

There are VIPs and then there are VIPs.

VIP – Very Important Person: June is time for the VIPs to show up and show off. At the RI Convention in Montreal important folk will walk about with name tags dripping in ribbons. We give out ribbons for holding a position in Rotary, for having held a position in Rotary, for promising to hold a position in Rotary, for having given to The Rotary Foundation, for giving to The Rotary Foundation, for promising to give to The Rotary Foundation, for volunteering for The Rotary Foundation, for being on a committee, and more.

Certainly the volunteer efforts and contributions recognized with these ribbons are all great deeds and worthy of recognition: And, I suppose it is hardly time for me to talk about ribbons. No doubt, I will never have more ribbons than those I will receive this coming year.

My daughter, Ashley, and I just returned from 8 days in Ghana. (Who knows maybe we will get ribbons for making this trip?) We were joined by incoming Director Elio Cerini from Italy. We attended the kick off ceremony for a \$2,000,000 water and sanitation project. This project is a partnership with US AID and is effectively a pilot for the large scale, strategic partnership grants hoped for under the Future Vision of The Rotary Foundation. 70% of the citizens of Ghana have safe water to drink. However, only 12% have improved sanitation facilities. Our project under this alliance will help 114 communities and over 100,000 people. Much of the money spent will go towards installing ventilated improved pit-latrines (VIPs) in the public schools in Ghana. During our trip we visited several of the villages and schools that hopefully will receive our assistance through this project.

When I speak on behalf of Rotary, I am known to some extent for selling the sizzle that is our Rotary Foundation and safe water is a big part of what I sell. The Rotary/US AID alliance project in the Dominican Republic is an easy sell and almost fully funded. It provides safe water to those in need through the installation of bio-sand filters. Providing safe water is sexy.

In Ghana it is a different story: We are short \$340,000. US AID has put its \$1,000,000 on the table. The Trustees have approved a special \$500,000 grant to help fund Rotary's share. The rest must come from Rotarians, clubs and/or districts.

The challenge to me as a VIP is to sell the funding of VIPs for Ghana. Is there sizzle in having a decent restroom to use and a place to wash your hands? Last week as I walked through the school yards of Ghana, I frequently looked around and saw my daughter bent over sharing a moment with cute little school girls all in their matching uniforms: An amazing view for a father to see! However, the idyllic visual scene was tarnished by my other senses: Stifling heat and humidity prickled my skin and the stench of human excrement filled my nostrils. The smell came from the corner of the schoolyard where the children have no other option but to defecate in the bushes. When faced with so many other obstacles how long will a young girl stay in school under these conditions?

Ashley was blessed to grow up and go to school never having to worry about toilets or washbasins. Become a VIP, fund a VIP and maybe I will give you a ribbon!