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Volume 71, Number 34

18th May 2009

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It's rather astonishing to think how basic necessities we all tend to take for granted, such as toothpaste and deodorant, could cripple a person or even a whole family's chance to regain or obtain a modest livelihood.

[Columbus House](#) has a wish list of items which are regularly consumed and often out of stock.

PARTNERING UP FOR COLUMBUS HOUSE



Left to Right: John Karavas (Pres. Elect), Mohammad Elahee (Pres.), Alison Cunningham (Dir. [Columbus House](#))

- New Socks & Underwear (Boxers for men)
- New Bras, especially Plus-Sizes
- Travel-Sized Toiletries (no mouthwash, please)
- Shampoo & Conditioner
- Soap
- Deodorant
- Feminine Hygiene Products
- Insect Repellent
- Sun Block
- Water Bottles
- Boots
- Full or Twin-Sized Sheets, Blankets & Comforters
- Gift Cards to Subway, Dunkin Donuts, etc. (\$5 and \$10 denominations)
- Bus Vouchers ([Purchase Online](#))

The Quinnipiac Rotaract Club held a benefit dinner for the New Haven based homeless shelter [Columbus House](#) on March 30th, raising more than \$1700 in donations in one night. Rotaractors were able to secure funding for the dinner from the Quinnipiac University Student Government Association, such that every dollar in ticket sales went directly to Columbus House.

Cunningham further explained during the February 16th meeting that [Columbus House](#) needs more than financial and consumable resources, and called for material support from volunteers ranging from serving meals to painting rooms to general administrative functions.

The Rotary Club of Hamden was so moved by the good work of its Rotaractors that the board decided to match the Rotaractor's funds dollar for dollar. A combined check for approximately \$3400 was presented to [Columbus House](#) on May 11th to Director Alison Cunningham.

We're very proud of our Rotaractors for taking the initiative to put together this charity dinner entirely on their own, and hope that the combined funds make a material difference for [Columbus House](#) this year.

Cunningham had visited the Hamden Club on February 16th explaining that current economic conditions are placing an increased burden on [Columbus House](#) with national unemployment at that time at 7% (now more than 8.5%), and a simultaneous increase in the population of homeless veterans.

ALASKA CLUB MOVES TO FIGHT HUNGER

By Ryan Hyland Rotary International News -- 11 May 2009

[Columbus House](#), though located in New Haven, does support a population of homeless citizens from Hamden; providing beds, meals, and a range of other services to more than 300 displaced individuals and families per night.

Every second Saturday of the month, members of the Rotary Club of Anchorage East, Alaska, USA, distribute food to families in low-income neighborhoods through a mobile food pantry, addressing the area's increasing need for assistance.

In 2006, the club raised \$50,000 to purchase and refurbish an old beer truck for the Food Bank of Alaska. Rotarians have since maintained a strong connection to the project by volunteering once a month to distribute food and funding the maintenance of the vehicle.

The truck made a "magical" transformation from hops to hope, says David Kester, who chairs the effort.



"This project fills a basic but important need in the community," he says. "By helping put food on the table, we are hitting people where it counts. We're making a lasting impact one family at a time."

Demand at the mobile food pantry has increased by about 30 percent in the last 18 months, says Susannah Morgan, an Anchorage East club member and executive director for the Food Bank of Alaska, which distributes food six times a week to hundreds of families in Anchorage. The recession has increased the number of people seeking help.

"We're seeing more and more working residents utilizing our pantry," says Morgan. "I'm consistently amazed at how many people are hungry. This pantry puts a face on hunger."

Stocked with a variety of canned goods as well as fresh and frozen produce, the truck delivers enough groceries to last a family a week. The food is donated by farmers, local grocery stores, and other agencies. People can choose the items they want and take home as much as they can carry, says Kester.

Club member and Rotary Foundation Trustee Carolyn E. Jones says volunteering once a month at the pantry gives Rotarians the opportunity to build relationships in the community.

"We know a lot of the people on a first-name basis," she says. "It's a great hands-on project that is fun and exhilarating. When the money runs out, we're there to put food on the table. You can see the appreciation on their faces."

Kester estimates that more than 2 million pounds of food has been distributed since the mobile pantry first started its engine. He says the free groceries help in ways that extend beyond finances.

"We give families one less thing to worry about, which in turn can improve home life," says Kester. "This project serves communities in immeasurable ways."

"I think Rotarians here are catching a glimpse of the difference we truly can make in people's lives," says Morgan. "The success of the mobile pantry gives me faith that Rotary can fight hunger worldwide."

ROTARIAN ASSISTS AIDS ORPHAN FROM UGANDA

By Peter Schmidtke Rotary International News -- 13 May 2009

Allan Akamura's friends used to push him to school in a homemade wheelchair.

Now the 13-year-old from Uganda, who has cerebral palsy, pedals himself around on a tricycle through the corridors at University Hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. He received surgery there to correct problems with his hips, knees, feet, and hands, with help from Ira Zinman and his club, the Rotary Club of Bloomington North, Indiana.

Allan, who lost his father to AIDS when he was a year old and now lives with his uncle, attends the Nyaka AIDS Orphans School in southwestern Uganda. Zinman became acquainted with him while working on a documentary about the school.

"I was in Indiana watching footage, and I see kids at the school walking and running and kicking a ball, and here is this boy crawling," says Zinman, who was reviewing film from a cinematographer he had sent to the school for the documentary.

"He didn't say he wanted to walk or run. He said that when all the students at the school would stand up to sing or pray, he wanted to stand up with them."

When Zinman learned that the medical procedures that could improve Allan's condition were unavailable in Uganda, he enlisted the help of the Children Waiting Everywhere Foundation to lobby University Hospital to provide the surgery free of charge.

Allan flew to Michigan in November for the surgery and is staying with a host family while he undergoes physical therapy to build his strength and flexibility and to develop neuromuscular connections. Doctors are hopeful that he will be able to walk.

In March, Allan's host family took him on a visit the Bloomington North club, during which he traded smiles and laughs with Zinman and other club members. The club has contributed \$5,000 for travel and other costs associated with Allan's surgery, and it has committed to providing \$3,000 annually in support of the Nyaka school.

Zinman hopes to accompany Allan back to Uganda in mid-November and is planning to shoot footage of him returning to school. The film will tell the story of the school and its 260 students, all of whom have lost one or both of their parents to AIDS, in a country with over one million children orphaned by the virus.

View a clip from [Zinman's documentary](#) on YouTube.

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

By James R. Petersen *The Rotarian* -- May 2009

Our man on the bike traveled 8,000 miles through South and Central America to see what some Rotarians are doing to improve the world. See more pictures from Petersen's trip in the May [Interactive: The Motorcycle Trip Issue](#).

Lima/La Molina, Peru

We arrive in Lima at midnight. The customs agents wave us through, ignoring the clang of spare parts, motorcycle helmets, camera equipment, and riding gear. I spot a sign in the crowd that says "Rotary." I smile at the unsure look that flickers briefly on the faces of our host and hostess.



Our group, with all our equipment, poses a challenge to both Rotarian and Peruvian notions of hospitality, but Rubén and Ana María Berrospi are game.

Rubén is an eye surgeon and past president of the Rotary Club of La Molina, and Ana María is an English teacher who is active with a group of La Molina club members' wives. Six adults cram into a suddenly tiny Montero, and we scrape our way to La Molina, an upscale district on the eastern side of Lima.

We introduce ourselves to the Berrospis. Ken Hodge, a member of the Rotary Club of Newport News, Va., USA, is the leader of the pack. He plans to ride BMW motorcycles from Peru to Virginia to raise money for his club's efforts to build footbridges in remote areas. With him is his daughter, Katie Hodge, a firefighter and paramedic for the Newport News fire department; his stepson, Ryan Anderson, a mechanic; and Jeff Dagenhart, a family friend. I'm the photojournalist asked by *The Rotarian* to go along for the adventure. My assignment: to photograph and write about Rotary club projects and Rotarians we meet along the way. I am not a Rotarian, so I have much to learn. We'll log 8,000 miles over five weeks. That I speak no Spanish turns out to be a minor challenge.

On an earlier trip to Peru, I learned something about the concept of *reciprocidad*, or "reciprocity." You help, knowing that someday down the line, you'll be helped in turn. I ask Rubén how Rotary fits with that South American custom. He says: "In the cities, we have lost that idea of shared effort. My father came from the hills a tailor, then a merchant. He never went to university. But I became a professional, studied here and America. Once you have fulfilled your personal goals, when you can take care of yourself, you can begin to help others. Rotary here attracts people who've reached a point in their lives where they want to give back. Our club started in 1987. We are first and foremost friends. We socialize together. We put friendship high in Peru. When you are friends and together, you can do good things. Peru is a nation of great need. It is easy to find projects."

On our first day in La Molina, Rubén takes us to Rinconada Country Club, an exclusive social club where his clinic is sponsoring a bocce ball tournament. It's also the home of the Rotary Club of La Molina.

Then Rubén drives us across town to a *feria artesanal* (art fair) sponsored by the wives' club. He explains the passing view. Lima is a patchwork quilt. Well-developed neighborhoods, houses hidden behind walls topped with electric wire or coils of barbed wire, coexist with pockets of extreme poverty. The need is visible and close at hand, but how, I ask, does a club choose a project? Rubén says that the mayor of La Molina suggested the club's first project, which continues to address a need too often hidden from view. It built Escuela para Niños con Habilidades Diferentes, a school for children with Down syndrome and other developmental challenges.

"Other Rotary clubs give books and school supplies. We build schools from scratch."

The club financed the project through luncheons, with individual members pledging money to build classrooms. At one luncheon, four club members each pledged the US\$7,000 needed to build single classrooms. Were they competing, trying to outdo each other? Rubén says the connection goes deeper. The club has now supported the school for 18 years. "The children change, grow older and move into society, but the need remains. Every time I visit the school, I see something that makes me want to do more."

We pull into the parking lot of Plaza Vea in the center of La Molina. Blue and yellow awnings cover tables piled with kids' clothes, jewelry, hand-painted boxes, T-shirts, hand-carved board games, embroidery, Christmas ornaments, dollhouses, necklaces, and oil paintings. It is a riot of color.

The wives' club makes money from renting space to the artists; the artists make money from the sale of goods during the three-day event. What has become an annual pre-Christmas sale for the privileged benefits both the *niños* and a second school.

A poster shows before-and-after pictures of the new school project in an extremely poor shantytown outside Lima. In one black-and-white image, you see a hillside of shacks. In the second, a one-room schoolhouse. (It has now been expanded with a second wing.) The next morning, we visit the school.

Manchay is 15 minutes from Rubén's house. For 30 or 40 years, construction companies strip-mined a hillside for sand and gravel to build the luxury suburbs in Lima. Into the pit moved 70,000 squatters. In the dust where a mountain used to be now stands Manchay.

Rubén fills me in on some details. The process is called *invasión*: Organizers find a parcel of unoccupied land, sign up 200 families, collect money and then, in the middle of the night, arrive to stake out a neighborhood. They plant Peruvian flags, cordon off building lots, put up straw huts, and refuse to leave. There are police standoffs, tear gas, lawsuits, and protracted negotiations. The squatters demand water, power, police protection, bus service, schools – in short, to be recognized by and included in society. The squatters' tactics have been used since the late 1960s, supported by some regimes, suppressed by others. The *barriadas* are called *pueblos jóvenes*, which translates as "young towns." They're different from inner-city slums and their overcrowded tenements in that they're not in decline or neglected. The huts woven from cane give way to houses made from wooden slats, to houses of adobe and mud brick, to cinderblock. In some, thickets of rebar jut skyward, awaiting a second floor.



Water is brought in by truck. There is some power. Buses rattle along the unpaved or barely paved roads, taking those eager to work to jobs over the hill. We pass tiny businesses. A shack is selling rubber kitchenware; another is selling bottles of soda. Still another is selling fruits and vegetables.

And then we're at the school, a one-story compound painted yellow, perched halfway up the mountainside. The classrooms form an L, surrounding a playground. At one end, a flagpole. On the slope beyond, overlooking the city, a sign with the Rotary emblem.

The schoolchildren come pouring out to greet us. We take pictures, then show the kids the pictures on tiny LCD screens. Ryan, Katie, and Ken are surrounded by kids looking at their own image for the first time. Ken takes a shot of Ryan besieged by students.

The school is an amazing commitment. Rubén recounts the progress: "At first it was a single room. Students sat on the floor. We brought in a few chairs, desks. Then we added classrooms. The state provides the teachers."

A few days later, I return to Manchay with Jaime Polo, an architect and the La Molina club president. He speaks almost no English, but his hands are articulate. As we pass a shed selling wooden slats, he indicates with thumb and forefinger the 3/8-inch thickness and gestures, "One hundred dollars to build a one-room hut." He names the materials used to build the more solid houses, points out the power lines – and potholes. He talks to the headmistress and arranges for supplies to be dropped off to complete a new roof over the classrooms.

He admires the dreams and ambitions of the squatters. He respects their leaders and mentions a school run by a priest who he says is a force in the community. The La Molina club raised \$50,000 to support that school, helping to equip the computer, chemistry, cosmetology, and electronics rooms, and a gym.

We drive back into town, past walls still bearing slogans from the last election: *Nada grande se hace sin ideales*. "Nothing great is done without ideals."

The neighborhoods change. Within a few blocks of each other are national universities, law and medical schools. We turn down a street into Las Viñas de la Molina, to the club's first school project. It's a beautiful compound, with lush vegetation and parrots in low-hanging branches. A path winds between freestanding classrooms – terra cotta-colored cottages, each bearing a plaque with the name of an individual or club sponsor. In one room, the youngest students learn to dress themselves. In another, they paint ceramics. In a third room, girls learn sewing. In a fourth, gardening. There are rooms for physical therapy and counseling. Workers are repairing an indoor pool built partly with funds from the German Embassy.

I experience an odd moment. In South America, Rotary clubs reach out to the Swiss, the Italians, the Germans. I'm not used to thinking of nations other than the United States as donors. Here, we are just one of many. But we are here.

I walk into a classroom, and two boys launch themselves into my arms, seeking a hug. In each room, I have a photo within seconds. A boy is holding up a potted seedling, a girl is looking over the tops of her glasses to smile as she puts glaze on a coffee cup, a boy looks up from a painting with a secretive grin. This is both heartbreaking and heartmaking. Rubén had said, "I cannot visit the children without wanting to do something more." These words will accompany me throughout this journey.

Different club members take us under their wing. Pedro Perez Silva, a retired customs agent, tries to pilot the paperwork needed to release the bikes still in customs. Julio Peredo and Anibal Vasquez, both members of the La Molina club, offer to drive us to Callao, the waterfront city where our bikes are being held.

Julio and Anibal take us to the best dives in Callao, then we return to the Rinconada clubhouse for drinks. They teach us Spanish slang. They keep us out late. They tell us to minimize the number of beers consumed so Ana María wouldn't get angry. We ask Malina, a young girl who came along to translate, how to say "troublemaker." Even before the words are out of her mouth, Anibal pounds his chest with pride. Our table swells with other Rotarians, their wives and sisters. Asked to describe our situation, Ken says our bikes are in the hands of God and Peruvian customs. The response, even without translation, would not make it into print.

Finally, we claim the bikes. We drive south on the Pan-American Highway. The first three hours curve through desert, a landscape that receives about 2 inches of rain every 30 years. Still, people live there. I recognize recent *invasiones*, *barriadas* perched on the sides of a sand dune. We turn away from the coast and move across a plateau. There are haciendas, wineries, cropland. The cities seem few and far between.

When we reach Ica and Nazca, both have small monuments announcing the presence of Rotary clubs, signaling "here there are professionals." But in the Andes, we're on different ground. Most travelers fly from Lima to Cusco on their way to Machu Picchu. The road is considered too winding to be enjoyable, too isolated. We buy gas in a small town (10 or so huts along the road) from a woman who ladles the petrol out of a bucket with a coffeepot, then pours it through a plastic, woven kitchen funnel into our tanks. The whole town watches. Kids show off soccer tricks. We sleep in the next town (20 or so buildings on two streets), parking our bikes by a backyard wall. We descend the next day into Cusco.



Cusco , Peru

The phone rings early. The girl at the front desk asks, "Rotario?"

Standing in the lobby is Eduardo Franco, president of the Rotary Club of Cusco. He speaks no English, but I mime taking pictures. He indicates that he will return at 10 a.m.

When he comes back, he brings along his son Jesús, who translates over breakfast. His mother had passed the hotel and seen the Rotary stickers on the motorcycles. They had heard about the ride but expected us a week earlier. She called her husband and told him to track us down. In Peru, hospitality is proactive.

I ask Jesús if he is in a Rotary club.

"My great-grandfather was Rotary. My grandfather was Rotary. My father is Rotary. Think I will be Rotary?"

We pile into a van and drive to the club headquarters, which serves as a clinic for the local poor. Narrow cobblestone streets, lined with houses from the Spanish era, built with stones pirated from Incan ruins – the layers of history are everywhere. The club was founded in 1927 and is still 48 members strong. Cusco is prosperous enough now to support four clubs, but I'm enchanted by echoes of the past. The club's first president donated his home to serve as club headquarters and to house a club-sponsored clinic. A fountain topped by the Rotary emblem stands in the center of an enclosed courtyard. The doors are ancient wood and thick ironwork. Eduardo leads me through a pharmacy, a two-room dental clinic, a one-room gynecology office, and a lab with a microscope and little else. In the courtyard are old wheelchairs waiting to be refinished. In another room is a lone child's wheelchair, bright red, the last of a gift of 100 wheelchairs from another club.

The walls of the clinic are covered in Rotary club banners by the hundreds. When you're close to one of the recognized wonders of the world, the jumping-off point for treks to Machu Picchu, the very heart of the mystery of Peru, you get lots of visitors.

Upstairs, I meet Elly, Eduardo's wife. Now, two weeks before Christmas, her women's club is busy collecting toys and food for 1,000 people in a nearby village, to be followed by a second dinner and gift-giving for another 1,000 at a different village. The boxes of toys are stacked on tables in a huge room. Pictures of past club presidents line two walls, as impressive as stone carvings of the 12 Incas.

I ask Eduardo why Rotary has so easily adapted to South America. "In Peru, a land of great differences, there were men who responded to need," he replies. The current needs? An X-ray machine for the dental clinic. New, more modern equipment for the lab. The club had given away 1,000 hearing aids to patients and could use more. The storeroom is down to one wheelchair.

Eduardo drives the van to a poor neighborhood high above Cusco, the site of one the club's new projects. The government has finally paved a road to the area, accepting or acknowledging the chaos of mud-brick houses, to connect it to Cusco proper. The club is acquiring a small bus so the kids can attend school.

His cell phone rings, and we drive back to the clinic to meet Edmilson Batista, a rugged Brazilian who is two years into a bicycle trip around South America. Eduardo calls his second son, who speaks Portuguese, to join the group for lunch. The bicyclist, whose calf muscles look like cannonballs, has an easy manner and the ability to make people laugh in any language. Edmilson brings along props (including pictures of llamas with dreadlocks), letters of introduction, and a scrapbook filled with news clippings describing his ride. When he hears about the footbridges project, he hands over his last seven soles. It is a remarkable afternoon.

That night, and for days that follow, I think of some of Rotary's goals: clean water, literacy, health. Peru shows, again and again, that real life can outdistance those priorities. Imagine living where there is no clean water, or no water. I see kids with plastic bottles lashed to bicycles, huge trucks pumping water into communal storage towers, public *lavatorios*. The neighborhoods above Cusco have no running water. Yet families settle here to be close to the possibility of work and later, through education, the future.

We retrace our route to Lima and head north, riding for three days through a desert landscape. Nothing grows here. Billboards still beckon, but only with the most common appeals: Inca Kola, Cristal beer, D'Onofrio (soda, water, and ice cream). And there are shacks, one-shelf stores, and dozens of young boys on yellow D'Onofrio tricycles, selling ice cream to passing traffic.

As we near the border to Ecuador, vegetation returns. We abandon the Pan-American Highway and bounce down unimproved dirt roads. There is an immediate change in the dignity of the housing. There are yards, neighborhoods, people sleeping in hammocks under the shade of front porches. The people are friendly. One village has a party going on in the town square, big speakers blasting music. In another, tricycle taxicabs cluster under the shade of a huge tree, the drivers sharing giant bottles of beer. At our last stop in Peru and on that road, we're the center of attention, but we're not the only ones with cameras. Everyone has a cell phone raised to get a picture of us and their friends, who pose on our bikes. Kids on motorcycles do U-turns and follow us, snapping cell phone shots.

We spend the evening at a restaurant in a quiet town square in Macará, just over the border in Ecuador. A rotund woman in a yellow dress cooks dinner on grills on the sidewalk. Her daughters bring us beer and bread but flit out of sight anytime we raise a camera. Having cooked our dinner, the woman sits outside knitting a yellow dress for her daughter.



Ecuador is pure Andes, barely enough room for the folded rock, razor-sharp ridgelines, and massive slopes. And water. What Peru lacked, this place has in abundance. Every slope is green, and the cows are fat, leaning at a slight angle on the steep slopes. We ride through clouds, above clouds, into fog, into rain. The bikes feel alive as they skitter through gravel, sand, mud, water. The temperature drops into the 40s. We stop at a little hut for coffee. A middle-aged woman in traditional attire prepares it by adding hot water to a thick coffee syrup. Next door, under a thatched roof, is a totally modern Internet cafe.

Cuenca , Ecuador

We stop in Cuenca, at about 8,000 feet in altitude, and there are still more mountains to the north. I ask the proprietor of our bed and breakfast to call the local Rotary clubs and to ask for someone who speaks English. Fernando Ramirez, secretary of the Rotary Club of Cuenca Patrimonio, answers the call. He arrives, admires our bikes, then takes me on a tour of the city. His club, formed four years earlier, is the newest club in Cuenca; the name stands for heritage and tradition. The town of 400,000 is 500 years old, surrounded on all sides by the Andes. Fernando points to the west, an area of lakes famous for fishing and hunting. There is a four-dome cathedral on the town square. In the alcoves, vendors sell votive candles and flowers

He admits that Cuenca doesn't have the obvious needs of Peru as a whole. "We have a better economy. Peruvians who come here to work for a month make as much as they earn in a year. But we have our projects. It is the South American nature to help others. Rotary gives us a framework. We have 28 members, 3 of whom are surgeons. Perhaps because of that, the club focuses on helping children with cleft lips and palates. There is an unusually high incidence of these birth defects in the area. We work with several different hospitals and do an average of 10 operations a month. We pay for the operating rooms, about \$100 per child. Last month, we did a focused campaign – 60 children in a week. The military let us use their hospital. Women for World Health, a group from California, brought in equipment and supplies."

The Cuenca Patrimonio club also focuses on specific villages, treating children from the region of El Oriente (in eastern Ecuador by the Amazon) and Loja. The help extends to follow-up operations and speech and physical therapy. "In all, it is our goal to perform 250 to 300 surgeries a year," he says. "Some agencies, like the Institute for Families and Children, help with the cost. We are trying to raise \$30,000 to \$40,000 for next year."

Quito, Ecuador

We make our way to the Turtle's Head, a biker bar crossed with an English pub by way of Rick's Café Americain in Casablanca . At midnight, we are to meet with Henry, a man who speaks no English but has a reputation for getting things done that no one else can.

We're joined by Nathaly Montaldo, a Rotary Youth Exchange student who had lived with the Hodges in Newport News as a teenager. Eight years later, she's a lawyer – and for tonight, our translator. Huddled over a small table, Ken and Nathaly work out the details of the deal for shipping our motorcycles from Quito to Panama.

I have one day to find Rotary in Quito, a city that's about 30 miles long and 5 miles wide, that snakes between mountains and up valleys cut by rivers. I attend the Friday morning meeting of the Rotary Club of Quito-Valle Interocéánico held in the lower floor of the Swissôtel. It is a place of attentive service, polished brass, and white linen, men and women dressed in immaculate business attire, there to plot and applaud good deeds. It is their last meeting of the year.

A representative from the district stands up. The only words I understand are "Bill Gates," a concept that needs no translation.

Evelyn Falck, my breakfast companion and contact, heads the foundation run by the club and notes that clubs will have to vote on new fundraising rules. She says simply, "Imagine 69 clubs in Ecuador agreeing on anything."

The club has just finished building a \$600,000 clinic and community development center in Cumbayá, a town swallowed by the expanding Quito. The plaque of donors, which I will see later in the day, includes 27 Rotary clubs in the United States and dozens of corporations and individuals.

The club president introduces Darrell R. Stokes, a biology professor from Emory University in Atlanta, who is presenting a check to the club's Children of the Andes project. While watching CNN, Stokes heard a report that the population of Atlanta was increasing by 93 Spanish-speaking people per day. He wondered how to adapt to the future. He applied for and obtained a Rotary Grant for University Teachers and came to Quito. He ran into Odd Hanssen, a Norwegian expatriate and member of the Quito-Valle Interocéánico club. Stokes returned to Atlanta, talked the Rotary Club of Vinings, Ga., into hosting an auction of Ecuadorian products (everything from artwork to jars of jam), then persuaded a fraternity and sorority at Emory to make Children of the Andes their community service project. The result: He is here to present a check for \$25,000 to the club. In return, he receives a hand-drawn letter of thanks from one of the children. It's a good trade.

He describes the project. Children of the Andes has opened seven preschools. "Before you can contemplate education, you have to address health. These kids come to us with an incredible parasite load.

We engage the families. We offer nutritional support, improve the water, clean the house, treat the brothers, the sisters, so they are well enough to attend school."



The kids receive school uniforms and supplies and are able to take their first steps toward the future. The Children of the Andes kids emerge from the program well prepared. Stokes conveys the poverty of the general educational system with a single fact: He'd taught at a university in Quito, one of the nation's best, but only the professors had textbooks.

Karin Schneewind, another club member, offers a lift over to club headquarters, and while driving fills in additional details. "Our first school, we took over an abandoned one-room schoolhouse. Some started from scratch, some with provincial help. Now we are raising money to purchase land to begin construction of an elementary school. We hope to add a grade a year. I admire the Rotary approach. We do not give money to people on the street or people on top. We work on projects that will change things from the bottom."

Hence the modern clinic in Cumbayá. "We raised over \$270,000," she says. "We publicize the clinic on radio. We have to put the Rotary name out there. Everyone is welcome."

I follow Miguel and Evelyn Falck and Stokes back to the club offices, where they load vans with Christmas gifts and food for the inhabitants of Las Manchas, a coastal town. The families, dependent on a dwindling conch population, has fallen on to hard times. The club is working with the fishermen, exploring alternatives.

Stokes' enthusiasm is contagious, and not the first I've encountered. When word of this motorcycle trip got out, I'd received e-mails from Americans who had fallen under the spell of *Rotario*. Susette Goff, of the Rotary Club of Yorktown, Va., sent me a stirring account of her nine years with Refugio de Los Sueños, a safe house for children located in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Quito. She told of a recent project, and of the power of small acts to change the environment in which the kids lived. Jim Sawhill, the 2007-08 Yorktown club president, and a team of six volunteers had repainted the school a vivid yellow. As the children said when they saw it, "*Es el color de alegría y del sol.*" ("It's the color of happiness and sunshine.") Goff gave me the name and contact information of Myriam Montero, a member of the Rotary Club of Quito Metropolitano.

Montero describes her club, one of the youngest in Quito: "We reflect the shift in culture. The oldest clubs don't admit women. Ours does. We are also younger, many of the members in their 40s. We met Goff at the District 4400 Project Fair, an exposition where neighborhoods lay out their needs and try to match them to interested parties. We stepped in to be the local club working with Refugio. We've put in hot water, showers, and upgraded the electrical. We also maintain a shelter for homeless kids in downtown Quito. The city gave us a house, and we converted it to take in children at night."

At my request, Myriam teaches me a new Spanish phrase: *Mírame y sonríe* – "Look at me and smile."

Imagine seven San Franciscos, laid end to end, or maybe one on top of another. That's Quito. Myriam pilots her car up increasingly steep slopes, cobblestone thoroughfares she has to traverse, going curb to curb. She knows the general direction (up) but has to ask directions to the neighborhood of Tactivco. Most people are helpful, pointing farther up the mountain. We zigzag and scrape our way beyond the invisible line that taxi drivers refuse to cross and eventually find the yellow building that houses Refugio.

The club in Virginia had sent me two slides, before-and-after shots of the paint job. Nothing prepared me for the kids. We pull into a flat spot on the playground. A few girls are playing soccer on the hard surface. I step out of the car, and children swarm, getting hugs and giving them to Myriam. One boy sees what I do to recall a photo and follows me for the rest of the visit, his fingers darting in to press buttons, rewind, multiple image, single image, so his friends can see themselves. Myriam explains that Refugio is a shelter for the children of prostitutes, drug addicts, abusive parents, and the seriously poor. It offers a safe haven after school lets out but closes at 5 p.m., when the staff goes home because of safety concerns. The kids wander back on the street to whatever passes for home. Over the years, the shelter has expanded its offerings. The staff teaches sewing, weaving, gardening, baking, carpentry, and construction. Older kids spread mortar over a new room at the back of the building. A water heater will provide hot showers, the first the kids have ever experienced.

I've arrived in time for the afternoon meal. A tiny boy brings out huge bowls of soup from the kitchen, then sits alone in a corner to feed himself. I recite my mantra: This is heartbreaking, heartmaking work.

The next morning, we catch a flight to Panama City. Near the office where we pay a departure tax, a Plexiglass box with a Rotary emblem asks travelers to donate their leftover currency. It is a final reminder of need in South America.

On the plane, I pull out my map of Central America on which I've listed projects funded with help from The Rotary Foundation. I see notes for biosand water filters, water pumps, wheelchairs, bookmobiles, school uniforms, computers, bridges, health clinics. They lend a completely different texture to the map, one that you don't get from Google Earth.

We retrieve the bikes and push on. We've gone from the high rock of the Andes to the tropics. The countryside is a green blur as we move through Panama to the north, on a road connected by earth to the United States.

Escazú, Costa Rica

The Rotary stickers on the motorcycle prove useful a second time. Manuel Vargas Araya had found us in the bar at the Hotel Andrea, in Ciudad Neily, the night before and returned to help us the next morning. He'd been a Youth Exchange student in 1999, living with a family near Columbus, Ohio, USA.



We sit in the gravel parking lot as I work on the bike, exchanging stories. My wife had been a Youth Exchange student in 1973 in Chico, California, and like Manuel had capped off the experience with a cross-country bus trip to discover America.

I ask him to work his way through the *Official Directory* for English-speaking Rotarians in the towns ahead who might be willing to act as guides. He hands me the phone, and I hear the voice of Franco Alvarenga, president of the Rotary Club of Escazú, in San José. Does he have any current projects that I might photograph?

"I'm standing in one."

Three hours later, we meet at a shaded park in Escazú. He leads us through town to a tiny house surrounded by walls, a temporary home for seriously disabled children, the victims of abuse, of genetic chaos, tertiary syphilis, mothers who abused drugs during pregnancy. "Without the love of the nuns, these children would not be alive," he says.

He greets Sor Caridad (Sister Charity), but warns us before entering, "There are members of my club who are unable to cross this doorway."

Inside, a group of hotel workers are putting on a Christmas party for the children. The nuns had asked Franco to repair the roof of their convent. He had seen a greater need and helped begin a complete renovation of the building, adding hydraulic lifts to move children into bathing facilities, rooms for physical therapy, rooms for 30 children, rooms for the nuns, kitchens, rec rooms, and a great center room filled with light. The children I photograph will move into the new facility when it's complete. I take pictures, then have to leave. They will not live beyond 10 years. But for that time, there are people trying to ensure a quality life for them.

Over lunch, Franco details his experience with Rotary. "In Costa Rica, most clubs are social clubs, good for dinners and drinks. I wanted to change that." He is a firebrand. When floods wiped out the homes of 6,000 people, he approached other clubs for help. "They said they didn't have a system in place. I said, what system? There is a boy without clean water. Go across the street, and buy two bottles of water. Put them in the truck. That's the system." Where there is a reason and will, there is Rotary.

His club was founded in 1971; many of the founders are still alive. "The secretary, vice president, and myself are all 42. Last week, we collected 3 1/2 tons of food to send to flood victims. Guess who has to do the heavy lifting?"

Franco prodded the club to action. "I suggested a \$35,000 water treatment project for a local school. The members said, too big. I said, \$1 million is a big project – \$35,000 we can do." He challenged the club. For one raffle, he sold 100 tickets, more than the rest of the club combined.

He sought and obtained Matching Grants, including money from overseas nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). For the renovation of the convent, "I knocked on doors, hundreds of doors. The biggest door, a local builder, gave us most of the construction material. The Swiss gave \$8,000."

He has reached out to clubs in the United States. "I have a Rotary friend in California who complains, 'We have all the money but no problems. You have all the problems but no money,'" he says. That is the story of Latin America.

We turn our motorcycles inland and spend a night on the flank of a volcano, in a town devoted to adventure sports. We'll spend Christmas Eve in a small town in Nicaragua. The streets are filled with donkey-drawn carriages. I see someone dressed as Jesus, accompanied by three wise men, waiting for a bus. The next day, we cross the border into Honduras.

Honduras

Our maps are spread out on the tables of the coffee bar in the Marriott in Tegucigalpa. Zoe Keone Pacciani, the director of the local Bridges to Prosperity program, which helps build footbridges in developing countries, discusses possible routes while her husband, Riccardo, propels 2 1/2-year-old Petra on a luggage cart.

Ken has suggested one approach. "The road is drivable, but one hour of the route passes through territory where they will kill you for your car," she says. "You round a corner to confront a fallen tree. A bullet to the head. It happens."

We take a longer, seven-hour route, dodging potholes that can swallow a bike, and once or twice rounding a corner to find that a landslide had clawed huge craters in the road. Gas station attendants carry sidearms. Even Coca-Cola trucks have security forces riding shotgun. We pass through a town where the locals have buried small pickup trucks axle deep along each side of the road. In the United States, it would be conceptual art; here it conveys menace. As the sun sets, a double rainbow appears over Gracias, our destination.

At dinner, Zoe gives us her biography. Born in Canada, raised in New Zealand, she'd taken up photography. "I followed doctors on missions to the interior of China. Learned a little of the language."

She signed on as photographer and site coordinator for the first Bridges to Prosperity project, rebuilding a bridge across the Blue Nile in Ethiopia. "I met my husband there, the friend of a UN worker. I've worked on bridges in Nepal, Ethiopia, Peru, and now Honduras. It is good work."

The Rotary clubs of Yoro, Honduras, and Warwick, Va., have teamed up to sponsor five community-built bridges. Worldwide, more than 30 clubs have joined the effort. The model provided the inspiration for the proposed Newport News club bridge project coming soon in Zambia.



She talks about the role of NGOs in developing countries: "It is my goal to put myself out of a job, to pass along the ability to plan and execute bridge projects to the local culture, to make a sustainable contribution."

We discuss a BBC documentary about countries addicted to aid, how some projects create and foster dependency. She talks about working with provincial governments and the citizens of towns, discussing priorities, generating the enthusiasm to participate in a voluntary project. The economy has made it difficult for the government to meet its obligations, but bridges are in the works.

The next morning, we head down a road that doesn't appear on the map, not even as a dotted line. At the turnoff from the main road, I think we're entering a drainage ditch. Ken, Ryan, and Katie wrestle with the bikes. This is by far the most technical riding of the trip. Zoe handles the four-wheel-drive rental car like a rock climber. She is aware of the traction under each tire, the danger posed by rocks exposed by erosion. The road changes with every rainy season. "Helvetas, the Swiss developmental organization, gave the local government a road grader, the kind pulled by cows. It doesn't look like they've come this far yet," she says.

We cross a river into hill country. I gaze over beautiful vistas, clouds, coffee plantations. Families rake out coffee beans on patios and rooftops. Pickup trucks bounce past. We cross log bridges with sheets of steel thrown over rotting timbers. After two hours, we come to an open field, a church, a soccer goal guarded by cows. Kids and parents sit in the shade of the church. Inside I hear a priest's voice. We pose the kids with the bikes, then ride down to the bridge site, kids following.

The bridge is simple: steel cables strung across a stream that in the rainy season cuts off hundreds of homes, keeping kids from school, goods from the market. On top of the steel cables are wooden boards, laced to two cables that act as handrails. I ask the children to run across for a photo. They comply, with incredible exuberance.

We drive on, headed for La Campa, the only town identified on the map. As we pull in, a pickup truck loaded with soldiers and police skids to a halt, blocking our way. Fortunately, the mayor recognizes Zoe and breaks into a huge smile. Situation defused.

Someone had called the mayor to report suspicious vehicles. In the preceding month, four bodies had been found along the road, two the weekend before. It was best to be careful.

As we head back to Gracias, we talk about raising children in an international setting, the joy of exposing Petra to different cultures – all good, all equal, all fun – so the openness, the ability to adapt, to acquire language, would become second nature. Zoe is 4 1/2 months pregnant.

I put away my cameras, download all the images onto flash cards and a laptop, and the next morning turn the motorcycle toward home.

I have reached a saturation point, my mind filled with images from Peru to Honduras, snatches of conversation settling into place: I cannot visit this place without wanting to do more. This is good work.

I give myself over to the pure joy of riding. There's the rumor of a road in Guatemala, a new border-crossing into Mexico. Somewhere along the route, we celebrate the New Year, listen to fireworks in a small town, cross into the United States in Brownsville, Texas.

On 6 January, we roll into the James River Country Club, in time for the regular Tuesday meeting of the Rotary Club of Newport News. We arrive to a hero's welcome. Someone hands Ken a check for money raised in his absence. The funds will help build more bridges.

I load my motorcycle, dinged and covered in dust, into a U-Haul. I have another 1,000 miles to go before I can download images, write these words, and introduce you to the heroes I met along the way.



JOKE OF THE WEEK

A doctor and a lawyer started up a conversation at a party. The doctor made a remark to the lawyer about how he hated that in social situations such as this that people often come up to him asking for free medical advice. The lawyer responded by saying that people often come up to him too seeking free legal advice and the way to solve the problem is to send them a bill and then they are never heard from again. The doctor then stated "Good idea, I'll have to keep that in mind." Then shortly after the party the lawyer sent the doctor a bill.



PUTTING A STOP TO POLIO

By Dan Nixon Rotary International News -- 15 May 2009

"As a health professional, working toward the eradication of a disease has to be one of the greatest programs one can participate in."

The words of Jenny Horton, a nurse and member of the Rotary Club of Kenmore, Queensland, Australia, helped mark the 10th anniversary of the Stop Transmission of Polio (STOP) program, established by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC hosted a celebration at its headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, in January. Attendees included Horton and other STOP team members, representatives from Rotary International and the World Health Organization, and current and former CDC staff.

STOP has taken Horton to Botswana, Ethiopia (twice), Nigeria, and Pakistan. She is one of more than 1,000 volunteer team members who have traveled to 60 countries to provide technical support for polio eradication since 1999.

The volunteers conduct field surveillance, train local health care providers in surveillance techniques, and help plan and monitor polio and measles vaccination campaigns. STOP also sends volunteers to support UNICEF in social mobilization, advocacy, and communications for immunization efforts in Africa and Asia.

"The STOP program was CDC's idea, and we met with several of the agency's 'smallpox warriors' to hear their thoughts on training and deploying staff for three-month assignments," said Dr. Steve Cochi, special adviser to the CDC Global Immunization Division director. "Based on their experience eradicating smallpox in the 1970s, they recognized the value of such a program and provided great input as we got started."

CDC's largest global health training program, STOP has received US\$681,900 in grants from PolioPlus for volunteers' stipends.

"When the STOP program was established, some 7,000 cases of polio were reported, and more than 25 countries were polio endemic," said Robert Hall, Zone 34 coordinator for Rotary's US\$200 Million Challenge and past governor of District 6900 (Georgia). "A decade later, only four countries remain polio endemic and, due to improvements in polio eradication strategies, we have more confidence than ever that polio can be eradicated in its remaining strongholds."

MEETING SCHEDULE

May 18 th	HAMDEN HIGH SCHOOL TOP-TEN AWARDS KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS - 2630 WHITNEY AVENUE, HAMDEN
May 25 th	Memorial Day - NO MEETING
Jun 1 st	Eli Whitney School - Top Ten Awards
Jun 8 th	HAMDEN SCHOOL/ROTARY ATHLETIC AWARDS KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS - 2630 WHITNEY AVENUE, HAMDEN
Jun 21 st -24 th	International Convention – Birmingham UK
June 30 th	Ambassadorial Scholarship Application Deadline

Of the things we think, say, or do...

