



Rob Rose holds a photo he took of children in Nepal.

Fumiko Yarita/Bellevue Reporter

Bellevue businessman takes Rotary abroad

Published: June 18, 2008 12:00 AM

South Asia has held a special place in Rob Rose's heart since he was 16; he lived in Calcutta, India, for eight months through an exchange program his junior year of high school. He still calls his Indian host parents "Ma" and "Pa" and visits them often, usually taking along his wife, Gina, and/or one of his sons.

As an adult, Rose wished to make a difference in the lives of a people that changed his outlook on life.

Now, Rose, owner of Brant Photographers in Bellevue and a 12-year member of the Bellevue Rotary Club, has been awarded a \$330,000 Rotary grant to continue his work in rehabilitating and educating Nepalese children with disabilities.

"It started with a phone call to volunteer 11 years ago and (it) has had an amazing impact on thousands and thousands of children in Nepal," says Rose.

He telephoned Olga Murray, president of the Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation, in 1997 after reading an article detailing the 72-year-old's quest to stop the tradition of families in rural Nepal selling their daughters into indentured servitude.

Rose was struck by the parallel between Murray's mission and his own; he also aspired to change a long-lasting perception in Nepal: a superstition that a child born with a disability is being punished for a past-life sin.

He wondered if he could get Rotary involved and asked Murray if she knew any Rotary members. She said she knew "just the guy," referring to Nepali Rotary member Rabendra Raj Pandey, or RR.

The two became partners and three years ago, Rose conceived the idea for an international Rotary project. He wondered if collaboration between local Rotary clubs and those in Nepal could foster a transnational movement to help Nepalese children with disabilities. He argued that having a disability "doesn't change what you were meant to do in life" and that through education, children with disabilities "can be empowered to be an important resource for their country."

After learning that Rotary Nepal would launch a new district in July 2008, he and RR pitched the idea to Nepali Rotary clubs. They explained that the project could be a kick-off for the launch of the new district.

Rose says that American social-marketing techniques can work in Nepal, noting that "once people find out there's a better way of doing something, they'll do it."

He lined up more project partners in Nepal and submitted a preliminary grant application in March 2007. He submitted his final grant request last August.

Rose says that he was ready for Rotary's decision either way: "We were still going to go out for a nice dinner," he says with a chuckle.

Turning more serious, he adds, "It's hard to describe the feeling when you accomplish something people said was impossible."

But, he notes, "Now the hard work comes in because we have to implement the program."

Club-to-club Rotary projects will include not only rehabilitating and educating children with disabilities, but also creating a help and info line for parents.

"Parents may not know their child is deaf, for instance," notes Rose, explaining that there is a severe lack of awareness about disabilities and their causes and cures in Nepal.

Rose's project is grand, but he encourages everyone to be a Good Samaritan, saying, "even as one person, you just have to think about how you could make a positive impact on someone's life."

For more information on Rotary Club, go to rotary.org. For information on Bellevue Rotary Club, go to bellevuerotary.net.

Rose, with his wife, also founded The Rose International Fund for Children. It became an official nonprofit organization in 2006 and primarily helps raise money for the Newlife Disabled Center in Nepal and the Kathmandu School for the Deaf. For more information, go to trifc.org.

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