President Courtenay Thompson's Annual Report 2008-9

When I accepted to become the President of the Club for this year it was really out of a debt of honour to all those members of the Club who, had in its then 95 years, achieved so many outstanding achievements in Rotary and in service to the proud city of Belfast. I just could not accept that this Club would not reach its centenary and would not begin its second century, at least fit and well and, if possible, ready to play a vibrant role in our city and in Rotary as it had done in its earlier years.

Looking at this one year I cannot possibly say whether we have been successful, if for no other reason that we are not there to July 2011, the centenary of when the Club held its preliminary meeting.

Do I think that we have achieved our preliminary objectives? - Only partially.

The first two objectives to be achieved if we were to have a hope of getting there at all, President Elect Arthur and I decided, were that firstly we must communicate more effectively with all our members, all other Rotarians and establish effective communications with the community in which we operate. Secondly we must at least establish how we could reduce the average age of our Club members and at the same time see if we could return the Club to the membership the Club had when it was founded in 1911- at least 100 members and if possible 100 active and participating members.

With RIBI and District 1160 both suffering from a falling membership and steeply increasing average age this was going to be a Herculean task, but absolutely vital if our next generation is have the opportunity to serve the community above self and to enjoy the good fellowship that Rotary offers.

Improve communications - the easy one, but only easy because our communications team have produced two stunning weapons in our armour of communications tools.

Our monthly news-sheet Flash is a superb tool in getting over to our members what has happened in the Club, advance notice of what we are trying to achieve and dates for diaries. It has also provided the President with an excellent promotional tool when trying to raise the profile of our Club within Rotary, in District, RIBI and even occasionally in RI and around the world.

The creation of our web site must have been an enormous task and we must be very thankful for the sponsorship we received to achieve this from the Science Park. But why it now is a joy to log onto and see such a full picture of the many successful and varied programs that our Club runs has only happened due to an incredible effort of one of our Paul Harris fellows and his very talented partner. Any one within the Club who has logged onto the site has been informed and encouraged. The compliments, and critiques that I have solicited, from outside the Club show that it too has improved the standing of our Club with other Rotarians and the public at large dramatically.

Progress in hand must be our communications with the media in general and although we have achieved some press coverage we must find a better way of making the news that we do create more appealing to press and media alike.

Membership - we have been very successful in attracting 24 potential members who are now more positive in the way they perceive Rotary and The Rotary Club of Belfast in particular;

they want to know what we are doing, they are prepared to help us on occasional projects, but for what ever reason they are not yet ready to make the commitment to actually join. They all live hectic lives, they are all busy people, they may not like the format of the current way our Club operates, they may regard our membership dues as too expensive. There may be many more views, which they feel we would not like to hear, but the end result is that they are not ready to join yet.

I believe each member of the Club sees the vital necessity of bringing in new blood we just need to harness that vision and get everyone to actually sit down and look for those younger people who have so much to offer the Club.

The Club must be prepared to think the unthinkable as to how we currently operate so that we can make becoming a Rotarian more attractive and fitting in with the modern life style of younger busy executives and civil servants. The membership team has drawn up an excellent and business-like action plan of the way forward, but they do need to recruit some members who are prepared to sit down and actually deliver. The Club is actively looking at RIBI's marketing plans and will try to ensure that the plan answers the critical need to create positive awareness of Rotary, find how to cover all the relevant target markets which are relevant to each district, and above all find how to overcome the perceived barriers to actually joining a local Club.

If I were a headmaster, I think I would say in my report on Membership: *" Recognises that he could do better, needs to be prepared to sit down and actually produce actual candidates, not just names, if he does this and is prepared to be flexible, I have every confidence he will surprise himself and achieve a good result, even in these difficult times."*

The Club has been greatly saddened by the loss of PP Harry Corscadden. Aged 101 years young he continued to be a very active and interested honorary member of the Club, attending the Christmas Lunch meeting less than a week before his death. He is the only member that the Club has awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship with Sapphire.

I find it absolutely impossible to pick out the many incredibly successful programmes we run, each and every one has only happened because some of the members were prepared to really work hard and put on a very positive and vibrant story of the good work of the Rotary Club of Belfast.

I have asked each Convener and Service Chair to give you a report and I hope this gives the true report of all our activities. A very full programme delivered by a highly committed team and a team that was charming to work with, I cannot thank them all enough for keeping me on the rails, responding to my lame suggestions and coming up trumps when it really counted.

I think we delivered, certainly beyond my expectations and I can only hope you have felt it was worthwhile and that you got some excellent fellowship out of your undoubted hard work.

As ever, a successful Club just does not happen without a substantial amount of work behind the scenes, both secretarially and financially by our two Trojans, Mark Davidson and Tim Browne, our Hon Secretary and Hon Treasurer respectively.

They both will have completed four years of excellent service to our Club and four very humble Presidents who could not have survived without them. Thanks just do not seem enough - they have given service above and beyond the call of duty.