

GOOD-BYE, POLIO: THANKS, ROTARY

In October, we observe both World Polio Day and the birthday of Dr. Jonas Salk, who developed the world's first safe and effective vaccine against this crippling and sometimes deadly disease. We also celebrate the fact that the world is on the verge of eradicating one of the most feared diseases of the 20th century.

When Rotary launched its push to end polio in the 1980s, the wild poliovirus crippled nearly 1,000 people every day. Since then, Rotary and its partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative have reduced the incidence of polio by 99-percent. And the push continues: This year, India has the lowest number of polio cases in history. We are "this close" to ending polio once and for all.

Despite this tremendous progress, children in some developing countries continue to be infected. That's why Rotary and its partners must reach every child in some of the most challenging regions of the world with the oral polio vaccine. But the greatest challenge to the polio eradication effort is a funding shortage.

To address this shortage, Rotary is working to raise US\$200 million in response to a \$355 million challenge grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. All of the resulting \$555 million will support crucial immunization activities in countries where polio still threatens children. Rotary club members worldwide already have raised \$180 million of the \$200 million challenge.

Over the past 26 years, Rotary's 1.2 million members in 200 countries and regions have contributed more than \$1 billion and countless volunteer hours to help immunize more than two billion children in 122 countries. Rotary also reaches out to governments worldwide to obtain vital financial and technical support. Since 1995, donor governments have contributed in excess of \$8 billion to polio eradication, due in part to Rotary's advocacy efforts.

The commitment of Rotary volunteers worldwide demonstrates the extraordinary role civil society can play in improving global health. Right now, in honor of World Polio Day, Rotary clubs around the globe are doing their part to raise awareness and critically-needed funds to vanquish the disease forever.

Once eradicated, polio will join smallpox as the only two human diseases ever eradicated, fulfilling Rotary's promise to create a polio-free world.

World Polio Day is observed on October 24. The Silver City Rotary Club welcomes your partnership in expanding awareness of polio and the work of eradicating it and thanks everyone who has contributed to the progress we have made to date.