

Rotarians honor literacy initiatives at Turkey celebration

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RI President Estess (seated at left) sees a demonstration on a bus fitted by District 2430 as an adult-literacy classroom. Photo by Sharon Cyr.



The president also recognized literacy projects sponsored by Rotary clubs in Turkey. Photo by Sharon Cyr.

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Rotarians recognized the importance of local and international literacy initiatives at the Presidential Celebration on Literacy in Istanbul, held 9 April. The event featured literacy-themed project site visits, plenary sessions, group discussions, a projects fair, and gala dinner.

In his opening address, RI President Glenn Estess Sr. described the time and money that Turkish Rotarians have spent in promoting literacy as an outstanding example of what dedicated volunteers can do. He also encouraged clubs and districts everywhere to invest more in education as a longer-term solution to humanitarian problems.

"On an emotional level, it can be easy to feel more attracted to addressing immediate needs - providing food to the hungry and medical care to the sick," he said. "When we see a crisis, we naturally want to help, and that is why we have seen such a wonderful outpouring of Rotary support for the needs of the tsunami victims in South Asia."

Serving with an eye to the future, however, is more effective, Estess said. He explained that because Rotary is an organization of business and professional leaders, Rotarians are already inclined to think of longer term solutions and "the best possible return on our investment."

The RI president cited PolioPlus, with its aim at preventing and eventually eliminating the disease rather than merely rehabilitating and caring for polio victims, as a perfect example of this approach.

"The idea that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is something that is very natural to Rotarians," said Estess. "So what is the ounce of prevention for the world's crisis of poverty and the secondary crises of hunger and ill health it causes? The answer, I believe, is literacy."

Several local and visiting Rotary leaders and dignitaries made addresses and presentations on the challenges and opportunities that illiteracy offers for volunteer service. For example, Semra Sezer, wife of Turkey's president and a former teacher, spoke on the importance of literacy for her country, and Past RI Director Sam Okudzeto explained why women's education is so crucial in the fight against poverty.

Attendees included RI directors Serge Gouteyron, David Linett, and Stan Tempelaars; Past RI Director Peter Krön; RI Director-nominee Örsçelik Balkan; Atilla Gönenli, chair of the celebration's planning committee and governor of host District 2420; members of RI's Literacy Task Force; past district governors; and representatives from government and nongovernmental organizations involved in literacy initiatives.

On 8 April, Estess was chief guest at the dedication of the Anatolian School, District 2420's US\$1 million Centennial Community Project. Completed in just six months, the school will hold preparatory classes in language, science, and culture for 500 coed students from low-income families. The RI president also rode on a bus fitted as a classroom for an adult-literacy project of District 2430. Rotarians brought the bus to the conference with a group of women who are current students.