

Traveling Philanthropists

Travel Proves Inspirational
for Generous Donors

by Steve Busalacchi



Visiting another country and meeting its people may offer visitors the greatest educational epiphany imaginable. It might also be the key to unlocking our spirit of generosity. Such has been the case for Rob and Mary Gooze, itinerant travelers who are longtime donors to the Rotary Foundation.

"Wow, is that what you guys do at Rotary?" Oregon's Rob Gooze recalls friends asking after he told them about their trip to India. And it wasn't even a Rotary trip! Five years ago, Rob and Mary had joined a tour group and visited a Mother Teresa Orphanage as part of the trip. When the group arrived at the orphanage, a team of nurses there made a bee line for Rob. They immediately began hugging him! Others in the travel group wondered, did Rob actually know orphanage nurses in India?

"They noticed the pin—he's a Rotarian!" explained Rob. The nurses then pointed to young boys nearby, still in crutches from polio. 'Those will be the last two children we see in this orphanage with polio. Now India is polio-free.' The Rotary connection to polio eradication was cemented in their minds and personified in Rob Gooze!

An endorsement like that cannot be underestimated. As a longtime member of Madison South Rotary, including as past president, in addition to his service as Grant Treasurer for District 6250, Rob's pride in the organization only grew.

"We made another big donation to Rotary after that. You saw what it can do," says Rob.

"They noticed the pin—he's a Rotarian!"

Monetary milestone

The Goozes now have reached the highest level of Rotary contributions, reaching Arch Klumph Society recognition. The Society is named for the sixth president of Rotary International and honors the highest tier of philanthropy within RI—those who contribute \$250,000 or more within their lifetime.

Contributing to Rotary at this level is something Mary Gooze is quite comfortable with, as well.

"I love Rob's passion and his passion towards Rotary," says Mary. "He loves the charitable work and I am very proud of what he does and I support him completely." Although Mary is not a formal Rotary member, she feels very connected to RI through Rob.

"He's kept me informed about what Rotary does so I feel like I am part of Rotary," Mary explains. She points to a Rotary trip to Guatemala 14 years ago that was a real philanthropic turning point for the couple.

"Bud" nurtured in Central America

"The Guatemala trip was incredible," she recalls. "I was a teacher back then and I was able to be involved with the literacy part of it and to get to know the people, the Rotarians. It was the beginning. It was the bud that just grew."

The Guatemala project Mary and Rob contribute to encourages students to further their education. "And a lot of these are girls who wouldn't have had the opportunity, so I feel good about that," Mary adds.

What Rob recalls from Guatemala was the mother with the baby on her back hugging them. "She thanks us for getting her kids educated."

Rotary intro

This Rotary journey began for Rob before he formally joined the organization in 1981. Although he was the first in his family to join

Rotary, he was once named Junior Rotarian of the month in Rochester, NY, where he grew up, so he had some familiarity with RI.

When he arrived in Madison to take a job as a CPA, it was very common for professionals to take part in service clubs. "We don't have anybody at Rotary South," his new employer said, so Rob readily agreed to join the Club. He didn't just join but he dove in, volunteering for numerous activities, and doing so with his characteristic good cheer. For example, he joined fellow Madison South volunteers a few years ago beautifying our roadways by helping to pick up trash in the grassy areas along the Interstate in Madison.

"Somebody had an exciting weekend," Rob called out over traffic to fellow volunteers, holding up a thong panty before dropping it into his garbage bag.

Rob has done it all, serving as president of Madison South, as well as faithfully grilling brats for the Club's biggest annual fundraiser at Badger football games for the past 15 years. That latter role is quite interesting, given he's Jewish!

"It's been a fun 40 years of being very active," Rob enthuses. "I was one of the younger members and now I'm one of the oldest."

The way Rob tells it, all of these experiences led to his faith in the organization and its mission.

"At first, you're still trying to go through all the pieces of the onion to see what makes Rotary tick. When I became president, I learned more about the organization and started giving more," he explains

In the '80s, the polio campaign was very intriguing and exciting to Rob and he learned how grants and matching funds worked. With his CPA background, he was a natural for service on behalf of Rotary's Foundation, where he learned still more.

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Experience matters

But if the Goozes had to point to one thing that was pivotal in their charitable decision making, it would be the travel. "When you do hands-on work and see the people, you get excited for what Rotary projects can do for communities," Rob says. "That was the biggest emphasis that got us going."

But Rob says the type of travel is especially key for an excellent volunteer experience.

"Find the right kind of work for us to do, so it's more educational."

The Guatemala trip, for example, really didn't require their physical help. Local volunteers could have easily loaded the books.

"I felt like we did something but it was more to see the people and how the projects were helping that community. I'm a CPA, so what am I going to do, go to a foreign country and help them do their taxes?" he says with a laugh. Rotary is particularly good at making these trips meaningful for volunteers and that cannot be taken for granted.

Sweatshirts in the Tropics?

Rob recalls a family vacation in Costa Rica, where they saw firsthand how a charitable group did not think through its donation.

"We showed up in the southern part, 90 degrees and 90% humidity," Rob recalls. "We brought school book supplies. Some other group donated 50 sweatshirts!" Boxes of those heavy garments were just piled there.

With Rotary, a project is only put together by Rotarians based on what the community actually needs. Rob's advice for others

interested in a service trip: “Go with a group that’s been doing this for 10 or more years. They know what to show you, how to get you involved. It will change your life.”

It certainly changed Rob and Mary’s life and more importantly, the lives of all the people they’ve helped. But as passionate as one can be for Rotary projects, how do you get to such a lofty space as Arch Klumph status?

Getting there

“You build it up over time,” Rob explains. “But I was able to sell my business back in 2006, so we substantially increased our donation then.”

For Mary’s part, she says the giving just evolved.

“We set aside money for charitable things and decided this [Rotary] is one of our top priorities. Rob would explain what this is going for and what help it would be for students [Guatemala], so we knew what we wanted. He’s the math guy. He figured it out and I trust him.”



Still, there are so many deserving charitable organizations, and the Goozes donate to others, as well. In fact, they have raised more than \$2

million to combat metastatic breast cancer through Mary’s [One Woman Many Lakes](#) project. Despite her ongoing battle with cancer, she has miraculously summoned the energy to swim and raise money to help defeat this scourge so others may enjoy a longer life. Her hope is to keep swimming this summer

to keep raising funds, as she already has surpassed by several years her life expectancy with the disease.

Given that fundraising passion, how does Rotary still manage to fit in so prominently to their philanthropic priorities?

“You can just give a nickel to everybody and nobody’s benefiting so we decided to be very generous to the Rotary projects,” Mary explains. Family considerations didn’t overly complicate their charitable decision-making either, according to Mary, as their children have been quite fortunate.

“They’ve benefited from our successes and I think you can give too much to kids and so we had set aside what we wanted them to receive and then the rest we can spend on ourselves or others. As we age, it’s more on helping others.”

Safe investment

For Rob, he is heartened by the fact that Rotary is such a “good caretaker of monies.” He adds that, “People don’t realize how good a steward of our money it is--the paperwork and the follow-up. As much money as possible goes to the cause.”

He also appreciates the bang for the buck when you give to international aid efforts via Rotary.

“For very little money, you could make quite a difference in the international world,” Rob says. And, there’s another less tangible and more satisfying bonus to being a Rotary benefactor compared to contributions made locally.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been hugged and kissed by my recipients here in Madison,” Rob joked.

To hear the podcast interview with the Goozes, [click here](#), or use your phone camera to scan the QR code to the right.

