

OCTOBER 2022

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# Contents

4	Welcome
5	President's Message
6	Convention Countdown
7	Foundation Trustee Chair's Message
8	Just Imagine
10	Disability Desk
12	A Smart(er) NGO
13	A new weapon against polio
20	Rules of engagement
22	A doctor's duty
24	Here's why Cape Town is clearing invasive plants
26	As big as our dreams
27	Where have all the chameleons gone?
30	An open book
32	50 amazing years
33	New surgical equipment for Mauritius A special visit for Chatsworth
34	Treats for the frontline
35	New hiking trails
37	Africa in brief

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# WELCOME

Sarah van Heerden - Editor in Chief

There is always room at the table for another chair or even space to add another table. The idea that to succeed we have to sacrifice or beat all the others is antiquated and not true. For years I have watched people who don't believe this attack, belittle and destroy people as they scramble to success. Sure, they have had some success, but eventually their journeys stall - they hit a ceiling of their own making.

I know a number of people who believe there is room for more, that we can all succeed and that a supportive environment is one that is primed for excellence. They are not wrong; these are the people whom I know whose success in life continues to blossom. They continue to grow, achieve and shatter glass ceilings. While some have hit the ceiling they created, these other people have reached out, supported others and made room - they have continued to soar.

I taught a class on healthy communication the other day. It was based on simple principles to address areas of potential conflict, the selection of words and the omission of the word YOU. We also spoke about healthy and unhealthy gossip.

Humans will always gossip; it is the nature of the social beasts we are. But we choose how we gossip, negatively or positively.

Negative gossip is destructive and nasty. It is essentially aimed at removing a seat from the metaphorical table and smashing it to prevent occupation.

Positive gossip is uplifting aimed at presenting someone in the best light, 'talking up' their strengths and selling their potential.

A lot comes down to the words we use, including the way people will react when we have to navigate difficult situations. How we speak, the tone, the words, the manner, everything actually, will determine the outcome of the conversation. I told that class of interns that speaking calmly, presenting what they perceive as the problem, how it affects them (using the word I instead of you) and tabling possible solutions, will more often than not end a difficult conversation on a positive note.

I think the world could be a nicer place if we all spent a little more time thinking carefully about the words we use. Harsh words, like loaded weapons, should never be pointed unless you are prepared to accept the responsibility that comes with pulling the trigger.

## The Four-Way Test

Of the things we think,  
say or do:

- 1) Is it the TRUTH?
- 2) Is it FAIR to all concerned?
- 3) Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
- 4) Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

Rotary 



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## Shining a spotlight on polio



In August, I was proud to visit Pakistan and highlight Rotary's top goal, eradicating polio. It was also a tremendous opportunity to spotlight women health workers who are playing a critical role in protecting children from this vaccine-preventable disease.

This month, as we celebrate World Polio Day, we are shining a spotlight on our more than 30-year effort to lead the first global polio eradication campaign and our success in forming partnerships capable of completing this massive goal. We all know that this is one of the most ambitious global health initiatives in history and that we've reduced polio cases by more than 99.9 percent worldwide.

Pakistan remains one of only two countries in the world with circulating wild poliovirus. (The other is neighbouring Afghanistan.) I was able to witness and take part in vaccination campaigns in Pakistan and soon after I left, a monumental nationwide immunisation campaign took place, focused on 43 million children under the age of 5. I saw the incredible work of Rotary members on the ground. More than 60 percent of vaccinators in Pakistan are women and

they are doing a remarkable job building trust and convincing mothers to vaccinate their children.

Seeing it all first-hand, I know that the will exists across the Rotary world to end polio and I'm confident that we have the strategy. The Pakistani media has been very supportive of our efforts as well and this is making a difference. This month, a new global pledging moment at the World Health Summit in Berlin promises to pull together more resources to fund these time-sensitive eradication efforts. Now it is up to us to do our part and raise \$50 million this year to earn the full 2-for-1 match from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

There's great cause for optimism on the polio front - but also some staggering new events that further raise the stakes. Over the past few months, new polio outbreaks have occurred in Israel, the United Kingdom and, most recently, in the New York City area of the United States. These stories are frightening, but in every case, the response is clear - vaccines work and if polio is spreading, we need to make sure the most at-risk people have kept their vaccinations up to date.

Most importantly, we need to eradicate this virus now. If polio exists anywhere, it can spread everywhere. What I saw in Pakistan convinced me that we can and must finish the job, but it will only happen if we remain committed to a strategy that's working and back it with all necessary resources.

Through our commitment, generosity and sheer determination, we will #EndPolio.

**JENNIFER JONES**

*President, Rotary International*



## Find Project Partners

Thousands of Rotary and Rotaract clubs have shared their projects on Rotary Showcase since it launched in 2012. Now Rotary has added new features that make this online tool even more useful.

Your club can now post proposed projects and seek partners for those projects. You can share project details, ask for financial or other support and connect with other clubs. Potential partners can search Rotary Showcase to find proposed projects to join and contact project creators directly.

Learn more at [my.rotary.org](https://my.rotary.org)



# A FOODIE'S DELIGHT

2023 Rotary International Convention Countdown

From food stalls to fine dining, the culinary scene in Melbourne is so international that hungry visitors have choices within choices. Case in point: At least three districts claim to be the Australian city's Little Saigon. So, when you come for the 2023 Rotary International Convention 27-31 May, don't forget to bring your appetite and sense of adventure.

Which way to Little Saigon? That depends. You could head to Richmond, Footscray or Springvale. Each is a hub for Vietnamese communities and cuisine, offering an abundance of restaurants, bakeries and grocery stores to explore. With a mix of traditional Vietnamese food as well as Australian-inspired fusion, you can't go wrong whichever direction you choose.

A short tram ride north will take you to the suburb of Brunswick, the heart of the Melbourne area's Middle Eastern food scene. With Lebanese, Turkish, Syrian and Iraqi fare featured at markets, restaurants, take aways and bakeries, this multicultural district offers an array of options. Finish your meal at Café Coco with great coffee and if you fancy a smoke, an aromatic shisha.

For Italian food, take a stroll down Lygon Street. There, you will find Melbourne's Little Italy, where the city's cafe culture comes to life. Make sure to stop for an espresso before heading to dinner at 400 Gradi. Famous for its pizza, the restaurant earned the Best Pizzeria in Oceania title three years in a row. To complete your Italian adventure, top off the night with some refreshing gelato from one of the area's numerous dessert spots.



## Foundation Trustee Chair

Ian HS Risely

Who are your Rotary heroes? One of mine was Clem Renouf, 1978/79 RI president. I related to Sir Clem, who died in 2020, in many ways. We shared the same profession and Australian nationality and a passion for polio eradication. It was Clem's leadership that first put us on track to embrace the cause, mobilising what is today a global partnership that has led us to the cusp of eradicating a human disease for only the second time in history.

What Rotary and its partners have achieved is nothing short of remarkable. We have helped reduce polio cases by 99.9 percent worldwide, immunising more than 2 billion children in 122 countries. Last year alone, more than 370 million children were vaccinated in 30 countries using more than 1 billion doses of oral polio vaccine. As a result, we are seeing near historic lows in the number of cases. In August 2020, the WHO African region was certified free of wild poliovirus, an incredible achievement for Rotary members and a huge step on the road to eradication.

But remember that while polio exists anywhere, it is a threat to people everywhere, especially to young children. You may have heard about importations of the disease to Malawi and Mozambique, detection of poliovirus in sewage

in the United Kingdom and a recent case in the United States.

To stay agile, Rotary and its partners are deploying a new polio vaccine, novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2), to fight outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus, also known as variant poliovirus, which continues to threaten children in Africa, as well as several countries in Asia and the Middle East, including in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Rotary is as active as ever. We are calling on every member to take action and be part of this historic fight. Take the fight to your clubs and communities on World Polio Day, 24 October. Keep raising awareness of the importance of polio eradication and Rotary's critical role in that effort by holding events and fundraisers. Don't forget that contributions toward the goal of \$50 million per year for polio eradication will be matched 2-to-1 by our generous partner, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Like Sir Clem, we can all be Rotary heroes, each playing a part in our organisation's great legacy. Through our giving, raising awareness and funds and hands-on service, each of us brings Rotary a step closer to fulfilling our promise to the children of the world by eradicating polio for good.

## ANNUAL FUND SHARE

Your gift to the Annual Fund empowers Rotary members to take action today to create positive change in communities close to home and around the globe. Through the SHARE system, contributions are transformed into grants that fund local and international humanitarian projects, scholarships, and activities.

**GIVE TODAY:** [rotary.org/donate](https://rotary.org/donate)





# Just imagine

**DR PATRICK COLEMAN**

**ROTARY E-CLUB OF SOUTHERN AFRICA D9400**

## **BRAIN HEALTH**

I read an interesting article written by Khyati Jain about how we kill brain cells with five daily activities. Contrary to popular thought, it's not your smartphone, overeating or sugar. And NO, it doesn't include watching "Reality TV" (Although I might argue that point...)

Wanting to conserve my brain cells, I continued reading to make sure I would not suffer the same condition that some politicians seem to suffer. Ok... That is probably politically incorrect, but brain health is a serious subject and those of us in leadership positions need to heed this warning.

Good brain habits can help you boost cognition and memory. It stands to reason, therefore, that bad habits increase stress which can ultimately lead to the mass destruction of brain cells. So, give up these habits for better brain health.

### **1. "All By Myself" sounds great when Celine Dion sings it, but...**

Social Distancing became the topic of every social media conversation. However, social connections are crucial for good brain health. Anxiety or fear of socialising is costing you your brain health. While we endured social distancing for nearly two years, those who maintained physical distancing while still keeping social connections were better off. Anti-social behaviour can change your brain, can lower your IQ and put you at a higher risk of substance abuse.

According to an article written by James Kingsland on February 18, 2020, scientists used MRI scans to evaluate the brains of 672 45-year-old men and

women whom researchers had closely studied since they were just three years of age. The participants were part of the Dunedin Study, which has monitored the health and behaviour of more than 1 000 people born in the early 1970s in Dunedin, New Zealand. Researchers categorised the participants as exhibiting life-course-persistent antisocial behaviour-based reports from their parents, caregivers and teachers.

Thank you, Eric S. Yuan, for creating Zoom! We are all emotionally healthier because of you!

Beat the isolation by:

- Make a promise to yourself to talk to a stranger daily.
- Get out of the house daily for at least 30 minutes.
- Buy groceries at a local store and not online.
- Call a friend, whom you haven't spoken to in months.

This is just the tip of the iceberg!

### **2. The "side hustle."**

Hustle culture is all the hype. In this economy, you need to have a side hustle to save some extra money, but working long hours can rapidly decrease your brain health.

Too much work makes your wallet heavier and your brain older. An overworked brain has low cognitive power because it ages faster.

### **3. Location! Location! Location!**

Your brain fog could be a result of your environment. Living in a high pollution environment can cause irreversible damage to your brain. Seriously, air pollution increases the risk of Alzheimer's and dementia. Cognitive decline and behavioural changes



are common effects of air pollution.

What to do? Short of moving, an air purifier might help.

#### 4. Breakfast!

Intermittent fasting is common for people who want to get right to work. Delaying breakfast to complete the fasting cycle is a common practice. Some even opt to skip breakfast altogether and start their day with a heavy lunch.

Skipping breakfast can alter your short-term memory and reduce attentiveness resulting in low cognition, slow response and irritability.

These are common side effects of skipping breakfast. Skipping breakfast can affect your mood and productivity.

#### 5. WATER Is Life - and means a healthy brain!

Water is crucial for brain health. Even a one percent dehydration can cause decrease your cognitive abilities by five percent. A two percent reduction in brain hydration can cause brain fog and decrease mental clarity. Prolonged dehydration can shrink the size of your brain cells.

Afternoon fatigue is a symptom of dehydration. Boost your work performance just by drinking more water. Sip water throughout the day to protect your brain from the damaging effects of dehydration.

Imagine how our Rotary clubs would improve our communities if we all took better care of our brains! So look after your brain, make the effort to see people, get enough rest, control your environment, eat well and stay hydrated!

Your enhanced online Rotary experience is beginning to unfold. Enjoy a modern design and search functionality that's fast and easy-to-use.

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# Disability desk

WITH JEREMY OPPERMAN



## WONDER DOG

I found myself reflecting on the extraordinary gifts that I have been given in the form of my guide dogs. Ronnie, now with me for four years, preceded by Gatsby and before that, the late great Barklee.

The reason for this sentimental jaunt is that I have just read a terrific book, *Thunder Dog* by Michael Hingson. The book cleverly captures one's attention by mentioning in the forward that its publication coincides with the sad passing of his memorable guide dog Roselle. Thereafter one is gripped by the story of how Roselle guided Michael down 78 floors of the north tower during the attack on and destruction of the World Trade Centre on 9/11.

Afterwards, even more impressive, was the guiding of Michael through the drenched and crashing chaos of the lobby and out into the apocalyptic scene outside which included the explosive debris of the collapsing South Tower.

This is obviously a tough act to follow and of course, there can be no amount of training and preparation that can equip a dog let alone any person, blind or not, to experience this.

But I was reminded of one situation, obviously not vaguely comparable to Roselle's amazing feat, where I witnessed a guide dog's initiative and diligence.

In truth, actually, we are guilty of being blasé about most of what they do and take for granted what took months and months to perfect with training. However, what Barklee did that day in November 2013 was definitely above and beyond his training.

"How are you going to get home?" said my client as I weighed up my options for going home from town that day. Normally this wouldn't have been a problem as I would have simply walked from Dorp

Street to the station and caught a train home.

But today, I had totally failed to consider a massive strike and march by COSATU through town, scheduled for that afternoon. The marchers were now in St George's Mall, Wale Street and lower Adderley. Sadly, this one was turning violent and we could hear the sounds of destruction from St Georges Mall already. This meant that I would need to try avoid the masses if I could.

Marchers tend to walk in large bunches, so when there was a lull, I took off really fast, hugging the eastern side of Adderley Street towards the station. I knew for certain that the station would be out of bounds as I could hear chanting coming from that direction.

So I thought I would be clever and turn right into Darling Street and walk a couple of hundred metres to a My CiTi bus stop and hopefully catch the bus to Salt River where I could catch a train.

As I turned into Darling Street, I ran slap bang into a late-arriving crowd of marchers who were rapidly heading towards St Georges Mall. It was like no experience I have ever had before or since. A body of several hundred people walking with purpose in one direction has a mass of its own and an inexorable momentum.

We were literally swept along, except that I was trying to go across their stream at 90 degrees to their direction. I had no appetite to join the destructive mob in St George's Mall.

I must point out here, that strangely, I did not feel frightened, despite the pace and the martial chanting. The marchers were not interested in me at all and ignored me completely.

I was however very disorientated and literally, was not sure exactly where I was. I raised my voice and said loudly so Barklee could hear, "Station boy,

station!” Barklee simply took charge. He powered forward and turned fully 180 degrees. I thought he was confused and nearly tried to correct him, but I kept quiet and realised that in the throng, we had both been turned around and were now facing the Cathedral. Also, we were on the other side of Adderley Street.

Barklee turned us around, marched us through the now thinning crowd and headed toward the station. I was right, the station was chaotic, with no possibility of entering or catching any trains.

“I wonder if My Citi will be running,” I thought. Usually, I walked to My Citi terminal, through the station then across the car park towards the Civic Centre. But that route was out of the question with the station full of angry marchers.

The only option would be to walk along Adderley towards Heerengracht and cross Hertzog Boulevard towards the Civic Centre. I hate this part of town since it is very awkward with many busy roads to navigate and the large Heerengracht circle is very confusing for pedestrians if you’re visually impaired. Barklee had certainly never done this route before.

And yet, he was clearly still in charge. I literally

said nothing, trusting that he knew what he was doing. I have a very good sense of direction, so I more or less knew where he was headed, but I was fascinated that he knew where I wanted to go.

He led us past the station building, the travel agent and a KFC, across the road, then past the Metrorail head office. We crossed over another road, past Standard Bank and finally a very busy Hertzog Boulevard.

Crossing that was no problem, but I had no idea exactly where the bus terminal was from this direction. I needn’t have worried, Barklee drawing on heavens knows what inner guide, carried on without hesitating straight to the terminal.

Barklee worked with me as a guide dog from November 2007 until September 2015. He died on 14 May 2018.

I have so enjoyed including Ronnie, my current guide dog in our Rotary club activities and I bring him to most meetings, if I can. I have loved how he enjoys club friends taking time to come over and greet him with a pat and a stroke, even if they forget to say hello to me!

Thank you for welcoming him, I look forward to more guide dogs in Rotary.

# Coming up...

## 7 OCTOBER

**ROTARY CLUB OF WORCESTER (D9350)** Golf Day all genders and people who can’t compete in the GiGi Classic next year. Sign up for a day filled with loads of prizes and lots of laughs.

**Contact:** Juanita Wilkinson at [juanitaw@breede.co.za](mailto:juanitaw@breede.co.za).

## 15 OCTOBER

**THE ROTARY CLUB OF HILTON AND HOWICK (D9370)** Gala Fundraising Dinner at Woodstone Restaurant and Wine Bar. uMngeni Municipality Mayor Cllr Chris Papas will be the keynote speaker and will share his views on the current state of our local economy and his vision for the future success of the municipality. Guests will also have the opportunity of networking with their peers during the course of the evening. Lucky draw prizes, including a two-night midweek break at the Cavern Drakensberg Resort, petrol vouchers and many more. **TICKETS:** Contact Colin Hall at 082 920 6306

## 21 APRIL 2023

**ROTARY CLUB OF WORCESTER (D9350)** The GiGi Classic Golf Day golf tournament for women who CANNOT play golf. Sign up for a day filled with loads of prizes and lots of laughs.

**Contact:** Juanita Wilkinson at [juanitaw@breede.co.za](mailto:juanitaw@breede.co.za).

Submit your Rotary club or district events to [rotaryafrica@mweb.co.za](mailto:rotaryafrica@mweb.co.za).

Please include ‘calendar’ in the subject

# A smart(er) NGO

How smart tech is transforming community-based organisations

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how much communities rely on NGOs to deliver everything from groceries to lifesaving medical care. Some NGOs rose to meet unprecedented demand for their services by deploying robots to pack meals and using online chatbots to give legal and mental health advice. This is the next generation of digital technology, what we call “smart tech” - technologies that make decisions for people. Learning how to use this technology well will be the difference between success and failure over the next decade of community-based NGO work.

Before you throw your hands up in disgust over more promises about technology making your life better, this is not the technology that has made our lives a daily game of Whack-a-Mole with people checking their email on average 74 times a day. That was the last generation of digital tech. Smart tech has the potential to rehumanise work and workplaces, and to free up time to do the real work of helping people - but only if we use it wisely and well.

Smart tech is currently best at doing rote tasks, like answering the same questions online through a chatbot, automatically filling out parts of a form, or looking for patterns within a large data set. This type of work takes up about 25 percent of staff time. Imagine what we could do for our communities with that extra time. We would have more time to spend talking and listening to people, more time saying thank you, more time telling stories. More time solving problems. More time just thinking and dreaming.

Smart tech products are now available for fundraising, hiring, communications, volunteering, finance and more. Even the smallest community-based organisations are beginning to use the technology. For instance, social service agencies are increasingly using smart tech to screen people for services like emergency housing and food support. These automated forms make it easier to screen many more people. However, they aren't neutral or infallible. Computer programmers will likely embed their own biases. For instance, in determining eligibility for housing, the forms may ask a question

about credit history, a metric that often discriminates against people of colour whose credit scores may be hurt by prejudicial economic practices. In addition, smart tech requires Library of Congress-size data sets to become adept at identifying patterns and making predictions. These data sets will have historic biases embedded within them.

It is critically important that community leaders understand what smart tech is, how it works and how to use it ethically and responsibly. Here are three steps community organisations must take to successfully integrate smart tech into their efforts:

- **BE PREPARED.** Using smart tech is a huge responsibility. It is important to take time to learn how it operates and to make sure it's not discriminatory. Everyone involved needs to learn its capabilities and understand how their roles will change and how the organisation will stay attuned to any impact on staff and clients.
- **STAY HUMAN-CENTRIC.** There is a sweet spot in the use of smart tech where the technology does what it does best and people do the fundamentally human parts - like building relationships, solving problems and telling stories. Some people call this convergence “co-boting.” It may take practice to figure out how to best balance smart tech and people, but the most important thing is to always ensure that people are in charge of the technology and not the other way around.
- **USE IT SPARINGLY.** Smart tech is hot sauce, not ketchup. It is important to consider what tasks - not what jobs - can be automated. Smart tech is not an opportunity to slash jobs, but a chance to free people to do more meaningful work. For instance, smart tech can help identify new donors, but only fundraisers can talk to those donors and begin to build relationships with them. Having honest discussions with staff about changes to their roles and responsibilities and providing coaching and support to use smart tech are integral to success.

- ALLISON FINE AND BETH KANTER



A photograph of a young girl with dark hair and a pink shirt, looking up with her mouth open as a hand administers a drop of vaccine from a small vial. Another child is visible in the background, looking on. The scene is set indoors, possibly near a doorway with a wooden frame and patterned fabric.

# A new weapon against polio

A modified vaccine offers hope that  
eradication is closer than ever

By Jason Keyser



*A polio vaccinator marks a child's pinkie after vaccinating him outside a home in Karachi, Pakistan. By early August of this year, 14 cases of wild polio were confirmed in Pakistan and one in neighbouring Afghanistan - the last two countries where wild poliovirus is endemic.*

In mid-2017, two groups of 15 strangers lived together for 28 days, each in a ring of shipping containers assembled in the parking lot of Antwerp University Hospital in Belgium. They had access to books and movies, a small courtyard for barbecues, a common kitchen and dining room and a fitness room - all of it behind secure interlocking doors and under the watch of personnel in protective gowns.

What sounds like a reality TV or sci-fi scenario was, in fact, a remarkable clinical trial of the latest weapon in the battle to eradicate polio - a re-engineered vaccine called the novel oral polio vaccine type 2, or nOPV2. The study aimed to evaluate whether the altered formula, the first major update to polio vaccines in about six decades, could help end outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus, also known as variant poliovirus. Such cases arise in rare instances when the live but weakened virus contained in oral polio vaccines circulates in areas of low vaccine coverage and mutates back into a dangerous form that can infect those who have not been fully vaccinated.

These variant vaccine outbreaks have emerged over the past two decades as a significant stumbling block in the effort by Rotary and its partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) to wipe out the disease. The outbreaks are different from

the wild poliovirus that circulated naturally in the environment for millennia and is now endemic in just two countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan. But their outcome is the same - they can, in rare instances, cause paralysis.

In 2011, staff at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, one of the GPEI partners, wondered if the live virus in the traditional vaccine could be tweaked to limit its ability to mutate. "The first challenge was purely scientific," says Ananda Bandyopadhyay, a deputy director of the polio team at the Gates Foundation, which funded and led the effort. "How do you make the vaccine more genetically stable without compromising its immunogenicity [ability to provoke an immune response]? That was really, really challenging."

And even then, researchers would need to figure out how to test the idea. Any attempt would require strict isolation of study participants. At a breakfast meeting in Brussels in 2015, Bandyopadhyay pitched the audacious idea to Pierre Van Damme, director of the Centre for Evaluation of Vaccination at the University of Antwerp. "We had to be very creative," says Ilse De Coster, who would lead the clinical trial team with Van Damme in Belgium, "because at that time we didn't have any facility that was developed for containment."



They considered sequestering study participants at isolated holiday resorts or vacant centres that had been used to house asylum seekers, eventually settling on the idea of a purpose-built modular container village, dubbed Poliopolis by Van Damme's wife. The centre's scientists have conducted more than 500 vaccine trials, but had little experience with polio, which long ago ceased to be of daily concern in the country thanks to routine immunisation.

For much of the developed world, polio is a distant memory. Long gone are the days of the summer-time terrors in Europe and North America in the 1940s and 1950s when children went to bed with what their parents thought was a mild flu only to wake up rubber-limbed and burning with fever. Thousands were paralysed. Some ended up in the dreaded iron lung device that enclosed the body and helped them breathe.

A vaccine developed in the early 1950s by virologist Jonas

Salk using killed virus, known as the inactivated polio vaccine, or IPV, carries no risk of seeding vaccine-derived, or variant, outbreaks because the killed virus cannot mutate. Many places use this vaccine for routine childhood immunisation. But it only protects the vaccinated individual and cannot prevent person-to-person spread, which is required in an eradication programme.

The oral polio vaccine, or OPV, was developed in the late 1950s by physician Albert Sabin. It's become the vaccine of choice for polio eradication because it's safe, inexpensive, easy to administer and the live but weakened vaccine virus replicates in the gut and produces strong intestinal immunity. As a result, vaccinated children can shed the weakened vaccine virus in their stool for several weeks. In areas with poor sanitation, the weakened virus spreads, stimulating an immune response in the unvaccinated.

But this ability of the weakened virus to circulate carries a vulnerability in areas of low

immunity - one that stayed hidden for years, until 2000.

When children started getting sick that year in the Dominican Republic and neighbouring Haiti, no one suspected the cause was polio, which hadn't been seen in the Americas for nearly a decade. Initially, pesticide poisoning was blamed.

From July 2000 to July 2001, 21 children were paralysed on the island shared by the two countries. Two of them died. A virologist from the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention analysed stool samples from two paralysed children and found that the cause was, in fact, polio.

More troubling was where precisely the virus came from. This was not wild polio. The weakened vaccine-virus had circulated unchecked for too long and had mutated and become virulent. Researchers had long speculated such a scenario was possible, but until then it had never been detected.

All but one of the children in the Caribbean outbreak were



**EXPERTS:** Epidemiologists and technical experts at local, national and international levels help guide polio eradication activities.

either unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated, researchers found. They were from communities with vaccination rates as low as 7 percent. Some 3.2 million children were quickly vaccinated on the island and the outbreak was stopped. But the risk of variant poliovirus outbreaks was now clear, along with the need to improve vaccination rates in vulnerable communities everywhere.

Most variant cases involve type 2 poliovirus, one of two strains that have been eradicated in the wild. In 2016, the year after its eradication was certified, the type 2 strain was removed from oral vaccine formulas, in part, to avoid the risk of seeding new vaccine variant outbreaks during routine immunisation campaigns. It seemed like the right moment to make the change, which was recommended by the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation, an independent body advising the WHO. There were only two reported type 2 vaccine variant cases that year, one in Pakistan and the other in Nigeria. But virus modellers at the time underestimated the amount of type 2 vaccine variant poliovirus still circulating around the world.

The number of children paralysed by the type 2 variant poliovirus surged from two in 2016 to more than 1 000 at its peak in 2020, spread over two dozen countries, most of them in Africa. The situation was made worse because of a four-month halt to immunisation campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic that left 80 million children unprotected. “It created a window for further expansion of the outbreaks,” says John Vertefeuille, chief of the polio eradication branch at the CDC. Variant cases now vastly outnumber cases of wild polio, though they are starting to decline.

Two high-quality vaccination rounds with the existing oral polio vaccine containing only type 2 virus have been effective in stopping 77 percent of variant poliovirus outbreaks, but still, that vaccine carries the risk of the virus mutating back to a more virulent form if it circulates in populations with low immunity. At the Gates Foundation, there was a realisation that a new type 2 oral polio vaccine was needed and fast. “This entire situation with the variant poliovirus outbreaks is a challenge, but it’s also an opportunity to innovate,” Bandyopadhyay says.

The foundation established and funded a scientific consortium to develop the new oral vaccine and included the UK’s National Institute for Biological Standards and Control and the University of California in San Francisco. Researchers at those two institutions altered part of the old type 2 vaccine virus’s genome to make it more genetically stable while preserving its ability to produce strong immunity in the gut. But the challenge of how to test it in humans without risking







# WORLD POLIO DAY

## 24 OCTOBER

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environmental spread remained.

The team at Poliopolis was moving fast. The 66 containers, which were prefabricated off-site, were assembled in just three days in April 2017 and were ready for operation a month after that. Altogether, it had been less than half a year since the team decided to proceed with the Poliopolis concept. To the researchers' knowledge, no one had ever attempted a containment study in such a purpose-built facility and for so long.

Other vaccine trials requiring containment measures have been carried out in hospitals and even motels. But since vaccinated people shed the weakened virus from the oral polio vaccine in their stool for several weeks, researchers would need a facility where sewage could be strictly contained, kept separate from any public waste systems and decontaminated. Clothing, towels, utensils, uneaten food

and anything else handled by participants would be disposed of securely or decontaminated with chlorine dioxide gas. Entrances were equipped with airlocks, meaning an inner door could not open until an outer one was locked.

Because of the length of time the virus can continue to be excreted, trial participants would have to stay sequestered for at least 28 days. Volunteers had to undergo medical and psychological screening to ensure they were up to the challenge and could function as a group. Volunteers, most from neighbouring Netherlands, included a housewife, a student finishing a master's thesis and a working professional who wanted a little time off. They got along well despite occasional friction over insignificant things like messes in the kitchen.

The trial was conducted with two back-to-back groups of 15 volunteers from May to August

in 2017. (Only one volunteer left early, on the evening before the final day, though he returned the next day to complete remaining study requirements). Further studies were conducted on adults in Belgium and children and infants in Panama. NOPV2 received the first-ever emergency use listing by the World Health Organisation in November 2020. The vaccine was rolled out in March 2021, first in Nigeria and Liberia. Through the first half of 2022, more than 370 million doses were administered in more than 20 countries.

"It's looking very promising and it's looking like it's doing what it is supposed to do: induce population immunity and interrupt transmission in most settings and with a much lower risk of seeding new outbreaks," Bandyopadhyay says. "It's that data that gives me the confidence that this is one of those tools that could be the turning point."

The new vaccine, by itself,

*Poliopolis was constructed in just three days. To the researchers' knowledge, no one had ever attempted a containment study quite like it. Volunteers had to undergo medical and psychological screenings to ensure they were up to the challenge and could function as a group.*





*At Poliopolis, a purpose-built container village in Antwerp, Belgium, nOPV2 vaccine trial participants had to live together for 28 days, sealed off from the outside world. “It was surreal,” says Caro Bouten, a volunteer from the Netherlands whose aunt had polio.*

is not a silver bullet. It won’t stop transmission if immunisation campaigns cannot reach close to 90 percent of children in the response zones. Adding to the challenge in Africa, a drop in routine childhood immunisations during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to surges in cases of measles, yellow fever, cholera and other infectious diseases, leaving governments with other public health priorities. “It’s hard for polio to always be top of the list,” says WHO’s Simona Zipursky, co-chair of the nOPV2 working group, which includes all GPEI partners. “That’s where we have benefited from the partnership and the Rotarians have played a key role in that advocacy.”

Integrating polio response with other important community needs is key to gaining trust and cooperation, she says. That’s crucial because under-immunisation remains an obstacle, allowing cases of variant polio to leap across the globe and pop up in places where the disease hasn’t been seen in years. Officials detected polio in London and New York City sewage this year, for instance. And in July 2022, health authorities announced an unvaccinated man in New York state had been sickened with variant poliovirus genetically linked to the spread in London.

“We’ve never been closer than we are now” has been a frequent refrain for the polio eradication campaign, but there are plenty of reasons to believe it today. The global community is united around the latest GPEI strategy. The Taliban leadership that returned to power in Afghanistan a year ago agreed

to allow house-to-house immunisation campaigns to resume nationwide after a three-and-a-half-year ban in some areas, raising hopes that the remaining reservoirs of wild polio can soon be extinguished. And there are more scientific innovations in the pipeline, including more genetically stable versions of the oral vaccines for the other two types of polio, modelled on nOPV2.

Like many polio campaigners, Nana Yaa Siriboe, a member of the Rotary Club of Accra Labone, Ghana, has a personal stake in crossing the finish line. Her cousin is a survivor who once needed crutches but now walks unaided, with only a limp. “My mother would tell her, ‘I’m not going to allow you to think that you’re going to be helpless,’” she recalls. “And I tell you, my cousin is a fighter.”

Siriboe became chair of the Ghana PolioPlus Committee in 2019, just as variant polio cases were emerging in the country after being polio-free for about a decade. She mobilised Rotary volunteers to visit homes, schools, mosques, churches and markets to find and immunise children and the outbreaks were suppressed for two years. But polio paralysed one person this June, prompting another mass immunisation campaign that was to start in August. The arrival of the nOPV2 gives her hope. So do the mothers she has watched over the years bringing their children to be vaccinated. “It’s a joy,” she says of meeting the children. “You get to play with them. Some like to see their little finger marked with the pen to show this child has been immunised. We give them toffee. It’s a wonderful experience.”



# Rules of engagement

*6 tips for nurturing the purpose and passion that power Rotary*



In a January address to incoming district governors before the International Assembly, Jennifer Jones, then RI's president-elect, told the story of a 30-year Rotarian who fully understood what Rotary was all about only after participating in a project that delivered coats to children in his community. "Imagine," said Jones, "more than 1 500 club meetings before he finally got Rotary."

The fault, suggested Jones, wasn't entirely his. "We must engage our members," she insisted. Ask

members what they want out of the experience and provide them meaningful responsibilities. "It's our offer of hands-on service, personal growth, leadership development and lifelong friendships that create purpose and passion. These are our responsibilities. If we don't serve our members, we don't serve our communities. And if we don't provide comfort and care for our members, they may never truly get the power of Rotary."

With Jones' remarks in mind, we checked



in with three clubs to learn the secrets of their success. Turns out, the key is exactly what Jones prescribed: Pay attention to the comfort and care of members. Here are six tips on how to do that.

### **MATCH MEMBERS' PERSONAL PASSIONS**

Nancy Prochaska is president of the Rotary Club of North Cobb County, Georgia, which has grown in just over six years from 33 members to more than 70. Prochaska attributes much of the club's success to its structured process to bring new members on board: The club interviews prospective members, learns what projects and causes they're passionate about, and assigns them roles that match their interests.

Victoria Ewert didn't connect with any of the Rotary clubs she visited near her home in Edmonton, Alberta. No one asked about her interests or followed up to see if she had any questions. So, at the suggestion of a friend, she helped charter the Rotary Club of Edmonton Southeast. After 14 years, Ewert has fine-tuned her recruitment pitch. "People want something from the heart," she advises. "I ask them about their life and family and what kind of service they are interested in." With that information, the club ensures that local projects engage all members - and that, Ewert adds, is what keeps a club strong.

Sarah Lynn Groves, the membership chair of the Rotary Club of Colville, Washington, recalls being somewhat intimidated by Rotary procedures and lingo when she joined five years ago. "Since then, we've developed a few programmes to engage and care for our members," she says. In its Rotary Rookies programme, new members are paired with a mentor who helps guide them through their first year. Accumulating points while working from a game-board checklist, new members encounter different aspects of the club and are ultimately led to a committee or project board they might want to join - a process that engages both new and existing members.

### **BE FLEXIBLE**

Take advantage of Rotary's relaxed rules regarding attendance and club structure. The Colville club holds weekly lunch meetings, but it also stages monthly service projects and social events, usually in the morning or evening. "For some of us, especially younger members, life is too busy to make it every single week, but we still want to do good," Groves says. "I think a hybrid is the way to go. That's part of being inclusive to a

younger generation."

The North Cobb County club takes attendance at its weekly morning meeting, says Prochaska. "But we also allow participation in a service project to substitute for attending a meeting," which ensures members stay engaged. And taking attendance is another way to provide comfort and care. "If someone is absent, we are able to check up on them to make sure they are OK," Prochaska explains.

### **EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY**

Even as in-person meetings resumed when concerns about COVID-19 diminished, the Colville, Edmonton Southeast and North Cobb County clubs continued to offer video call-in options. "We do have members who are technologically challenged," says Prochaska, "but we also have members who can assist them." Ewert notes that the virtual option opens opportunities for a wider selection of speakers. "We can have bigger, better, cooler things to talk about," adds Groves. And clubs that use technology have greater appeal for prospective younger members. "Young people expect information to come cleanly and quickly and in a specific way," Prochaska says. "If they don't get that, it's off-putting."

In addition to having an attractive and regularly updated club website, an active presence on at least one social media platform is also a must. Many members of the Edmonton Southeast and North Cobb County clubs are also on WhatsApp, a platform that allows people to share messages with a group instantly. "If I need more help with a project," explains Prochaska, "I can put the word out and get volunteers quickly."

### **ENCOURAGE ROTARY TRAINING**

During her year as club president-elect, Prochaska attended Rotary Leadership Institute sessions to learn about logistics and procedures. "Those who take part in training sessions really sparkle," she learned, which is why she encouraged institute organisers to hold training sessions closer to her club's base so more members could take part. Adds Ewert: "I always tell the district to make sure incoming club presidents and secretaries are well trained so they can communicate with all of their club members. It makes them feel like they matter."

"When I became membership chair, our club president supported sending me to the zone institute for training," Groves says. "For me, that was a life-changing Rotary experience. I got to connect to a

bigger Rotary purpose and know why we do what we do. It was an investment in me so I can develop our programmes. That is super important!”

## COMMUNITY PROJECTS POLISH PUBLIC IMAGE

The North Cobb County club maintains a high level of public visibility by partnering with local organisations and holding frequent and varied service projects, from food distribution to support for health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Colville club garners public attention through its annual Tree of Sharing holiday programme. Partnering with local agencies, the club sets up Christmas trees at numerous retail locations throughout town with tags that specify gift requests from people in need. The Edmonton Southeast club is especially proud of its Thanksgiving dinner, which each year provides meals to as many as 1 000 people

who need them. (The programme continued during the pandemic, moving to curbside pickup.) “Our club has become famous for that, because I always make sure to invite the media,” says Ewert. “Everywhere I go, people say, ‘That’s the Thanksgiving lady!’”

## DON'T FORGET FRIENDSHIP

Groves recalls that when she moved to Colville in 2015, she wanted to meet people and learn more about the community. Joining Rotary checked that box. “I stay in Rotary because of the work we do,” she says, “but I started because of fellowship.”

Prochaska concurs. “In the past year we’ve had 50 different service events and 15 social events,” she says. The club encourages members to invite their families and friends to take part in those projects. “Our secret sauce?” she says. “It’s fun!”



Olha Paliychuk was 13 in 1986 when a nuclear reactor exploded in Chernobyl, just over 150 miles from her home in Cherkasy, Ukraine. Her parents, both doctors, knew to keep her indoors and give her iodine tablets to lower her radiation risk. Years later, Paliychuk too became a doctor, specialising in the treatment of women and children with cancer, a legacy of the disaster.

Today, her patients, already struggling for their lives, are facing another threat with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Paliychuk and her colleagues work in operating theatres behind sandbags, doing their best - despite a lack of supplies and frequent air raid alerts - to care for a flood of patients displaced from other parts of Ukraine who are desperate to continue their cancer treatment. Many arrive traumatised, their health worsened by weeks sitting without treatment in cold shelters at the start of the war. “As a surgeon, I’m used to major medical emergencies,” Paliychuk says. “But the preventable tragedies caused by this unprovoked war fill me with anger and sadness.”

Paliychuk joined her Rotary club in 2016 after treating the son of a member. She recently developed a cervical cancer prevention project supported by a global grant funded through the Hearts of Europe programme, a partnership between The Rotary Foundation and USAID. She has kept the programme running despite the war, prioritising displaced women for cancer screenings and immunisations and moving training sessions for health care workers online.

She has stayed in Cherkasy even as neighbours pressed her to evacuate with them. “I’m a doctor,” she explained to them. “It’s my job. I must be here.”

# A doctor’s duty

*Behind sandbags, a Ukrainian doctor continues lifesaving cancer care*



## DID YOU KNOW

That in 2020 and 2021, extreme weather struck so many times that the full list of names was used up? There has only been one other time in history when this has happened.

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*A ground team clears invasive alien plants from Wemmershoek catchment area. Photo: Ashraf Hendricks.*

# Here's why Cape Town is clearing invasive plants

The project is expected to save billions of litres of water a year

By Liezl Human and Ashraf Hendricks

- The City of Cape Town and the Nature Conservancy are clearing invasive plants such as pine and eucalyptus trees growing in water catchment areas.
- Invasive species in areas such as Wemmershoek, Steenbras, Berg River, and Theewaterskloof are a serious threat to the region's water supply.
- A 2018 study by the Greater Cape Town Water Fund says invasive species contribute to water losses running to billions of litres per year.

Thirsty alien plants such as pine and eucalyptus trees are being cleared from mountain catchment areas across Cape Town. These plants drain billions of litres of water.

The City of Cape Town partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in July 2021 and committed to a two-year contract for R50-million to clear invasive species around important catchment areas such as Wemmershoek, Steenbras, Berg River, and Theewaterskloof.

So far 4 617 hectares have been cleared. Another

7,000 hectares will be cleared over the next year. About 1,088 jobs have been created through the project.

The City, in a recent statement, said clearing invasive plants will, in a few years, result in savings of billions of litres of water per year.

Research from 2018 by the Greater Cape Town Water Fund found that invasive species around these catchment areas contribute to significant water losses. It recommended that they be cleared as a sustainable and cost-effective way to reduce Cape Town's water



losses. According to the study, without intervention, the 55-billion litres of water sucked up by invasive trees could more than double in the next 30 years.

The researchers noted that initial control operations would cost up to R40,000 per hectare “in very dense invasions in rugged terrain and riparian areas”. After this, the cost should decline as plant density and size decrease.

Jasper Slingsby, of the Department of Biological Science at UCT, wrote in 2018 that invasive alien species were a greater threat to Cape Town’s water supply than climate change.

Speaking to GroundUp recently, Slingsby said the City’s project is “a good start” but “inadequate to get the job done”.

“If we actually want to fix this problem, we probably need about five times the investment to get it done, if not more,” he said.

The study by the Greater Cape Town Water Fund estimated that about R370-million is needed for catchment restoration to generate water gains

of 50 billion litres a year. The City’s R50-million investment in the project is not enough, said Slingsby.

GroundUp joined the City and TNC at the Wemmershoek catchment to see the process.

Removing trees and plants in mountainous areas can be tricky. Richard Bagan, monitoring and evaluation manager at TNC, said that three teams are contracted to help clear invasive plants. Each team does manual clearing using chainsaws, loppers, and saws to cut down and remove the invasive trees.

The first team works in lower-lying areas; the second camps in remote areas; the third team operates on cliff faces.

This year Cape Town has had below average rainfall. “If we have another bad year in 2023, we’re going to be straight back in the same boat [Day Zero] again,” said Slingsby.

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# As big as our dreams

The Braamfontein Spruit (Afrikaans for spring of brambles), the longest stream in Johannesburg, bubbles up near Barnato Park High School, runs through a concrete tunnel until it reaches Parkview Golf Course and then passes through parkland right to the edge of the city.

More than this, it is a public amenity that also supports indispensable biological communities and helps to increase city resilience to climate change. But urban development and irresponsible behaviour is killing it. The spruit is sick and polluted by waste. This is the bad news, but it also comes with some good news too.

On 17 September, the Rotary Club of Johannesburg New Dawn (D9400) organised the All Spruits Cleanup Day to celebrate World Cleanup Day. Nine tons of waste was collected as Rotarians and community members answered the call of “Our Spruit Needs Us.”

Nearly 1 000 people from volunteer organisations, resident associations, Scout troops, seven Rotary clubs and schools gathered at more than 15 different locations. The event was coordinated through a single WhatsApp group and two face-to-face meetings.

Only reusable bags would be used for waste

collection and no black plastic refuse bags or single-use plastic in any shape or form appeared on site.

The waste would go to City Recyclers, regardless of the additional distance, because they were the only ones who had committed to sorting and recycling it.

The sponsors were generous with their time and resources too: reusable collection bags from Beagle Watch, waders from CAP security, gloves bought by New Dawn members, biodegradable gloves from Halyard Health, sponsored t-shirts from Rawson and 600 doughnuts from Krispy Kreme. The City of Johannesburg and Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo provided organisational support, while coffee was provided by Jackson’s Real Food Market and Eatery. All that was needed for the Environment Village event was provided by Delta Café.

The Environment Village was a space where people could relax, browse eco-oriented stalls and listen to some expert speakers. The afternoon event was opened by the choir from the National School of Arts who sang Let the River Run before Jenny Moodley, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo’s Stakeholder and Public Relations officer, gave a rousing speech. Two indigenous trees were planted next to the stage.



*Just under 130mm long, Bradypodion caeruleogula lives in trees in small forests in KwaZulu-Natal. Photo: Tyrone Ping*

# Where have all the chameleons gone?

And what you can do to encourage them to live in your garden. By Tyrone Ping

Until early 2022, there were 19 described species of chameleons in South Africa. That number has now changed, with three new species described, taking the total to 22. There are two typical chameleons (Chameleo) and 19 dwarf chameleons (Bradypodion) species.

There are very few biomes across South Africa where one cannot find at least a single species of chameleon, whether in coastal forests, grasslands, savannah, montane forests, fynbos, renosterveld or Karoo scrub. And due to the transformation of wild areas and rapid urbanisation, certain species have become well adapted to suburban gardens and well-planted urban areas.

So where have all the chameleons gone and why are we seeing fewer and fewer of these fascinating

reptiles?

There is a general trend that biodiversity across the world is rapidly declining due to a variety of factors: land use change, climate change, invasive species, over-exploitation and pollution.

There is, however, good news. In many areas where suitable habitat is present – both natural habitat and slightly disturbed – chameleons can still be found in great numbers, that is of course if you know how to find them. Chameleons are notoriously difficult to spot during the day. They are the masters of camouflage after all.

Chameleons are often more easily seen at night, while sleeping on the edges of branches and leaves. When chameleons rest at night, the specialised cells in the skin, called chromatophores, become pale and



are easily spotted by torchlight against vegetation.

Chameleons are up against a range of challenges: disappearing habitats, busy roadways, domestic pets and people keeping these amazing wild animals as pets.

### HABITAT LOSS AND FRAGMENTATION

Although not unique to chameleons, vast tracts of suitable habitat are being cleared to build houses, office parks or roadways. Even if a few chameleons survive the land-clearing, their habitat and food source is often lost and the remaining chameleons simply cannot survive. When animals are restricted to a small patch of habitat, once carrying capacity is reached, this forces animals to leave and attempt to find new habitats, usually by means of crossing roads, which leads to road mortalities.

### SUBURBAN GARDENS

Well-maintained suburban gardens with manicured lawns, high concrete walls and topped with electric fences are often inhospitable for chameleons. Large open lawn spaces without corridors of interconnecting vegetation will force chameleons to venture onto the lawns putting them at risk of predation by small mammals, birds and domestic pets. Chameleons are unable to climb up smooth concrete walls, further restricting their movements. If they do manage to climb these walls, they are often met with electric fences and killed on contact.

### PESTICIDES AND INSECTICIDES

Chameleon's prey items – their food – are killed by people using pesticides and insecticides. A sprayed or poisoned insect can also end up killing the chameleon.

### DOMESTIC PETS

Free roaming cats can destroy a healthy population of chameleons in a suburban garden in a matter of months. Once the local population has been eradicated, these free-roaming cats continue in adjacent greenbelts, causing further destruction to the chameleon populations.

### THE ILLEGAL TRADE

Although the removal and transportation of wild chameleons are illegal in all provinces in South Africa, the trade is big business, especially in the export market where many wild chameleons are collected under the guise of being captive bred. Taking a chameleon you find crossing the road home to your garden or buying chameleons being sold on the roadside is simply perpetuating the problem by supply and demand. Don't move chameleons far from where

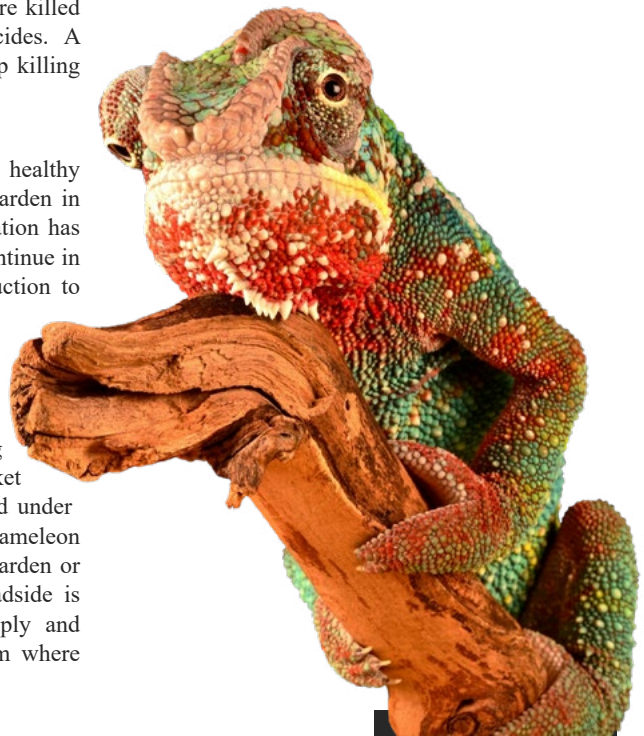
they are found and don't take chameleons to collectors or sanctuaries as they are seldom released.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

We can all make a difference to help these animals even by something as small as not totally clearing all-natural vegetation, planting indigenous and by not supporting the illegal wildlife trade.

- Create well-vegetated green corridors in your garden where chameleons are able to move around freely without being noticed or forced to move across large open spaces.
- Growing indigenous plants and shrubs, which flower naturally in-season, attracts a large diversity of butterflies and other insects which the chameleons need in order to thrive. If your garden is planted correctly, chameleons will eventually make their way into your garden.
- Creating a compost heap or an area in the garden where you allow leaves and garden cuttings to naturally break down, brings more insects into the garden.
- Planting more indigenous trees, plants and flowers, and clearing alien vegetation, will create healthy green spaces which encourage insects and allow chameleons to naturally thrive.

*Tyrone Ping is a herpetologist and published author who travels South Africa documenting and photographing some of the country's most elusive reptiles. © 2022 GroundUp.*





Rotary Africa  
Magazine

*No Increase for  
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# An open book

With an assist from Rotary, a Liberian refugee realises his dream of establishing a library in his home country

Fifteen-year-old Leo Nupolu Johnson was in school when the shooting began. It was 18 September 1998 and the country of Liberia was poised between two civil wars: the one that had ended in 1997 and the second that would begin in 1999. Now, in Monrovia, the capital, Liberia's president had launched a violent attack to eliminate his rivals. As the fighting accelerated, Johnson fled the school and in the chaos that followed he was separated from his family. Ultimately he landed in a refugee camp in Côte d'Ivoire. Years would pass before he saw his family again.

Today, Johnson, 39, can reflect on his past from his home in Hamilton, Ontario. As the founder and executive director of Empowerment Squared - an NGO that assists and inspires marginalised youth, many of them newly arrived in Canada - he has begun to fulfil a dream he nurtured when he arrived as a refugee in Canada in 2006.

"As a child growing up in Liberia, I never had the experience of what a library looked like," he recalls in a promotional video for the Liberian Learning Centre, currently under construction outside of Monrovia. "Still, as a young man, I had this burning desire that no child should be allowed to go to school without access to books and educational materials. I set out on a journey to make sure that this was going to be a different reality for children going to school in Liberia."

In 1998, all that lay in the future. Johnson



remained in the refugee camp in Côte d'Ivoire until 2002, when civil war broke out there. He fled to the Buduburam camp in Ghana, was host to approximately 50 000 Liberian refugees. One of the women there, a single mother whom Johnson often helped, was given an immigration document to complete. Because she couldn't read or write English or French, Johnson filled out her paperwork and served as an interpreter during her interview. As a result, he was allowed to immigrate to Canada with her.

Johnson was accepted at McMaster University in Hamilton, where he studied political science. While there, he noticed that many refugee youths, including some from Liberia, dropped out of high school due to struggles with cultural differences, financial challenges and pre and post-migration trauma.

With help from other McMaster students, Johnson started what became Empowerment Squared as a campus club to support and tutor those young students. "My larger goal was always to support newcomer families and the black community, which was facing similar discouraging outcomes due to poverty and marginalisation," he says. After graduating from McMaster, Johnson worked at a bank and as a development intern at his alma mater. In 2014, he devoted himself full time to Empowerment Squared, despite experiencing some initial financial hardships. "In 2015, I became the first paid staffer," he says. "Today, we're in two locations with 15 staffers."

In the last decade, Empowerment Squared has supported more than 5 000 newcomer youths and families and it is turning Johnson's dream of the Liberian Learning Centre into a reality. Which is where Rotary comes in.

Johnson was introduced to Rotary in 2010. After helping with various Rotary projects, he decided to present his idea for building the Liberian Learning Centre to the Rotary Club of Hamilton (D7090). In the audience at one of his presentations was Paul Takala, the CEO and chief librarian of the Hamilton Public Library and a member of the club's international service committee.

"When I heard Leo's vision," Takala says, "I

thought his deep connections with Liberia, along with his experience in Canada, made him uniquely qualified to accomplish a lot of impactful things that could be self-sustaining." Today, the Hamilton Public Library is one of the learning centre's principal supporters.

Takala accompanied Johnson to Liberia for the centre's official ground-breaking ceremony in 2019, two years after Johnson joined the Hamilton Rotary club. "The resilience of the Liberian people and their deep connection to Leo and his work was clear," Takala says. "We can help people improve their world, but if we do it with a sense of mutual sharing and a recognition that we can learn as much from them as they from us, then a lot of small miracles can happen."

According to Johnson, about a dozen Rotary clubs in Ontario and Liberia have contributed more than \$30 000 toward the learning centre. And in 2020, the Hamilton club, in partnership with the Rotary Club of Monrovia (D9101) - which is raising funds for a Rotary room at the library, devoted to the seven areas of focus - secured a global grant of \$87 000 to fund the development of a solar energy grid for the centre. In July, Johnson estimated that the first phase of construction on the centre should be completed in the next 18-20 months.

"In Rotary, the principle of assisting people comes with the question of sustainability," says Johnson. The green solar energy is part of the centre's answer to that question, as are its plans to offer classes in personal and professional development, information literacy, computer training and entrepreneurship. A small-business incubation centre, an indoor recreation facility and the renovation of an existing conference centre on the site are also part of the project.

Johnson has since reunited with his family - all of whom stayed in Liberia - and he is proud that his dream has come true. "I hope to inspire other Liberians with the learning centre," he says. "It demonstrates that we can lead the rebuilding of our country and foster socioeconomic prosperity in a sustainable manner through innovation, collaboration and culturally responsive initiatives."

The Rotary Club of Monrovia is proud to have taken the lead and joined with Empowerment Squared and the Rotary Club of Hamilton in welcoming other Rotary clubs from around the world and individuals to raise \$50 000 to support of the Liberian Learning Centre Project by Empowerment Squared - also involving an approved global grant (solar power). Learn more about how you or your Rotary club can support this project at [www.empowermentsquared.org/rotary](http://www.empowermentsquared.org/rotary).



*Kim Wolhuter was the keynote speaker at the anniversary dinner.*



# 50 amazing years

August 2022 was a busy month for the Rotary Club of Gaborone (D9400). It started with the club's 50th Anniversary Gala Dinner at Phakalane Golf Estate.

More than 300 people attended and the guest speaker was Kim Wolhuter, an acclaimed South African conservationist, wildlife photographer and filmmaker. His grandfather was a founding ranger of the Kruger National Park who was famous for single-handedly fighting off an attack by male lions and killing one while being dragged off to be eaten.

Kim's father, Harry Wolhuter, later became head

ranger at Kruger National Park and Kim has carried on the family tradition. He is famous for being able to get so close to wildlife that he can touch and play with them and his slide show presentation contained many examples of him stroking hyenas, cheetahs, leopards and lions.

He walks about barefoot, not only in the bush, but throughout life. Indeed, he was barefoot when he stepped off his flight from Zimbabwe. This amazing and very successful event raised a considerable sum of money for some of the club's projects.





## New surgical equipment for Mauritius

Four state-of-the-art pieces of equipment for cataract, vitrectomy and glaucoma surgeries, were presented to the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, by the Rotary Club of Beau Bassin-Rose Hill (D9220) held at Le Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel in June.

Also in attendance were the Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr Kailesh Kumar Jagutpal, the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare, Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah, the President of the Rotary Club of Beau

Bassin-Rose Hill, Mr Arvin Authelsingh and project leader, Rtn Maheshwarsingh Chakhoor.

President Arvin Authelsingh spoke of the club's commitment to various incentives that assist the Mauritian people. The equipment, valued at approximately \$315 000, will help to cater for more patients undergoing cataracts, vitrectomy and glaucoma surgeries.

Endowed with the latest technology, the surgeries are pain-free, ensuring a quicker recovery and return to regular routines.



## A special visit for Chatsworth

The community of Chatsworth buzzed with excitement when District Governor Gavin Jepson visited the Rotary Club of Chatsworth (D9370) in August.

The day's events kicked off with a heart-warming container handover project at Queensburgh Primary School. Past President Logie Naidoo of IVS Containers and his team fully converted the

container into a much-needed library facility for the learners. Principal Dr NG Reddy, his management team and learners were ecstatic at the unveiling of the new library.

The DG spent the rest of the day visiting other project sites in and around Chatsworth such as the Hare Krishna Temple and the Sarva Dharma Ashram in Welbedacht.



# Treats for the frontline

Recently the EarlyAct Club of Outeniqua Primary School, sponsored by the Rotary Club of George (D9350), concluded its latest community service project.

The learners of the EarlyAct Club, assisted by their parents, supplied beautifully decorated cupcakes for the approximately 350 nurses working at the George Hospital. Each cupcake included a message of gratitude and encouragement. Danielle Barnard, educator and EarlyAct coordinator at Outeniqua Primary and seven EarlyAct members delivered the cupcakes to the hospital.

The project was inspired by Barnard's experience at the hospital after the arrival of her first born last year. "During this time, I became particularly aware of the professionalism, dedication and care given by the nurses at the George Hospital. Their willingness to go the extra mile inspired me and

when we discussed potential projects for the Outeniqua Primary EarlyActors, doing something for the nurses at the hospital seemed logical. Our EarlyActors proved to be more than able for the task."

"Part of our mission as a value-driven school is assisting and empowering learners to make a positive contribution in our society", notes Dr Nico Venter, principal of Outeniqua Primary, "and EarlyAct for us provides a forum for answering this responsibility."

"We are so proud to be associated with the Outeniqua Primary EarlyActors," enthuses Di Kershaw, president of the Rotary Club of George. "Their initiatives embody the leadership, compassion and community spirit our country needs."

## ROTARY SHOWCASE



## Attention Rotary clubs!

Attention Rotary members! An Empowering Girls tab has been added to Rotary Showcase. Project champions are encouraged to log into My Rotary and upload their empowering girls projects. This will allow you and other Rotary clubs to collaborate, showcase and inspire more projects through a single platform!



# New hiking trails

The Makgeng Mountain Trail was developed by the Rotary Club of Haenertsburg (D9400) with the assistance and cooperation of the Makgeng Executive Council.

The aim was to develop a project that is beneficial to the community and tourists.

Situated above the village of Makgeng, 17 kilometres from Haenertsburg, the mountain surrounding Makgeng is an ideal natural region that could be preserved as a result of this development.

There are three circuits of differing lengths. These are marked on a simple map to allow hikers to choose a distance suitable for them.

A small entrance fee helps fund the maintenance of the trail and a project identified by the community for the community.

Local community members were chosen for training as local guides and learnt basic first aid, information on trees and plants found along the trail as well as birds of the area. Focus on indigenous knowledge of the plants and trees is an added attraction.

For more about the trail and bookings contact [rodharman360@gmail.com](mailto:rodharman360@gmail.com).



Rotary District 9400 held a two-day fundraising and marketing workshop for its clubs in August. The conference was hosted by Annelise de Jager, who created the Casual Day Sticker campaign. Rotarians Geshim Francis and Aneshrie Moodley of Rotary Club Polokwane (D9400) were among those who attended the event.

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# AFRICA IN BRIEF



Decoupage was the name of the game at Ons Tuiste Home for the elderly held in August as the Rotary Club of Pietersburg 100 (D9400). Monica van der Watt, Hannelie de Kock and Carina van Zyl-Smit undertook a workshop to keep the minds and fingers active. The project utilises art and creativity as a means of developing personal growth and focus, interactivity, stimulating imagination and concentration, all of which have been shown to help seniors communicate better and slow the deterioration of cognitive functions. Decoupage can be applied to almost any surface (wood, metal and glass) utilising a large number of readily available and recycled materials; these were combined in a process that involves not only the conceptualisation and planning stage, but also practical cognitive aspects of fitting, cutting and attaching the various materials. As the decoupage projects were undertaken by small groups with the coordinators, concept development and planning (and many other things) were discussed in detail for the production of the final artwork.

The Rotary Club of Algoa Bay (D9370) handed out wheelchairs, commodes, shower chairs and various mobility aids to individuals, NGOs and other Rotary clubs. Sixteen organisations attended the hand over at Doubell Bricks.





The Rotary Club of Amanzimtoti (D9370) was visited by PDG Angelika Zimmerman of the Rotary Club Überlingen (D1930).



A music workshop was facilitated by Rotarian Pethambaram Francis, of the Rotary Club of Polokwane (D9400), at Siloe School for the Blind. The workshop was held over three days and culminated in a concert for safari visitors from the United States.



The Rotary Club of George (D9350), Eden Lions Club and George Lions Club spent two great days packing stew mix bags at the Garden Route Food Pantry in George. This two-day inter-service club project supplied local crèches in and around George with 550 food packs, ultimately feeding 3 300 children.



Members of the Interact Club of Highlands North Boys' High School received their Interact scrolls from Assistant Governor Jean Bernardo of the Rotary Club of Rosebank (D9400). The school permits these scrolls to be worn on their blazers. The Interactors also received their certificates of merit for having completed a first aid course. With AG Jean are Neo Segooa, Allan Sibanda, Njabulo Seruto, Wandile Mtshali, Levi Nyathi, Mashudo Papala and educator Mimie van Deventer.



Ann President Mieke MacDonald of the Rotary Club of Helderberg (D9350) received a cash donation from friends in Holland to help needy families in the area. Food parcels worth a total of R10 000 were purchased for people at Kay's Caravan Park in the Strand.



The Rotary Club of Phoenix (D9370) celebrated Women's Month with a comedy show to uplift the spirits of the attendees after two years of lockdown, riots and floods. The phenomenal Bash with Tash was hilarious, spontaneous and inspiring. The audience of both men and women left feeling motivated and empowered by the comedian's journey. The act was followed by the fabulous Malaika who had the audience working for prizes by showing off their talents. The event was an opportunity to fundraise for the annual bursary project.





The Rotary Club of Port Shepstone (D9370) recently supported the opening of the 1st Port Shepstone Boy Scouts Troop. Since the Port Shepstone Scouts had closed many years ago, the club's Youth Committee, led by Shamin Maharaj, together with a group of community volunteers, decided to restart the movement. The club supported the training of volunteers, assisted with rehabilitation of the Scout Hall, oversaw the registration process and contributed toward the purchase of the necessary uniforms and learning material for the new leaders. The official launch was held in August.



The Rotary Club of Polokwane (D9400) was joined at their meeting by eight American Rotarians who were on safari. The guests gave a short speech about themselves. After PP Charles Hardy demonstrated how to blow the safari horn, the guests tried their best to do the same. There was also an exchange of Rotary flags between President Susan van de Merwe and guests Debbie Hale and Carol Helzer.





The Rotary Club of Haenertsburg (D9400) undertook a Food Gardens Global Grant project in the Making, Segwashi and Spitzkop villages. It partnered with Choice, a professional organisation that provided training. The Rotarians realised that their understanding of what permaculture was sorely lacking and learnt a lot in a short time. At the food gardens training are PDG Maurice Stander and Rotarian Betty Ramasalela.

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