

Celebrating The Rotary Foundation

(Honesdale, December 1, 2009)...When it comes to strength in numbers, the Rotary Foundation packs quite a punch. On Friday November 20th in Philadelphia, more than 100 Rotarians gathered to celebrate the work of the Foundation, a group that leverages the hourly and monetary contributions of more than 1.2 million Rotarians worldwide into programs that save ten times as many lives.

Former Rotary International President Wilf Wilkinson talked about the importance of the Foundation's programs, including its Polio Plus Campaign and its Annual Fund. The Fund supports humanitarian, educational and cultural projects—disaster recovery, sustainable agriculture, health and hunger projects, ambassadorial scholarships, group study exchanges and more.



Pictured Left to Right- Brian Fulp, Wilf Wilkinson, and Elias Thomas

Honesdale Rotarian Brian Fulp, who attended the event, felt that Wilkinson “wanted to make sure that although our current 200 million dollar challenge to eradicate polio is critical, it’s equally important to continue giving to the Annual Fund. Without it, Rotary cannot continue supporting other projects around the world.”

Last year, the Rotary challenged its 33,000 clubs to raise \$200 million by 2012 to match part of \$355 million donated by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Why the Rotary? Since its polio eradication program was launched in the 1980s, more than two billion children have received the oral polio vaccine, and the number of cases worldwide has been reduced from 350,000 to less than 1700.

But the battle isn’t over. “Polio is still around and it’s only a plane-ride away from the USA and Canada, where this devastating disease has been a thing of the past for decades,” said the evening’s keynote speaker, Maine Rotarian Elias Thomas. He’s the Rotary’s \$200-Million Polio Challenge Coordinator for Zone 32, which includes his home state of Maine.

“There remain four polio-endemic countries – Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and India,” Thomas continued. “Although we are 99.3% successful in reaching our goal of total eradication, we must re-double our efforts in each of these countries.”

Thomas is one of thousands of “everyday” businessmen and women who have participated in mass-vaccination projects abroad. He spoke eloquently of leading groups of Rotarians to help vaccinate children on National Immunization Days in India—children who might not have even a small chance of leading capable lives without the polio vaccination. The vaccine costs a few dollars; the results are priceless.

The groups Thomas leads have also served as common laborers in other projects: construction of washing platforms to bring about safe drinking water; creation of a computer training center and a day-care center in a remote Muslim village; construction of a toilet block for Muslim women and girl children; and construction of a catch-dam in a remote area for a water harvesting project.

His trips abroad have meant a lot to Thomas and the people he takes with him. That’s their “return” on their investment—and that, too, has no price.

For more information about Rotary’s Polio Eradication efforts visit <http://honesdalerotary.com/PolioPlus/>