

# AN ELEPHANT AND A MAKE-UP

**"SHARE YOUR STORIES...  
OUR ROTARY STORIES ARE  
WHAT INSPIRE US AND WHAT  
ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO JOIN  
US..." – PRESIDENT GARY CK  
HUANG, JANUARY 2015**

It began with an elephant.

It was 1963 and the Rotary Club of Bayswater, Vic, chartered 1961, had completed its community service project: a massive masterpiece of tubular steel, lovingly welded and moulded by Rotarians into the form of a pachyderm, over which children could clamber in safety. The culmination of months of planning, design, skill and sheer hard work.

The story, complete with photographs, was posted to *The Rotarian* – the official magazine to which all Rotarians subscribed; but oh! The disappointment! It never appeared.

President of the Rotary Club of Bayswater, Vic, Jim Robinson and his friend Les Gilbert pondered the problem. They wondered how many

more stories of great projects were never told. They concluded that we needed a magazine of our own to complement *The Rotarian*, to exchange regional information and project ideas.

Bayswater sponsored a motion at the next district conference at which, in the face of strenuous opposition from the usual suspects, a ways and means committee was appointed to make a feasibility study and report to the next conference.

In the Rotary Club of Newtown, NSW, chartered 1962, it began with a make-up. In 1963 I spent a month in northern NSW, making up each week at local Rotary clubs.

Before joining Newtown as a charter member I had been a Rotarian for seven years in nearby Marrickville, so was not entirely inexperienced, but I was amazed at the service so enthusiastically given by Rotarians in other districts. Every make-up introduced me to a new, exciting community, vocational or international service project or program. I came home overflowing with information and bristling with ideas; but why did we never hear of these remarkable Rotary activities beyond our own district?

Perhaps a national or regional newsletter or magazine could be issued, sharing project ideas and information.

Some months later, I tentatively suggested this to a friend – a former district governor.

His reaction was astonishing. Instead of agreeing to pass on the suggestion to the current leadership he gave me a long and stern lecture, leaving me in no doubt of his passionate opposition to the proposal. A local magazine would promote regionalism to the detriment of internationalism. This would sound the death-knell of Rotary. The one previous regional magazine, *The Pinion*, had failed for lack of interest and support. His opposition failed to dampen my enthusiasm; in fact it had the opposite effect.

A proposal to my own club that we investigate the possibility of establishing a regional publication was adopted. A committee was appointed and set to work immediately.

RI past vice president Douglas Stewart gave a different version of *The Pinion's* demise. Published from 1926 until 1940, it became a war casualty when paper was rationed and production became difficult. No post-war attempt had been made to revive it. He also revealed that several other excellent regional magazines existed. However, he warned that to gain approval from 11 district conferences in Australia and three in New Zealand would present difficulties, mainly because of traditional opposition.

We decided to by-pass conferences and request the authority of incumbent governors (1964-65) to survey all clubs in their districts. The questionnaire should be straightforward: "Would you support a Rotary regional publication to exchange information and ideas? Yes or No?"



“

**PAUL  
HENNINGHAM**  
RDU EDITOR AND  
SECRETARY (1965-1984)



When we realised we would be trying to sell a still non-existent product, we decided to go a step further: we should invite clubs to subscribe to three issues of a magazine, to be produced by our committee, and then decide whether they wanted it to continue.

Our own district governor Ken Scheller – later to serve as vice president of Rotary International – was an immediate enthusiast and personally wrote to his colleagues. They did not give immediate approval, but agreed to take the proposal to the next conference of past, present and incoming governors (the predecessor of Institutes) in January, 1965.

District governor Bill Brett, on receiving Scheller's letter, informed him of Bayswater's interest. As I have recorded elsewhere, we in Newtown were overjoyed. We promptly wrote to Jim Robinson, giving him all the information we had gathered and our detailed plans – even a “mock-up” of a proposed magazine. We suggested that Bayswater incorporate our plans into their district proposal, pledging our full, unconditional support.

They returned the “buck” next day, with the counter-proposal that we proceed with our plan, offering to share the workload and costs.

So a partnership was forged and, despite almost strident opposition by some past officers resulting in a less-than-encouraging response, the incumbent governors met separately, unanimously granted what was now the Newtown/Bayswater request, and appointed a committee to supervise the “pilot” program, as required under Rotary International policy. They decided that, at this stage, it would be unfair to apply to New Zealand governors, who had not been involved in the discussions.

The Rotary International Board approval was duly conveyed by the general secretary, who set out the conditions for licensing regional publications and for using the Rotary emblem, but our chosen name *The Rotary Family* was rejected.

An alternative name (for the pilot issues only) was discussed at the first committee meeting. Objections were raised to every title suggested – *Rotary Australasia*, *Rotary Australis*, *Rotary Antipodes*, *Rotary Oceania*, *Rotary Southern Cross*, *ROTARYANZ* – until, in desperation and as a joke, I said, “Oh, let's call it *Rotary Down Under!*” To my surprise it was adopted. A more suitable name could be chosen if the pilot succeeded. My own subsequent choice, *Rotary Endeavour*, was never

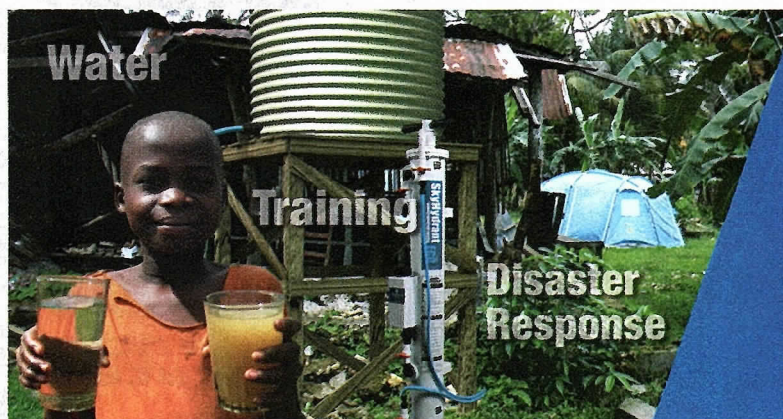
seriously considered.

Of the 22,000 Rotarians in Australia in 1965, 10,200 agreed to pay six shilling (60c) for three issues of a proposed regional magazine.

*Rotary Down Under* first appeared in April 1965. The three “pilot” issues were produced entirely by volunteers from Newtown and Bayswater, with Bob Johnson (stained glass design) from Hurstville as art editor. My “publishing” classification made me the obvious choice as editor.

At the conclusion of the pilot program the district governors conducted a ballot in all clubs. The result was conclusive: 72.78% in favour, 12.16% against, 15.06% abstentions. The incoming governors met at the International Assembly, formed themselves into a Board of Governors, adopted a set of interim rules called “Organisation and Procedures”, elected a management committee and an editorial committee and told us to get on with it. I was elected secretary (in absentia) and was asked to continue as acting editor pending a permanent appointment.

The first official issue of *Rotary*



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*Down Under* (No. 3) appeared in July, 1965; price 2/- (20c) a copy or £1 (\$2) for a one-year subscription.

In the following year the three New Zealand governors, after consultation with their clubs, joined the board. Thus the original hope of the Bayswater and Newtown Rotarians was realised – a regional magazine to exchange ideas, to share our stories – to inform and to inspire us.

In 1970 the office was moved from crowded, inner-suburban Newtown to rented premises above a service station in Parramatta; later to a small cottage, then to a bungalow in Harris Park which, with the help of a Rotarian bank manager, we purchased. To own property, we needed a “legal entity”, thus RDU Pty Ltd was born.

A proposal favoured by Rotary International director Ted de Joux from Upper Hutt that regional magazines should be “taken over” as regional editions of *The Rotarian*, was discussed at a meeting convened by


the Rotary International president in 1974. The purpose was to ensure that all Rotarians subscribed to only one magazine, *The Rotarian* in North America or one of its regional editions elsewhere. With 23 regional magazines published in 17 languages, the obstacles appeared insurmountable. Ted de Joux, director elect Ken Scheller and I, representing RDU, agreed to submit a new proposal: recognition of regional magazines retaining autonomy, but agreeing to include certain “mandatory” material provided by *The Rotarian* editor. The magazines would be approved by Rotary International and prescribed for the region as acceptable alternatives to *The Rotarian*. The suggestion was adopted. An experiment was authorised and *Rotary Down Under* was chosen as the guinea-pig.

One need not dwell on the difficulties (before computers, faxes, photocopiers, emails or direct-dialling telephones) and the procedures to be

formulated. On July 1, 1978, after the two-year experiment, *Rotary Down Under* became the first “approved and prescribed” regional magazine and other regionals were invited to apply for similar status. The term was later changed to “official regional magazine”.

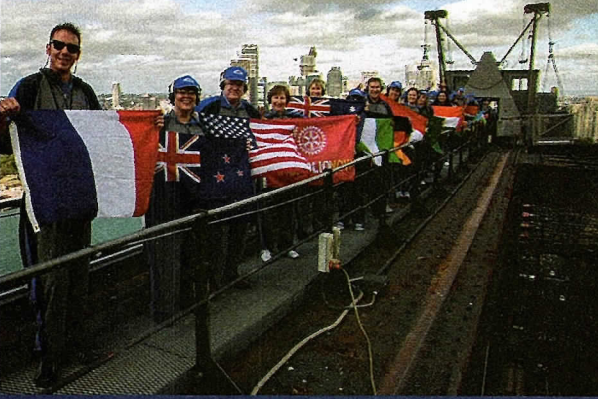
*Rotary Down Under* continued to develop and improve, thanks to the commitment of members of successive boards, committees and councils – and with later technology, colour printing and sophisticated design, but always adhering to its primary purpose: to tell Rotary stories, to share ideas, to inform and inspire us, to promote Rotary's programs and share ideas.

In 1984, after 19 years as editor and having gained many, many friends, I was able to hand over the reins to Bob Aitken, turn my attention to other challenges and observe the further growth and startling development of *Rotary Down Under* with some satisfaction – and gratitude. 50

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