



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings Fellow Rotarians

Since our last newsletter much has happened. We held a successful breakout session at the Los Angeles convention with speakers from the UN Mine Action Service, the Mine Action Information Service of John's Hopkins University and the US office of the Mines Action Group. We also staffed a booth in the house of friendship for the whole convention with help from many NGO partners including the HALO group. I wish to underline again my thanks for all the Rotarians who helped out you were great. We met many new people, signed up new members and learned new ways in which we can move forward.

I also attended the council of Rotarian Action Group Chairs and was excited to see how far this group has come over the past year. Once again it was clear that RI headquarters increasingly sees the importance of these groups and they are rapidly developing ways to assist and empower us. A new annual report format has been developed and we completed our first such report in the fall, you can see a copy on our website via the link on our home page. There is still much discussion amongst the groups about fundraising, matching grants and other issues and I expect a continuing stream of developments on this front. The forum was extremely useful and reminded me of the great things that Rotarians can achieve when they get together and set their sights high.

As outlined in my last message, we have been working on ways to improve communication amongst the Chapters and members of our RAG. I am pleased to announce that we have completed the RFMA Yahoo Groups site and email list and you will all be receiving an invitation to join shortly. If you can not bear the suspense, you can visit the site by following the link on the RFMA website. This tool will allow us to talk to other members, circulate ideas, seek advice, support and expertise for projects and many other things. Watch your inbox for more on this over the next few days.

It has become increasingly clear that our District Chapters are the driving force

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Rotarians for Mine Action is a voluntary not-for-profit association dedicated to building fellowship and landmine awareness amongst Rotarians and

behind our group and we need to improve our level of support and communication with the leaders of these groups. Therefore, the Board has decided to create the new board position of Vice President, Chapters Coordination. We have succeeded in recruiting an outstanding Rotarian and staunch supporter of RFMA, Verna Andrews, past President of the Rotary Club of Oakville Trafalgar. Verna is the previous chair of the District 7080 District Chapter and was an active participant in the seminal conference held in Seattle Washington in 2002. Verna will be introducing herself to the chapter chairs very shortly.

I am also very excited that former RI President Wilf Wilkinson has joined RFMA and we look forward to working with him as we move the group forward.

We expect to have more exciting developments for you in the coming months and will be continuing to develop ways to increase our membership, expand our reach and develop and encourage more Mine Action projects.

Sandy Boucher
President RFMA



**RFMA's new
Vice President of
Chapter Coordination,
Verna Andrews.**

The United Nations Mine Action Service--UNMAS--was grateful for the opportunity to speak at the break-out session at the 2008 Rotary International convention in Los Angeles. Although I work for UNMAS, I made my presentation on behalf of the UN Mine Action Team, which consists of 14 UN entities including the UN Children's Fund, the UN Development Programme, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The session enabled us to provide Rotarians with a snapshot of the efforts of and challenges to the UN Mine Action Team and its implementing partners.

The Team recognizes the important contributions made by Rotarians. Whether these contributions are made directly to non-governmental implementers or are used by community groups to support initiatives that maximize the potential of land that has been cleared of landmines and unexploded ordnance, the funds made available by Rotary always have a positive impact on post-conflict recovery and development. UNMAS looks forward to future collaboration with Rotary and counts on your continued support.” *Justin Brady, Office-in-Charge, Programme Section, UN Mine Action Service*



Dinner Goes To the Dogs

On June 12, 2008, Rotarian Tod Wright spent all day cooking dinner for 24 of his friends. Lobster Bisque, Osso Buco, and Risotto Milanese, were all on the menu, accompanied by the finest wines. It is hard to believe, but this was all done for the dogs.

Flashback to March of this year, when Wright heard Verna Andrews, a representative from the Canadian Landmine Foundation, speak at his weekly meeting of the **Burlington Lakeshore Rotary Club**. She told about the desperate plight of people living in former war-torn countries, unable to go about living a normal life, tilling the soil or rebuilding their communities because of landmines left behind by long departed armies.



According to Andrews, one of the most effective ways to remove landmines is through the use of specially trained dogs working with a deminer. These extraordinary Mine Detection Dogs can speed up the work of manual demining by about 10 times. By smelling the explosive charge, these incredible dogs are remarkably adept at identifying the location of mines, without coming into direct contact with them. It's good to know that there has never been a Canadian-trained dog killed or injured in the field.

Wright was so moved by this story that he resolved to raise the necessary \$15,000 to purchase and train a mine detection dog. As part of the Night of A Thousand Dinners, he invited several friends to join him for a gourmet dinner and make a donation to the Canadian Landmine Foundation. His Rotary club also agreed to match his fundraising efforts for this worthwhile cause. After all, it's not often one has the opportunity to save a life!

The response was overwhelming. Over thirty people donated more than \$15,000 to this wonderful cause. With the match by his Rotary club, and the amount raised by clubs in District 7080, Wright and friends were able to fund the purchase and training of not one, but two dogs!

The celebration dinner was a huge success attended by 24 supporters. And, at the end of the night, Wright's two Labrador Retrievers even managed to snag a couple of bones from the Osso Buco. Two happy dogs at home, but more importantly, two dogs that will be trained to save lives! All in all, a great dinner.

Submitted by Verna Andrews, RC Oakville-Trafalgar, RFMA VP of Chapter Coordination

American Rotarians and a Canadian Rotarian Tripping in the mine fields of Cambodia



As we drove from Siem Reap north to Kouk Prasat we came across lush, green, picturesque fields and villages. The drive was long, but worth every bump. Upon our arrival at the site of the working men in the mine fields we were given a briefing of the parameters of this particular area.

Pride, safety and diligence of work was very evident in this group headed up by HALO International. We donned our head gear/bullet proof vest and ventured into the actual grounds being striped of the fearful explosives.

We met only a few of the 36 men who apparently have been doing this for years. The sections work in "cycles", so in a normal month the Deminers work 24 days, then 6 days to rest. Out of a 7am to 3 pm work day, their routine is 30 minutes followed by 10 minute break with one hour lunch break. Wearing the helmets and full overalls, these men suffer the consequences of heat and humidity.

As we strolled casually amongst the fields, we noticed homes with families of many children surrounded by mines which is very common. Our grand finale was watching four discovered mines, explode with great safety.

At the end of that day, October 20th 2008, we were exhausted but excited to have had this experience.

Submitted by Karen Paul, RC Burlington North

Update on Vanna Min

As reported in the December 07 newsletter, Vanna Min lost her leg to a landmine when she was 6. Now 16 she visited Canada as part of the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Ottawa Treaty. Vanna was the inspiration of the children's story *Vanna's Dance* by Canadian writer Maria Almudevar-van Santen.

Following her visit to Canada, Rotarian Jack Bennett and the Rotary Club of Toronto-Forest Hill provided some funds to A Mine Free World Foundation to support a year of Vanna's schooling. Recently the Rotary Club of Etobicoke contributed an amount that should see Vanna through the rest of high school.



Vanna with RFMA
President Sandy Boucher

In December 08 Lisa McCoy, a member of the Rotary Club of Gravenhurst and Board member of A Mine Free World Foundation, traveled to Battambang to meet with Vanna to see how she was doing. You can read more about her visit to Vanna, and Lisa's work in Cambodia on her blog: <http://schoolsforcambodia.blogspot.com> (December 14th entry)



Lisa and Vanna at Battambang restaurant



Lisa and Vanna at Ek Phnom Temple

Lisa reported that Vanna is happy and healthy. She goes to school from Monday to Saturday from 6 am to 6 pm. In the morning, she takes the paid classes and in the afternoon, the regular ones. During the summer she attends school as well, continuing with the paid classes. Right now she is in Grade 10 and will continue on until Grade 12. The only class she has difficulty with is math, but her marks are still good in that subject.

After high school, she wants to go to University and her determination to become a Tour Guide is as strong as ever and she happily went through a book on Cambodia with Lisa describing for her some of the attractions.

Submitted by Scott Fairweather, RC Toronto-Forest Hill, RFMA VP of External Relations

My visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a beautiful country and was once a destination for those that loved the outdoors especially hiking. From a distance the beauty of the country is still breathtaking, but up close there are danger signs posted and tracts of land are cordoned off warning people to stay away as there are landmines in the area.



On an intellectual level, I always knew that demining was dangerous work, but it was not until my visit to an active minefield in July 2008 when I visited Bosnia and Herzegovina on a field trip, that I fully appreciated the extent of the dangers of the work of deminers.

My first visit was to a minefield on the outskirts of Sarajevo, a city that is in a valley and surrounded by hills. The minefield that I visited was on the side of a hill. They had just started demining a few days before our visit and so they were still working on clearing the safe lanes. I was allowed to walk in the safe lane (one metre wide) for about 30 metres into the minefield.



That was enough for me. The earth in those 30 metres was loose from clearing so there was not much traction thus making walking uphill a slippery task. Despite the fact that I was in the “safe-lane”, I did not feel very safe at all. I knew that one misstep could have me on the

wrong side of the yellow tape. From where I stood, I could see that the piece of ground that I stood on dropped off very sharply on the one side.

Still fresh in my mind was the fact that the mines that were used on this hillside were one of the most dangerous mines, the “bounding mine”. This mine when activated springs about a metre into the air and sprays fragments up to 200 metres in all directions. To my relief we didn’t linger in the safe-lane.



As we drove away, I felt a new respect and appreciation for the deminers and the dangerous but necessary work that they do. The conditions that they work under are less than ideal. On the day of our visit the temperature was well over 30 degrees Celsius and it was only 10:00AM! They also have to contend with terrain which can not only be hilly, but it can also be overgrown with shrubs and bushes, making their already difficult task even harder. Under these harsh conditions, they must be meticulous for they cannot afford to make a mistake that could cost them their lives. Talk about a stressful job, never again will I complain at month-end and year-end that my desk job is stressful.

Submitted by Seemoir Ho, RC North York, Treasurer RFMA

District Chapters & Club Champions

What is a RFMA District Chapter?

A Chapter is a policy and coordinating group, made up of RFMA members, within a District. Its role is to:

- Keep the District Governor informed of progress;
- Build awareness of the landmine issue in the District through sending emails to Champions, and identifying speakers within the District;
- Build membership for RFMA either directly or through the Champions;
- Learn more about landmine action and Rotary activities such as limb centres.
- Serve as District liaison with RFMA.
- Provide advice and support for District-wide mine action including recommending type of mine action and country to benefit.
- Recommend projects to be funded and report results back through the Champions;
- Build a network of Club Champions to promote and support mine action activities.

Please welcome incoming 7080
Chapter Chair Bill Koopman of
the Rotary Club of Oakville
Trafalgar



How do we establish a RFMA District Chapter?

The Chapter starts with someone prepared to provide mine action leadership in the District:

- Recruitment of members may include strategic (such as including a former Governor, former WCS Chairs) and geographic (regional representatives within the District).
- You might even find that it is appropriate to have more than one chapter due to the size of the District
- Contact RFMA to get a list of current RFMA members in their district

To register a RFMA District Chapter email us at info@rfma.org

What is a Club Champion?

A Champion is a Rotarian who:

- Is in a District with a RFMA Chapter, or who first agrees to organize a Chapter;
- Raises awareness of the landmine issue within the Club;
- promotes RFMA membership within a Club;
- serves as Club liaison with the RFMA District Chapter;
- encourages Club participation in landmine action.

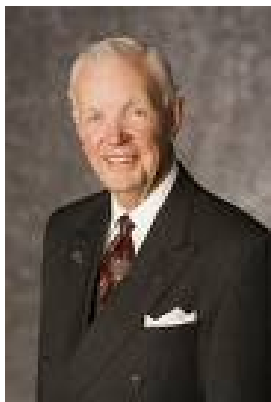
Things You Can Do

When our Rotary President DK Lee came into office in June of last year, he quickly identified his focus as one of the millennium goals: MDG #4 is “To reduce child mortality”. The specific initial target attached to this goal is to “*Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate*”. To this end, an exercise was begun to identify ways in which Rotarians around the world can help in the achievement of this goal.

One of the ways in which this project was undertaken was a survey of all of the Rotarian Action Groups to develop an understanding of the ways in which each group is taking actions that reduce child mortality. The survey was undertaken by Charles Kurtzman, Assistant General Coordinator of the RI Health and Hunger Resource Group and after completion, a brochure was developed to convey this information to Rotarians. The resulting document is entitled “Things You Can Do” and is an excellent resource for all Rotarians. The text contains a section on the work of RFMA on pages 28 and 29, outlining our efforts in Mine Risk Education and Demining, as well as providing basic information on our group.

This is an excellent example of the way in which RAGs are rapidly becoming a focal point for Rotary work and also the way in which RI itself is using them as a primary resource in relation to their individual areas of responsibility. This new prominence for RAGs was in evidence at the Convention in Los Angeles and is a welcome addition to the level of recognition afforded groups like ours. Please take the time to download the Things You Can Do brochure and take a look.

You can find a copy on our website www.rfma.org, or on the main RI website at http://www.rotary.org/RIdocuments/en_pdf/things_you_can_do_en.pdf



Encourage others to join Past RI President Wilf Wilkinson in becoming a member of RFMA.

Just like in your Rotary Club – membership, membership, membership. Size matters when you are trying to influence. We believe that many Rotarians around the world are concerned about the landmine issue and believe, as we do, that it is solvable with a concerted effort. We need to be able to prove it. Our numbers need to grow in order to do so.

Please share this newsletter with others!