

Past RI President Herbert G Brown, a tireless advocate for polio eradication, dies at 100

Herbert G. "Herb" Brown, the 1995-96 president of Rotary International who met with world leaders to advocate for polio vaccination and helped raise millions of dollars to fight the disease, died on 23 April at age 100.

A member of the Rotary Club of Clearwater, Florida, USA, Brown exemplified the Rotary ideal of Service Above Self and dreamed of a world that was free of polio, at peace, and where people were true to their word.

He held various roles in Rotary, including RI director, chair and trustee of The Rotary Foundation, aide to the president, committee chair and member, and district governor. He also had over 60 years of perfect attendance.

Brown was a tireless advocate for polio eradication, serving as chair of the U.S. PolioPlus Campaign Committee in 1987-91. He played a pivotal role in raising over US\$125 million in the United States and more than US\$240 million worldwide to help immunize children against the disease.

Brown and his wife, Diane, met Pope John Paul II in Vatican City in 1985, sharing information about Rotary's PolioPlus program. Brown also met with South African President Nelson Mandela shortly before Africa launched the Kick Polio Out of Africa campaign, and he met with leaders in India before the country agreed to undertake National Immunization Days. Brown was also instrumental in advocating for U.S. funding, meeting with President Bill Clinton in 1995.

During the 1995 International Assembly, Brown shared his vision of the world he wished for. His presidential theme, Act with Integrity, Serve with Love, Work for Peace, bore witness to his belief that these dreams were possible if Rotary remained true to those values.

"The words of our theme are action words, and they encompass every aspect and deed of our Rotary history," Brown said. "Marked by the inspiration and leadership of our great past presidents, it is easy to see that Integrity, Service, Love, and Peace have always been the actions that have led to the fulfillment of Rotary's dreams and visions."

Brown's presidential year was also, as he said in his IA speech, "a milestone year for Rotary" as the first in which women served as district governors. "The admission of women into Rotary has diversified our organization, and made it more representative of our business and professional communities," he said.

Beyond Rotary, Brown had an enormous impact in the business world. After serving in the U.S. Army domestically in 1943-45, he entered the family furniture business and expanded it, and also launched a discount drugstore chain that eventually merged with the larger Eckerd Drugs in Florida. Brown grew his 50-year-plus real estate business throughout Florida and Louisiana and served as president and chair of banks in both states.

Brown was named Florida Entrepreneur of the Year in 1991, Citizen of the Year in Louisiana, and Humanitarian of the Year in Tampa Bay, Florida. He received the Silver Medallion Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews. He also served as president of the Boy Scouts in Louisiana and Florida.

A recipient of RI's Service Above Self Award, he also received The Rotary Foundation Citation for Meritorious Service, the Distinguished Service Award, the PolioPlus Pioneer Award, and the International Service Award for a Polio-Free World.

Brown was preceded in death by his son H. Graham Jr. He is survived by his wife, Diane; daughter Deborah and her husband, Lee Arnold; son Jared and his wife, Mary Ellen; son Robert Gregory and his wife, Karina; daughter Donna McMullen and her partner Dave Winton; and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

— Arnold R. Grahl

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