



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

An Interview with Past Rotary International Director Ted Gifford

LaGrange IL, 20 June 2018

Edgar “Ted” Gifford has packed a lot of Rotary into his century on earth. The past Rotary International director (1981-83), who turned 100 in July, founded the Rotary Club of La Grange, Illinois, in 1958 and became its first president before serving as governor of District 6450 in 1964-65. Gifford helped found 30 Rotary clubs, received the RI Service Above Self Award, and, in 2003, saw the La Grange Rotarians establish the Dr. Edgar (Ted) Gifford Community Service Award.

In 2015, after giving \$780,000 to PolioPlus, Ted and his wife, Caroline, became members of the Arch Klumph Society, whose members have contributed \$250,000 or more to Rotary during their lifetime. In total, Gifford has given over \$850,000 to The Rotary Foundation. After Caroline passed away from Alzheimer’s disease in 2106, Gifford donated \$1 million to the Cure Alzheimer’s Fund to support Alzheimer’s research.

He continues to be an active member of the Rotary Club of La Grange.

THE ROTARIAN: What is one of your favorite Rotary memories?

GIFFORD: After I had been in our club for about seven years, I organized a Chicago-area Interact Conference. I called Herb Taylor [Rotary president 1972-73], who wrote The Four-Way Test, to invite him. I got his wife on the phone, and she said, “I’m sorry, that’s Herb’s birthday, and I’ve got a surprise party planned for him.” Half an hour later, Herb Taylor called me. He said, “The birthday party has been canceled. I’m coming to the conference.”

TR: You've brought many new members into Rotary. Can you tell us about one?

GIFFORD: The postmaster for La Grange was a Rotarian. She got promoted and moved to another office and joined another club, and we got a new acting postmaster. I immediately went to see the new postmaster and said, "Would you like to come to Rotary?" So I got her into Rotary. I just like doing that.

TR: What do you say to interest people in Rotary?

GIFFORD: When I used to give talks to prospective Rotary members who were organizing clubs, I talked about the opportunity. Becoming a Rotarian provided them with chances to not only develop relationships in their own club and community, but also to develop friendships with members of over 34,000 Rotary clubs throughout the world and promote international projects with them with funding from The Rotary Foundation.

TR: What has led you to make such generous gifts for the eradication of polio and Alzheimer's?

GIFFORD: For many years, I participated in Rotary club activities, the Youth Exchange program, and projects. Now that those things are more difficult for me, I consider it appropriate to become more involved in financial contributions. The focus of my giving comes from my own life. My wife, Caroline Wilcox Gifford, passed on in 2016 from Alzheimer's disease. My interest in becoming a Rotarian hinged in part on the fact that her father was a Rotarian. And her mother was a victim of polio. And I was a member of the Rotary International Board of Directors in 1982 when Cliff Dochterman, as chair of the New Horizons Committee, informed us that the committee believed Rotary should rid the world of polio by 2005. We all agreed. That has not occurred as yet, but my hope is that it soon will.
— Anne Ford