



**Rotary Opens Opportunities**

Dear Friends and Fellow Flamingos, my Rotary Family!!

We have been taught to not begin with an apology – and yet I apologize; this is a more personal letter than usual for the incoming District Governor. And for good reason.

As I write this note to you on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, our country that we all love is in despair, turmoil, anger, rage and rioting, and in the midst of a pandemic that has taken at least 110,000 Americans away from their friends and family, too soon. And with little or no chance for the comfort of family gatherings to grieve, share, and say proper good-byes. We are also a nation divided, and no longer conduct discourse, political or otherwise, in ways that build and reflect respect for each other, even though we may disagree.

And frankly, I am deeply hurt and troubled, and a little more than a little scared – you may need to read that again. Scared for myself, my family, my community, my country, and yes, for Rotary. Alone, it would be easy for me to feel despair rather than joy as my leadership year approaches - I have been in training for countless hours for this position during the past three years! And at the dawn of my DG Rotary year, much that I have been prepared for, is no longer in place.

However, I am a person of faith – I happen to practice (not perfectly) Christianity in my life, although I honor and respect the other major religions (as well as those who do not believe in a supreme deity), as I believe GOD is bigger than any box that religions try to place Him/Her. So I am also a person of hope, a person who believes in the power and truth of redemptive resurrection. And that hope, my faith, calls me to look past any despair or fear, to find and share light in places of darkness, to chase out the darkness, as only light can.

Rotary has provided Marie and me opportunities to help make the world a slightly less dark, slightly brighter and better place than what it could be otherwise; to fight for the eradication of the crippling disease that is Polio, to care for the hurt, the hungry, the homeless and the helpless. And Rotary has made me a better person along the way, in no small part due to the gifts of friendship and love that I have at my small club, and throughout District 6970 - we are 3,200+ strong Rotarians who care deeply about our communities and each other, and that gives me hope and strength!

And it is important to know that beyond the walls of our club, Rotary raises awareness and provides aid throughout the world, in over 200 countries, 33,000 clubs and 1.2 million members strong, all led by RI President Holger Knaack, who is truly an amazing person. As are my fellow DG classmates from Florida, the Caribbean and from up and down the eastern seaboard of this beautiful, troubled country. These leaders are truly inspirational in their wisdom, passion, and commitment to Rotary and the betterment of our communities throughout the world.

And all of that is a comfort to me, as we start this Rotary journey together. But before looking ahead, let us briefly reflect on the year just completed: it has been amazing and inspiring to witness the resiliency that our club presidents (including Marie!) and DG Mike Darragh displayed during such a challenging year. They began with the devastation of Hurricane Dorian, soon followed by the Covid-19 pandemic, spring tornados, floods and earthquakes, quarantines and virtual meetings; the list goes on! Through this tumultuous year in our world and in Rotary, our presidents and District Governor have lead us with grace, calmness and a steady hand on the wheel. Thank your President, and PDG Mike, extra this year – they all deserve every bit of our gratitude.

What this year means for me, and the ask I have for each of you, is to help make sure Rotary Opens Opportunities. Only by remaining committed to our Rotary Ideals, embodied by the Four-Way Test, can we face the challenges of today's world, embrace change, and find alternate ways to take advantage of those opportunities in our lives, so as to continue to do good in our communities and in our club. And yes, to the betterment of ourselves – it's kind of being smart selfish.

As we embark on this new Rotary journey together, I ask for your support and prayers, in whatever form that takes for you. We have an amazing, passionate District, one of the absolute best in the Rotary World. With your help, support, and guidance, we can continue our proud tradition of servant leadership, strong Foundation giving, and fun and fellowship in our clubs. It is an honor to serve with you - let's have a great year!

Yours in Rotary Service,

Rich Turnbull  
District Governor 2020-21  
District 6970, Rotary International