

May, 2000

Diplomatic Rotarians and Rotarian Diplomats
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Rotary International is contemplating a move to “bring diplomats into the world of Rotary” - to use President Frank J. Devlyn’s own words. It would indeed make for a better world filled with goodwill and understanding, when, as proposed, Rotarians and diplomats formally cement their ties.

The word “cement” is deliberately used here, if only to point out that there must have been ties already in existence and that what is being proposed now is merely to formalize them. In fact, it seems a little surprising that there has been no such formalization before. It is common knowledge that in many capital cities around the world, Rotarians know and socialize with foreign diplomats en poste and enjoy each other’s company and association. Diplomats, in turn, deem it an honor to be invited now and again to Rotary functions or to give speeches, thereby reaching out to an important sector of the community. Indeed, there are so many things - interests, beliefs and outlook - which Rotarians and diplomats have in common and share in the pursuit of their respective assignments and responsibilities.

But what do diplomats really do? The “popular” notion about a diplomat perennially on the cocktail circuit with a cigar in one hand while holding in the other a Champagne glass is not an entirely accurate portrayal of a modern-day diplomat. Neither is he or she in this day and age someone who, in the words of the noted French practitioner of the profession, Talleyrand, “is sent abroad to lie for his country.” Certainly, not necessarily! A working diplomat nowadays has been variously described as a salesman, a public relations executive or even an arch - lobbyist. Such sobriquets that a diplomat has earned, in a way, reflect quite meaningfully the nature of his assignment.

To-day, any diplomat worth his salt cannot be contented with dealing only with officials of the host country. Inter-state relations have so developed that one is compelled to think in terms of an all-embracing relationship, involving not only officialdom but significantly also the business, academic and media communities, as indeed civil society in general.

Matched against such ever-growing scope of a diplomat’s work and interest, Rotary’s well-known out-reach to the world to foster better understanding among peoples, regardless of race, creed, or wealth, would find ready consonance and response. Consequently, Rotary which, in many ways, has been a “global” proposition long before the advent of the Age of Globalization, and has practiced to perfection a kind of diplomacy aimed at promoting better understanding among mankind, can readily team up with modern diplomats almost as soul-mates.

In any capital city whether in East or West, North or South, the Diplomatic and Consular Corps comprise for diplomatic and consular officials from the far-flung corners of the globe and can even be likened to a world in microcosm. Rotary International will discover that every continent, each with colorful variations in terms

of language, culture and, not to say, cuisine, is brought over for Rotarians to try, taste and tangle with.

It has become normal and customary for foreign diplomats or consuls in a given capital city, be it Bangkok, Buenos Aires or Bahrain, to carry on their official and social activities along geographical lines. There are thus regional groups, ranging from the ASEAN, the European Union, the Commonwealth, the Arab to the Latin American. So for Rotarians, to establish formal contact with the Diplomatic or Consular Corps would not mean only socializing with sociable personalities but would seem like getting a “free” ticket for instant visit to various parts of the world through the “regional” groups in the Corps.

It is noteworthy that some of these groups are more cohesive than others and that even the Corps itself does not enjoy the same degree of “togetherness” everywhere, depending partly on the location of the post. In a place like London or Paris, where the “whole wide world” is tantalizingly open to one and all, including foreign diplomats, the Diplomatic or Consular corps is not so much a part of a diplomat’s or consul’s life or interest. The opposite, of course, is true of, say, Timbuctoo where diplomats would tend to gravitate cling to each other more, for obvious reason.

Modern-day diplomatic assignments, as earlier alluded to, would involve a diplomat in many activities and fields of interest beyond such traditionally diplomatic grounds of politics, security and economics, into the broader areas of community service and development, education, charities, care of the handicapped and the underprivileged, etc. This being the case, one can see right away how the areas of interest and involvement of the Corps and Rotary converge! Co-operation and collaboration can be envisaged in many worthwhile projects that are Rotary’s own “bread and butter” and can do with admixture of foreign or “diplomatic” elements. To have Ambassadors or Consuls as honorary members of a Rotary Club would indeed facilitate contact and communications.

When diplomatic Rotarians and Rotarian diplomats meet, make merry and “make merit,” they can do “a world of good” and a lot of good for a better world!