



## RYLA North America Conference 2009

**By: Jennifer Greenberg, District 7450 Rotaract Representative**

This first ever RYLA North America Conference hosted by Rotary District 7620 in North America lasted four-and-a-half unbelievable days in our nation's capital - - Washington, DC, from July 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>. We had a full schedule which consisted of visits to foreign embassies, service projects, cultural expos, a talent show, leadership training, scholarship programs, keynote speakers, fellowship and experiences which will last a lifetime! I was the Registration Director on the RYLA North America 2009 Committee and promoted this conference throughout our district. A very special thank you to the District 7450 Rotaract Committee who sponsored four Rotaractors to attend this conference! Anna Dennery and Tida "Annie" Manatad from the Philadelphia Rotaract Club, as well as Patricia Dantis and Monica Sockwell from the Main Line Rotaract Club, were all excellent representatives from our district!

We had participants attending from all over the world including; USA, Canada, Cayman Island, Trinidad & Tobago, United Kingdom, Egypt, Italy, Pakistan, India, Algeria, Guyana and Haiti. The RYLA conference was designed to strengthen and encourage Rotaractors to get involved in the local RYLA program held at the District level, encourage the formation of Rotaract clubs, provide leadership training to Rotaractors and leaders, as well as to further the development of outstanding young Rotaractors and non-Rotaractors. The program was a combination of the District 7620 RYLA, International RYLA, Regional Rotaract Conference and the Rotaract Pre-Convention.

The conference commenced on Wednesday, July 1<sup>st</sup>, with check-in at George Washington University. On this first day of the conference, we made Rotary history! We were honored to be guests at the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. This was the first time in Rotary's 104 year history that we attended the first official Rotary event on Saudi Arabian soil! The beautiful embassy at the invitation of His Excellency Adel Al-Jubeir, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States welcomed us into their culture and the embassy representatives gave a wonderful video presentation about their Kingdom. There was also a costume show, which featured our very own Rotaractors! The traditional dinner, was a once in a lifetime meal made for royalty! The whole night was absolutely spectacular and set a great tone for the rest of the conference!

On the second day, we got down to business and met our group leaders, group members and had a brief overview of the conference activities. All the conference participants were divided up into groups of 12 with Rotaractors as group leaders.. Paul Frey, District 7620 Governor gave opening remarks and welcomed everyone to the nation's capital. There were many leadership workshops, including: How to start a Rotaract Club, Rotaract 411, Professional Development, Fundraising, Membership, Community and International Services. There was also a presentation by the delegation from Egypt about the INTEROTA 2011 Conference in Cairo in 2011. We wrapped up the day of workshops with discussions with our assigned city groups. We had another

exciting night, at yet another Embassy; the Embassy of Jamaica! We were greeted by His Excellency Anthony Johnson, Ambassador of Jamaica to the United States who presented some insight into life and lessons learned. Again, the dinner was fit for a king! It was truly a night to remember!

We continued with more keynote speakers and workshops on Friday. Groups had a chance to get competitive with RYLA Ball, a sports game involving a ball which included the art of negotiating, group work and communication skills. We also had an interesting exercise to understand communication challenges that may exist within our clubs, cultures and communities. Then there was a presentation from a member of the 2010 HOC Committee about the 2010 Rotary Convention in Montreal, Canada. The day ended with a Talent show! All 12 groups performed with a final performance by the 2009 RYLA Committee members. This was a scene that couldn't have been missed! Let's just say you would have been laughing your head off if you were there! And, since it was a Friday night, nothing could top this night other than clubbing with 140 of your closest friends!

July 4<sup>th</sup>, our Nation's Birthday, was a huge celebration all day! The morning started with the finals of RYLA Ball---Group Philadelphia, won! and is the 2009 RYLA Ball Champion. Afterwards, there were many morning festivities to see; from watching America's National Independence Day Parade, going to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Smithsonian Folklife Festival, or seeing the Annual Independence Day Organ Concert. The afternoon continued with a tour of The U.S. Capitol! What an incredible way to celebrate and see the heart and soul of our nation! "A Capital Fourth" was a huge all-day celebration! Barry Manilow, the National Symphony Orchestra, Aretha Franklin, Natasha Bedingfield, and many others made this a superb night! Oh, and did we mention, the FIREWORKS? The concert and Fireworks were spectacular! Happy Independence Day America!

Sunday, July 5<sup>th</sup>, was our last and final day of the conference. We wrapped up the past four and-a-half days with our groups and were honored to have more keynote speakers to share many scholarship opportunities available to Rotaractors and non-Rotaractors alike. There were presentations about the Polio Plus in Nigeria, Rotary Foundation, Group Study Exchange and the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship Program. The conference ended successfully on a very high note with next year's conference participants expected to double! We hope to see you next year at RYLA North America 2010 in Washington, DC on July 14<sup>th</sup> to July 18<sup>th</sup> 2010!



*Embassy of Jamaica-Left-Right: Monica Sockwell,  
Patrica Dantis, Jennifer Greenberg*



*RYLA North America 2009 Group Photo*

