

Chapter 9. CHARITY ABOUNDS

As the ninth decade of the century opened, the year to come saw the Moscow Olympics boycotted by 45 nations, insider dealing in shares became a criminal offence, Barnum hit the New York musical stage, Ronald Reagan became US President, 'Solidarity' emerged in Poland, John Lennon was murdered, Leicester's 'own' C.P. (Lord) Snow died and, horror upon horrors, MCC members assaulted the umpires at the abandonment of the Centenary Test at Lords after ten hours' rain!

The Rotary Club of Leicester, however, maintained its "Service Before Self" stance, and saw no reason to change from its time-honoured principles, although an international threat was once more to manifest itself within a very few years. Local charities, and groups of people all over the world continued to benefit from the munificence of the Club's deep pocketed members, even though that membership was falling as the years progressed. Nonetheless, practically every charity one could name became included on the almost endless list of bodies dealt with by the Club. All this in spite of the fact that the Club Council had reported that charity cash reserves were, as the 1980s arrived, in a parlous state. But gradually the money came in and there is no shame in listing some of the charities and groups that benefited from the Leicester Club's efforts.

Sums of cash and practical help in the form of goods went to (mentioning just a few) technical Books for the third World, the Shoebox Appeal for Romania and Moldova, spectacles for vision Aid, the Leicester Royal Infirmary Child Asthma Centre, Holidays for Sick Children, the Rainbow Appeal for a Loughborough Hospice, 1000 books from Loughborough University for use in prisons. "Kids Out" days at entertainment parks for under-privileged children, a Railway Corridor project by Leicester Polytechnic students to video the lineside between Leicester and Wigston, for safe botanical and other purpose studies, the Bosnia/Croatia relief fund (over £17,000 raised in the District), sponsoring disabled athletes for the 1992 Special Olympics, funds for two schools for handicapped children, MacMillan Nurses, day visit for young Scouts to Nottingham, Sir Andrew Martin Trust for young people and even a request from Kitwe, Zambia, for spectacles and Easter eggs, items which were paid for via one of the many Starvation Lunches at the Club.

These only show the diversity of the appeals answered, but the means of raising cash and goods were equally prodigious. These included special performances of musical productions at the Haymarket Theatre, Leicester, each Christmas, raising an average of £3,000-£4,000 or so at a time; Pro/Am

golf tournaments, sponsored walks, cycle rides, plus the innumerable private house functions. In 1998/9 the Club supported and sponsored the Toy Trades Association Alternative Cup Final event, when the TTA handed over £20,000 to the Club towards the National Children's Home. Links with local radio were forged when the Club supported the Leicester Sound Radio Auction for funds to buy two fibrillates for Leicester ambulances, probably making Leicester the first club in the District connected with such an appeal. That charity funds never made any great showing on the balance sheets was due entirely to the fact that as soon as the money came in it went out again to some good cause.

Practical help abounded, such as finding accommodation for the daughter of Taunton Rotarian visiting Leicester, arranging transport for a Rotarian's father visiting Leicester nursing home, dealing with a request from a Swiss Rotarian asking to send flowed to comedy actress Irene Handl who was appearing in a Haymarket Theatre production. This resulted in a letter of thanks from Miss Handl and two tickets for the show!

Another typical situation arose when a letter was sent to the Club's then President, Keith Gayton,, asking Rotarians to sponsor a week's holiday for a 12 year old girl, Marie, from Western Park Day School for a delicate and handicapped children aged between five and 19. That May the school was taking a party of 20 pupils for a residential experience at Barmouth, north Wales, and the previous year Marie, who suffered from cerebral palsy, could not go because her parents could not afford to pay for her, and felt unable to accept a charitable donation. The letter described Marie as "a cheerful young lady who works tremendously hard to overcome problems associated with her medical condition". She led a rather sheltered life and she would definitely benefit from the trip. The Leicester Club unhesitatingly stumped up £100 as a donation to the school.

But the outstanding achievement by the Club, both in charitable fund-raising and in social responsibility, came in 1991, when in the celebration of the Club's Anniversary, a Leicester Bone Bank Appeal was launched. With the help of the Leicester Club's associated bodies, Inner Wheel Rotoract and Interact, the aim was to raise £25,000 towards equipping the United Kingdom's first Bone Bank of its kind. The Bank was to be situated at Glenfield Hospital. By 1991 it was feasible to build up a 'bank' of bones preserved by deep-freezing, which could be used in the treatment of bone tumors and the salvaging of joints which had failed. Rotary would raise funds for the freeze-donated bones, deep freeze equipment, plus publicity, a pc-based computer system, sophisticated photo-copying and facsimile transmission equipment, plus the salary of a part-time administrative

assistant for 12 months. As Mr Huw Thomas, Medical Director of the Leicester Bone Bank, who retired from this post in December, 1999, said at the time: “ This is a gift of life and a gift of mobility.” Fund co-ordinators at Rotary. were John Aldridge, Club President, and John Saunders, vice-president of the Club. Among Club events to raise the sum required was the raffling of the ‘nut-and-bolt’ rebuilt and fully restored 1952 Austin Somerset saloon, in May 1991 at Leicester Mercury Historic Transport Pageant at Abbey Park. This raffle alone raised £4,500. As the year passed, it was clear that the Appeal would be huge success and when eventually it closed in August 1992, just under- taken. As for the Bone Bank, in nine years of operation some 3300 bones have been transplanted to nearly 13000 recipients throughout the UK.

By 1998, records show that the Club was regularly raising over £20,000 a year for charity, and this in spite of gradually declining membership. Nor were the efforts centered around Leicester. An appeal was made for the Life Education. Caravan Project, the intention of which was to have a mobile caravan visit schools with education programme warning pupils against drug abuse. Leicester Club became involved in a Group 2 scheme to raise £130,000 for the project, and in the event Leicester and Leicesteshire clubs alone raised £60,000 by March, 1995, as part of Rotary International’s appeal for the RIBI to improve its cash raising efforts. RIBI also initiated a “Raise Million” scheme for the RIBI Foundation, plus a similar amount for the individual club charities. One idea was the selling of tickets for a luxury car at £1 a time, 40p going towards the Rotary Club selling the ticket and the same amount to RIBI, plus 20p for expenses, any left over going towards RIBI FUNDS. The scheme was success. By late 1994 the RIBI with all Clubs’ help, had completed a Wateraid Campaign for £50,000 to supply water for the Dodomo region of Tanzania. For this effort RIBI won a Gold Award at the Professional Fund Raising Awards ceremony.