

LitRAG

Literacy Rotarian Action Group Newsletter

August 2017

LitRAG at the Atlanta Convention

The RI Convention in Atlanta was a great opportunity to network, share ideas and recommit to making a difference. And LitRAG certainly had a presence and had a part in all of that! Our booth couldn't have been better placed for meeting Rotarians interested in literacy. Being just a few steps from the hall where the general sessions were held, LitRAG members gathered to meet fellow Rotarians with a passion for education and literacy!



Above: RI Past President, Bill Boyd, conveys the importance and significant impact that Rotary literacy programs are having throughout the world.

LitRAG was well represented at our breakout session on Wednesday afternoon. Moderated by Past RI President Bill Boyd (- see above), the session highlighted several areas where Rotarians can and are making a difference through literacy:

- ♦ Carolyn Johnson spoke of the importance of clubs getting involved in **literacy projects in their own communities**. Large or small, hands-on involvement with education projects should be an emphasis and a goal of every Rotary club.
- ♦ Brian Julius spoke of the impact that **Speaking Books** is making in promoting health through literacy. *Speaking Books* delivers powerful messages on a variety of topics, such as, disease prevention, handwashing, immunization and multiple others, through picture, text and sound.
- ♦ Nancy Leonhardt challenged us to include projects that address the challenges of **adult literacy needs**. Nearly one in 9 adults lacking basic literacy skills, impacts on their ability to care for their families and takes a toll on health care, nutrition, infant mortality and the ability of communities to thrive.

Website: www.litrag.org

Facebook: facebook.com/reading.rotary

Contact John Thorne or Carolyn Johnson:
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- ♦ Dr Ravi Vadlamani explained the tremendous effort and impact of **Rotary India Literacy Mission**. By emphasizing five essential aspects of literacy: teacher support, e-learning, adult literacy, child development, and happy schools, TEACH is forming significant partnerships and improving the quality of education throughout India.



LitRAG will definitely have a booth at the **Toronto Convention**, 23–27 June 2018. We welcome your involvement and ideas to promote projects. If you have a suggestion for a LitRAG breakout session topic, please send your ideas to info@litrag.org

For more information about the topics presented at the Atlanta Convention, contact:

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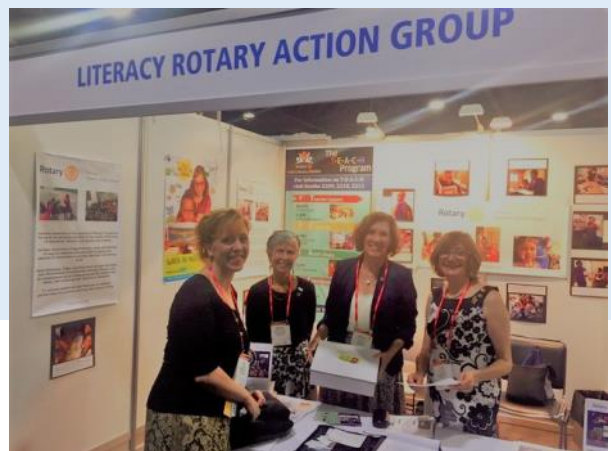
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How Does Your Club Celebrate Literacy Month?

September is Literacy Month in the Rotary world. As one of our six areas of focus, Basic Education and Literacy is key to the service of Rotarians. Literacy Month is a perfect time for all clubs and Rotarians to examine how their club is engaged with projects locally that make a significant difference in a child's or an adult's education. Literacy projects are areas where **every Rotarian and every club can and should be involved.**

A favorite example of mine is the involvement of the **Rotary Club of Kajjansi (Uganda)**. A few years ago, this club noticed a small, government school attended primarily by children from a nearby fishing village. The school was tiny, just three small classrooms that housed kindergarten through 6th grade. It was located near the top of a hill overlooking Lake Victoria, surrounded by large, expensive private homes.

The Rotarians talked with the director and teachers to ask how they could help. The response was for more classrooms so that each grade could have its own space. After an agreement with the Ministry of Education was reached to provide a teacher for each grade level, Rotarians took action and raised the funds to build three more basic classrooms of concrete block with a metal roof. But what a significant difference!

In addition, the keen Rotarians determined that a **mentorship program** would also benefit the children. So each Rotarian (and now, Interactors) is a mentor who provides a child with a backpack (- see right) and some basic school supplies. More importantly, regular visits are made to the school to check on each child's progress, follow up on attendance and grades and generally provide encouragement to study hard and stay in school. The results? The school has grown from 16 students to, three years later, 95 students enrolled and attending regularly! **Rotarians Making A Difference!**



Rotarians don't need to be educators to make a difference through literacy and education service projects. Our best efforts are our time and attention. There are so many projects that your club can undertake that are not costly and do not require any special training. Could you:

- ♦ donate books to a local library or classroom in recognition of club speakers?
- ♦ read with a young child on a regular basis (read to a child or, better yet, listen to a child read a story to

you)? There are some great options to do this using technology!

- ♦ sponsor a set of books for a classroom, each reinforcing the themes of *The Four-Way Test* (tell the truth, be fair, be a good friend, help others)?
- ♦ set up a lending library at a homeless shelter, women's shelter, soup kitchen or veterans' center (using gently used books that your family has already read)?

Get the idea? Now once you've tackled a one of these projects, imagine the difference that your club could make by taking on a large-scale literacy project!

What about you?

LitRAG would like to know what your club does for local literacy projects or how you celebrate Literacy Month. Would you please send a short description of your local project to info@litrag.org and we'll publish them in our newsletter and post the on the LitRAG website. Be sure to include contact information!



What Do Motivated Teachers Do on Vacation?

Though it would be tempting to relax and read a good book, for a week in July teachers from San Diego Schools traveled to Honduras as part of a Vocational Training Team to improve the strategies and skills used in primary school classrooms (- see photo above). Twenty talented and energetic teachers took the first steps to implement a **three-year project focused on improving student attendance, academic performance, literacy and critical thinking skills.**

The goal is to improve school environments by making classrooms more engaging so that children will want to attend school because classes are engaging and stimulating and by changing the current culture to improve aspirations and prevent kids from joining gangs.

Led by Rotarian Maxie Gluckman and sponsored by the Rotary E-Club of San Diego (USA) and RC El Progreso (Honduras), the \$91,000 Global Grant will

include of a series of VTTs to support Honduran teachers over the next three years. The San Diego teachers were all volunteers who joined with Rotarian educators to use their skills to make a difference – and what a difference they made! Over the course of a week, we worked with teachers from 18 schools giving four training sessions each day, two in the morning and two more each afternoon. Our ‘classroom’ was a train museum, which certainly added interest to the daily lessons. The program, ‘**Train for Change**’, ironically became a real train moving toward a better future for students and teachers in Honduras.

Teachers were immersed in the effective use of picture books, developing critical thinking skills, classroom management and working with the social and emotional needs of students. The plan is for teachers to become leaders in their own schools, sharing the information and serving as coaches for their peers.

For most of the US teachers, this was their first time to be involved in working in a developing country. The scarcity of books and school supplies was an eye-opener, but the lasting impression for each was the eager interest of the Honduran teachers. As we discovered, this was their vacation week which they used to attend this week-long training. Clearly, each participant returned home with a renewed sense of professional purpose and a commitment to collaborate further with our Honduran colleagues and friends. Just as evident was the experience to learn, firsthand, about Rotary’s mission. By spending the week with Rotarians, it was an ideal way to show what Rotary is, what Rotarians do, and the collective good that results from the collaboration of Rotarians.

For more information, contact Maxie Gluckman:
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This year, **International Literacy Day** (8 September) will be celebrated across the world with the theme of **Literacy in a Digital World**. UNESCO chose this theme with the overall aims to look at what kind of literacy skills people need to navigate increasingly digitally-mediated societies and to explore effective literacy policies and programs that can leverage the opportunities that the digital world provides.

At record speed, digital technologies are fundamentally changing the way people live, work, learn and socialize everywhere. They are giving new possibilities to people to improve all areas of their lives including: access to information; knowledge management; networking; social services; industrial production; and mode of work. However, those who lack access to

digital technologies and the knowledge, skills and competencies required to navigate them, can end up marginalized in increasingly digitally-driven societies. Literacy is an essential skill.

Just as knowledge, skills and competencies evolve in the digital world, so does what it means to be literate. In order to close the literacy skills gap and reduce inequalities, this year’s International Literacy Day will highlight the challenges and opportunities in promoting literacy in the digital world – a world where, despite progress, at least 758 million adults and 263 million out-of-school children still lack basic literacy skills.

International Literacy Day is celebrated annually worldwide and brings together governments, multi- and bilateral organizations, NGOs, private sectors, communities, teachers, learners and experts in the field. It is an occasion to mark achievements and reflect on ways to counter remaining challenges for the promotion of literacy as an integral part of lifelong learning.

*from UNESCO: United Nations Educational,
Scientific, and Cultural Organization*

Talking with the Chair of the LitRAG, PRID John Thorne

Editor: Have you had any family activities lately that ‘warmed your heart’?

John: Actually everything we do together warms my heart, but a few weeks ago, I had a ‘significant’ birthday. The whole family gathered together for four days at Cradle Mountain in the north-west center of Tasmania. With my two daughters, two sons-in-law and our five grandchildren, we had fun together, including some serious walks on the mountain in ice and snow – a wonderful time in the outdoors!



John is the ‘young’ guy with the sunglasses to the left of center.

Editor: John, what Rotary tasks have you been involved in recently that give you a good feeling?

John: For the last few months, a group of Rotary friends, community friends and I have been preparing carefully for a day's training workshop that will target a group of recent arrivals (refugees) to Tasmania to share skills in creating and maintaining a kitchen garden. Due to the traumatic state of their homeland, most of the refugees have not ever grown any vegetables. The day will involve very practical, hands-on participation and skills as well as reading guides and it will offer an understanding about planting and cultivating vegetable plants, their nutritional values and how to prepare them to eat.

Editor: I imagine that what you are creating will form a strong model for other Rotary clubs to implement. I hope that you'll share this with us when you have trialed it. Are there any other Rotary highlights to share?

John: With a friend, I recently published, as a Kindle eBook, a concise, clear guide entitled, [Good Manners in Rotary](#). It really summarizes the essentials of sound protocol and etiquette with hints on being business-like in Rotary, leading to more effective meetings and interactions. It was first written in 2004 and following four sell-out paper editions, we moved to this digital edition – expanded and enhanced. The cost is quite minimal and, of course, all proceeds go to The Rotary Foundation.

Editor: Well done, John! Thank you.



How to Raise a Reader **by Pamela Paul and Maria Russo**

The information provided at [How to Raise a Reader](#) is excellent. It is clear, direct and to the point, including emphasizing such things as turning on a television, or even an audiobook, does not count as reading.

There is advice for every parent for nurturing literacy in newborns, babies and toddlers with links to other advice for children at other ages.



Back to the basics? **No! Forward to the basics.**

Current research confirms many aspects of knowledge that good teachers have used and understood about reading. For instance:

Vocabulary - A person needs to have a broad, rich vocabulary and use of sentences before beginning to read. This is the reason that children growing up with interactive older siblings and parents who engage them in a variety of topics will arrive at a learning place ready to read. In addition, it is essential to continue to add to that vocabulary in the widest sense through talking and listening.

Phonics - Here we have an ability to understand that there is a relationship between sounds and the symbols we use to write them - in any language. We don't need to use the word 'phonics', however, those learning to read will need to decode and work out the one-to-one relationship between sounds and symbols (letters). It's like a mental game and can be made good fun.

Phonemic awareness - Here we have another mental game that the early reader plays. It is working out, with a good teacher's guidance, that words can be broken into separate parts or sounds. The more the learner handles oral language in a skilled way, the faster they will make the connections.

Two further skills come to the early reader: **fluency** and **comprehension**. A reader aims to read accurately, quickly and expressively (fluently) while also trying to get meaning from the text using their knowledge of words, ideas and facts. These early skills need to be nourished.

The ultimate goal of reading is a combination of enjoyment and comprehension. Talking, interacting and sharing ideas is common to all cultures. The methods we use vary and some children will learn to read whatever methods we use. It is the teacher who needs to have a strong understanding of how it fits together and assists each learner to better function in today's complex world.

Fluent readers have a better chance for employment and a wider, more positive interaction with the world. In Rotary, we try hard to offer literacy skills within basic education for young and the older learner since this leads to genuine understandings of others and then peace.

Report from Sylvia Byers Literacy Coordinator Rotary District 9455

(Rotary D9455 liaises with schools to implement literacy and math solutions using a researched computer program to help children become fluent readers and improve math skills.)

I am currently 82 and don't mind who knows. In October, I go back to Mt Augustus, Western Australia, located 852 km north of Perth for three weeks.



Above: My Mt Augustus classroom with cattle grazing nearby.

The oldest student is a writing refusal kid – a real challenge – and the younger sister (in the picture at right) is heading in the same direction. Their mother teaches the three kids and is quite outstanding. They will still be mustering livestock on this station (ranch) when I go to give her a hand.



This time I will fly into Carnarvon and the family will pick me up from there for the six-hour drive to their station. I only have one spare tire and you need at least two to go to these remote places. Last time I drove to another station called 'Bidgemia' at the end of the asphalt after a 13-hour drive.

There are lots of kangaroos this year as it was a bumper year last year and they bred up. I drove very carefully last weekend and kept telling myself to brake hard and don't swerve if I see emus or kangaroos on the road ahead.



The family I last stayed with have only one vehicle which is not 'roo damaged at present. (It's their new one of only four weeks.)

Left: Typical cattle station in this hard land.

Brief News #1

As this Newsletter is being prepared, the Vice-Chair, PDG Carolyn Johnson, is working hard as a volunteer with Basic Learning activities with teachers and children in Guatemala.

Brief New #2

John Thorne (the LitRAG Chair), in another community service activity involving kitchen gardens for refugees (mentioned on p. 4), organised the successful translation of a kitchen gardening calendar into the Nepalese language in readiness for a coming gardening workshop for Nepali residents in Tasmania.

Brief News #3

Rotary International has a very active discussion forum on its website. Please consider joining in to share your experience and ideas and also to learn or to network.

You will need to register with your Rotary membership details under [My Rotary](#). Then look for the "Exchange Ideas" link then "Discussion Groups". It's good fun and you may make new International friends.

LitRAG Office-bearers

LitRAG Executive Committee:

- Chair: John Thorne, PRID (Australia)
- Vice-Chair: Carolyn Johnson, PDG (USA)
- Secretary: SP (Bala) Balasubramanian, PDG (India)
- Treasurer: Harvey Baxter, Rotarian, (USA)

LitRAG Directors:

- ♦ Rodolfo Bianchi, PDG (Guatemala)
- ♦ Sylvia Byers, PDG (Australia)
- ♦ Chebab Elawar, PDG (USA)
- ♦ David Fowler, Past President RIBI (England)
- ♦ Shekhar Mehta, PRID (India)

LitRAG Advisors to the Board:

- Bill Boyd, Past RI President (New Zealand)
- Noraseth Pathmanand, PRID (Thailand)
- William Stumbaugh, Rotarian (Ecuador)



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