

Martin Ward

President's Report 2016-2017

(Based on AGM report)

The past year has been very busy, not least because of all the planning for the Pentangular which takes place next weekend. Three years' planning over in three days! But at its heart is acquaintance and fellowship which, along with service, are the key tenets of being a Rotarian.

At last year's Club Assembly, I underlined the priorities for my Presidential Year:

- Fellowship & Fun - with every member having a role
- Improve Communication both amongst members and the outside world
- Bring in new members
- Reinvigorate Fund Raising
- Reinforce our place in our community whether at home or abroad.
 - Support for the homeless and young people
- To try and simplify our Rotary?

It goes without saying, of course, that support for our ongoing fundraising projects and charitable activities was also a key objective.

On the fellowship front we enjoyed the black-tie musical picnic at Charlton Park last August – weather notwithstanding – and we then had an extremely well-attended Christmas Dinner in December. We tried something different with the Valentine's Musical evening – which would have benefitted from better acoustics. Still to come we have the Pentangular, the Falklands Dinner and the annual Safari Supper. I have enjoyed mixing the traditional with the ambitious; I hope other members have enjoyed it as well.

In a club the size of ours, communication will always be a challenge. We live in the real world where it's not possible for all members to attend all meetings and we have to accept that perhaps no more than two-thirds are present at any one time. Modern technology allows for almost instant communication and that is what I have attempted to do with the 'President's Puffs' newsletters. Preparing them, though, takes time, but I have tried to make them a priority.

Communicating with the outside world is less easy. As a club we must become more adept at exploiting social media. Club Council has backed redesigning the website to make it more accessible and friendly.

On the need to bring in more members, I think, over the past Rotary Year, we have been rather successful. It has given me the greatest pleasure to induct five new members: Jo Nolan; Julie Reza; Graham Bough; David Bailey; Neil Fraser. I doubt there is another President in District 1120 that has inducted so many new members. However, I'm not just pleased because of the number; I'm also pleased at the new dimension they all bring to the club – and that all of them are younger than me! They all, too, either are, or have recent experience of the workplace, which is so important for a club like ours. We have other prospective members in the pipeline, so hopefully it won't be long before we hit the 'magic' 70.

Sadly, we bade farewell to three former members during the year: Vic Banks, Ted Abbott and John Collard. So, unlike some clubs, membership at the moment isn't an issue for our club – we're the biggest in District 1120. But maintaining momentum to run our various fundraising projects is.

We organised another successful Duck Race last September, there was the street collection for the Haiti floods and Peter Hermitage master-minded an incredibly successful maiden Boxing Night in January. We ran a profitable bucket collection in memory of Hannah Loughran in February and there was Top Choir Kent (TCK) in April. However, with TCK, there is a sense of weariness amongst the organising team and it's clear we need a new approach or fresh ideas. That, though, is an answer which will hopefully emanate from the newly-formed Fundraising Committee under Stephen Thompson.

As part of my wish to reinvigorate fundraising, I have been encouraging committee chairmen since last July to prepare a budget for any projected spending so as to give the fundraising committee a target at which to aim. I think we're getting there on that one!

We have had problems with the web-based Event Management System, but new support arrangements with our contractor, ExtraDigital, will hopefully mean any problems are fixed quickly and efficiently.

I have been pleased to represent the club at a number of initiatives for young people organised by the Vocational Service Committee, including the Innovation Competition, Schools' Writing Competition and Public Speaking Competition.

The Millennium Scholarship Trust Fund has disbursed funds to a number of qualifying young people and it's a privilege, being a trustee, to sit on the panel interviewing prospective recipients.

The Pentangular Project, JPP3, to provide educational bursaries in Juba, South Sudan, starts soon. Rotary doing extraordinary things in difficult situations. Pentangular has been a major focus of mine over the past few years. It's taking a lot of planning and the coming weekend will prove its success or otherwise.

The President's Charity is progressing well and I'm confident I will be able to hand over a very reasonable cheque to Porchlight for their young people's project before the end of my year in office.

Have I managed to simplify our Rotary? We are a big club, there is always lots going on, but I still believe we should spend less time debating minutiae and more time actually "doing".

Finally, I wish to express my thanks for the extraordinary amount of support I have received this year. Planning Pentangular has shown several members at their absolute best. Not for them asking questions about the amount of work involved, or saying how much they're doing already, just a willingness to take it on and get it sorted.

I also want to say a very personal thank you for the understanding and support following the death of my dear old mother last September. Although she was very poorly, the speed of her final decline surprised us all. It was a tough few weeks and, at times, difficult to hold it all together. But I knew I could rely on President-Elect Sharon when I needed to take time out - and it provided her with good practice for next year!

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to lead your club over the past 11 months – and we still have one more month to go!

Martin Ward

President 2016-2017

16 May 2017