Message from President Courtenay Thompson ~ March 2009

It seems no time since I wrote the last Presidents letter, and yet I am sure everyone had a hectic Christmas and hopefully saw in the New Year in true festive spirits.

What a relaxing and enjoyable way to celebrate Advent than to have our Christmas luncheon and be entertained to an outstanding performance of carols and music from the pupils of Royal Belfast Academical Institution, we only had a select choir under the brilliant leadership of their head of music Philip Bolton. Our District Governor Paul and his wife Marnie joined us as did the president of Strandtown Probus Club. (the club are celebrating their 40th anniversary of their founding by The Belfast Rotary Club this year.) The Ladies of the Europa staff who look after us each year were their usual very courteous selves greeting each of us by our Christian names and enquiring about our families, they deserve a sincere thank you and always make us feel welcome.

It was with great sorrow and yet very many happy memories of excellent fellowship that we learned of the passing of our **Past President Harry Corscadden**. One of only two people ever to have been awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship Sapphire Award from our club, and the other recipient HRH The Princess Royal. His work in setting up the Harmony Trust and the purchase of Glebe House was exceptional, tireless and an example of how a local member of the Belfast club can by his own devotion to a worthwhile cause get Rotary Clubs from all over the world to join together and deliver an end result that has helped reconciliation in our divided communities beyond belief. When our politicians let the project down, he redoubled his efforts and I am sure there are hundreds of young people who owe their enhanced outlook and personal development to his vision and determination.

At the Rotary District Council meeting in mid December the Belfast Club was able to announce that we would be putting on a charity concert in aid of the eradication of Polio Worldwide. I cannot thank Past President Marnette Lyons and her team for firstly persuading the Harvard University Glee Club to include Belfast as part of their first ever visit to Ireland, during the University spring break, but then to get their agreement that they wanted to assist the Belfast Rotary club in our commitment to raise funds for Polio eradication was exceptional. The teams' efforts have been an example of how Rotary can produce outstanding results from a group of committed volunteers.

If the chatter and good will were anything to go by Adrian Kerr's "Talking Heads" evening for prospective new members should produce some, if not immediate new members, then a very vibrant group of 'friends of the Rotary Club of Belfast'. Even more encouraging was the fact that at least half of those attending were under forty! The Rotary clubs of South Colorado are able to run a one day course on business ethics, mostly based on Rotary's four way test, for every kid leaving high school. They have trained all the 'friends of Rotary' in the course and thus in one week they are able to put on the one day course for the 16,000 high school leavers in the area.

A final sincere thanks to all the officers and council members who have roughly kept me on the straight and narrow. Our secretary and treasurer really do beaver away in the background and give up precious family hours just to keep a busy club like Belfast running smoothly; I always get a friendly and prompt response to my least request.

Lets all have a brain storming session to look for ways that we and we as a club can help those who are caught up in this downturn, to make their lives more human and pleasant. There must be things that the state or our council does not provide which we can help with.