

## **Paul Harris - a Visionary Before His Time**

**Written by: Stephanie Torres**

**October 25, 2021**

Born in 1868 and raised on the east coast by his paternal grandparents, Paul Harris turned his loneliness into a thriving organization centered around diversity, camaraderie and charity. An attorney in his personal life, Harris attended the University of Vermont, Princeton University and graduated with a law degree from the University of Iowa in 1891. Before practicing law, he took several years working odd jobs in journalism, as an actor, a cowboy and traveling to Europe on cattle ships before finally settling in Chicago, Illinois.

While on an evening stroll in the early 1900s with a colleague in Chicago, Harris sparked the idea to form a group of young professionals new to the city. He hoped that these men could gather to share ideas and develop friendships, an organization now known as Rotary. The first meeting took place in 1905, with only four members in attendance.

During his tenure with Rotary, Harris twice served as president and encouraged the organization to find a greater purpose. In 1907 he initiated Rotary's first service project to build public toilet facilities throughout Chicago. This effort led Harris to encourage Rotary to expand the organization outside of the city. By 1910 there were over 15 clubs throughout the United States.

Until his death in 1947, you could find Harris behind a pen writing. He also spent his summers in Alabama with his wife. He was passionate about his spirituality and often attended religious services at various congregations, although he did not align with one particular religious sect.

Today, Harris' vision of Rotary has grown into a worldwide public service organization best known for its efforts to eliminate Polio worldwide. There are more than 35,000 clubs around the world made up of 1.2 million members. The organization now promotes peace, helps to fight disease, aims to provide clean water and sanitation for underprivileged countries, assists mothers and children, supports education and helps to grow local economies. Rotary remembers Harris through Paul Harris Fellowship, which acknowledges Rotary members who have achieved high personal and professional standards, and the Paul Harris Society, honoring Rotary members who commit to contributing \$1,000 annually to the organization.

**(USC PR 562 Assignment)**

For immediate release

Contact: Stephanie Torres  
Hitched Agency  
(214) 497-7407  
torressm@usc.edu

## **Rotary's 40 years of fighting polio set the standard for international disease control**

**Evanston, Ill., (November 17, 2019)** -- When Rotary administered its first polio vaccine in the Philippines in 1979, the organization had no idea it was putting into place one of the first and most successful public global health initiatives. Paralyzing over 1,000 children daily in 1979, cases of the debilitating disease have now declined 99.9%.

This year, Rotary is celebrating 40 years since it began its push to eradicate polio. After the first vaccination in 1979, Rotary's actions grew into the Global Polio Eradication Initiative to help eliminate the disease. Initially affecting children in over 125 countries, only two countries have active polio cases globally.

The first Filipino president of Rotary International, M.A.T. Caparas, was there from the beginning. "We had no idea that our one small act would lay the groundwork for an entire world change," stated Caparas. He believes that their actions on that day in 1979, with lofty goals of inoculating over five million children within five years in the Philippines alone, set forth the most significant global health initiative any organization had endeavored. "We plan to stay committed to eradicating polio until it no longer exists," promised Caparas.

According to the World Health Organization, since the first vaccine in 1979, they have seen the following results:

- Decrease from 350,000 cases in 1988 to 33 in 2018
- Of the three strains of wild poliovirus (type 1, type 2, and type 3), wild poliovirus type 2 was eradicated in 1999 and no case of wild poliovirus type 3 has been found since the last reported case in Nigeria in November 2012
- More than 18 million people can walk today, who would otherwise have been paralyzed

- An estimated 1.5 million childhood deaths have been prevented through the systematic administration of vitamin A during polio immunization activities.

Rotary brings together a global network of volunteer leaders dedicated to tackling the world's most pressing humanitarian challenges. Rotary connects 1.4 million members of more than 36,000 Rotary clubs in over 200 countries and geographical areas. Their work improves lives at both the local and international levels, from helping those in need in their own communities to working toward a polio-free world. For more information, visit [Rotary.org](http://Rotary.org).

###

Stephanie Torres  
PR 562

## **Why Service Organizations Are Important in the 21st Century**

By Stephanie Torres

Although many people consider younger generations, like millennials and Generation Z, “me” generations, only thinking about themselves, we have proven to be quite the opposite. Today’s youth feel more connected to the entire world as news and information are at the tip of our fingers, 24/7. Travel allows us to experience other cultures. Television and media enable us to witness the trials and tribulations the globe faces. This transparency has led our younger generations to become more passionate about serving those around them.

As humans, we have an innate desire to form relationships with others. Technology has isolated many of us from the in-person experiences that previously connected us. Meetings can take place online, with or without showing your face. Emails and texts have replaced phone calls and coffee dates. Service organizations, which often require hands-on assistance, offer an opportunity to bring people together while serving a higher purpose. Donating one’s time allows people to select an organization they identify with and create connections with both the organization and their fellow volunteers.

Connection to the cause is most important for our younger generations and choosing where to volunteer their time. At nine years old, I nearly lost my life during a two-week stay in the hospital for a ruptured appendix. The kindness and generosity of the doctors, nurses and staff at the hospital impacted my life forever. After college, when I discovered the need for volunteers at the hospital, I immediately signed up. For several years I spent my Sunday mornings, a day when most non-essential hospital staff is off of work, opening up the library so that families could utilize the space to research, escape and get their minds off of their hardships by reading a book.

The beauty of volunteering is that it serves both the self and others. People can gather together to make a difference for others, but it also leaves a lasting sense of value for oneself from helping others. It is self-gratifying without selfishness. It also offers the opportunity to help out with more than just your wallet. When you do not necessarily have the funds to give to a cause that you are passionate about, you can volunteer your time.

COVID-19 has further enhanced the desire of many to serve others. The world has collectively faced a global pandemic and left many of our peers without jobs, losing their homes and struggling to keep food on the table. We have found solidarity in the suffering. The number of volunteers for organizations like the Red Cross has doubled during the pandemic. Seeing the hardships of so many people has led the youth and older generations to become more involved than ever.

Outside of serving those less fortunate, service organizations have also provided us with a way to make a more significant impact on social issues in our lives. With more diverse younger generations, the world has seen an uprising in the number of social justice movements, human rights issues, political disunity and equality struggles. Younger generations are no longer satisfied to sit on the sidelines. Service organizations give citizens who are unsure where to put their time and effort a resource to begin their journey with activism and volunteerism. The youth want the opportunity to give back, to have a more significant impact for the future generations, and service organizations play a huge role in creating outlets for them to do so.

Along with providing volunteer opportunities, service organizations also offer educational opportunities. Through these organizations, individuals can further enlighten themselves on causes, be it charitable, political, environmental, or social. When researching a topic, you will often find some of the most informative articles from service organizations. It is essential to take the time to determine whether an organization serves the greater good of the cause at hand. As with any organized social group, people will always try to take advantage of a cause for personal gain. Ultimately, the good outweighs the bad.

Public service organizations are as important now as they have ever have been. As we become one world economy and technology continues to connect us, our service organizations will help highlight the issues and struggles of the day. These organizations offer everyday people the ability to communicate with others and leave an everlasting impact on the world around them. As millennials and Gen Z become parents, their volunteerism and passion for social issues will continue with their children. The actions of these generations and their impact will ensure that public service continues for many years to come.