Rotary Peace Fellows and Rotarians from all around the world Making a Difference in Kampala, Uganda. Oh, the Places You’ll Go!

[SLIDE] Each of you has many stories to share with your prospective, new and even your current members. Stories that are inspiring. Take the time when you go back to your club next week to share one. And ask someone to share their story with you. As Rotarians we are Making A Difference every day and we just need to share it.

You’re a Rotarian!

Oh, the places you’ll go!

There are wells to be dug

There is peace to be won

There are kids to be taught

There are babes to be born

There are drops to be given

And new friends to be found

And the magical things you can do with us all

Will make you the winningest Rotarian of all!