

I have seen first-hand many Rotary projects throughout the world. I guess it has become a passion of mine within Rotary to witness the wonderful work of Rotary not only on a local level, but internationally also. Samoa was the very first international project I had participated in. To be perfectly honest, I have never got over how hopeless I was as a volunteer in Samoa. It simply would not have mattered if I had participated or not. Regardless, my experience in Samoa encouraged me to look at ways I could make a positive difference with my future international workand do not simply become extra baggage!

Importantly, if it was not for Samoa, I would have never come to appreciate the importance of our Rotary Foundation and RAWCS. My experience in Samoa had a dramatic impact on my Rotary life. Consequently, I decided to firstly research our history records about how our Rotary Club first became involved in Samoa. Also, to check with Garry Gunnell, who has had an involvement with our work from the very beginning, about the accuracy of what I had found. Where appropriate, he has added his comments to what I have found in the history records.....



How did we first get involved with our voluntary work in Samoa?

(Note: Samoa was formerly called Western Samoa until July, 1997).

Even though our first two working parties did not leave for Samoa until July 1, 1993, we need to look at how our Club first became involved with overseas hand-on projects.

On March 13, 1990, a FAIM representative (Neville Lee) from the Rotary Club of Melbourne South asked for volunteers from our Rotary Club to assist with the construction of classrooms for the Martyrs school in Popondetta, PNG. On July 1, 1990, Hugh Wheeler and Garry Gunnell responded to the request to become our first overseas volunteers on any FAIM project.

Garry: *the school we were working at was at Kokoda.*

In 1990/91, the goal of the Club was to continue with providing volunteers for PNG; however, political unrest in PNG caused the club to look at other options - despite the Rotary Australia World Community Service encouraging our Club to continue with the PNG project. Garry had mentioned to me the malaria issues in PNG also caused us to look elsewhere.

Garry: ***Hugh and I joined the District Rotary Australia World Community Service (RAWCS) at the time and have both served as District Chairman over the years. Colin Burns also later became involved at District level and as a District Chairman.***

On December 4, 1991, Cyclone Val struck Samoa. The cyclone lasted 5 days with 240km/h winds and 15 metre waves. The estimate of damage to electrical, water, telephone connections and the destruction of various government buildings, schools and houses was 200 million. The damage to Samoa was estimated to be four times the level of damage to American Samoa.

Garry: ***It was at one of the District RAWCS meetings that we heard about the severe damage that had occurred in Samoa as a result of two cyclones close together. A call had been put out for volunteer teams as Rotary New Zealand had funding for the construction of 25 cyclone shelters in village areas around the two main islands of Samoa. It was evident that in the recent cyclones, people had nowhere safe to shelter that was designed to survive the wind force and most either went inland into the jungle, or in fact created a hole in the side of their concrete water tanks and took shelter inside. While cyclones are fairly rare, it was agreed that the main purpose of the shelter was a community facility for the weekly visit of the district nurse and other community functions.***

In 1991/92, there was lots of interest within our Club with the idea of doing something to assist Samoa. The overall goal of the Club this year was to ensure something significant happened to assist Samoa in 1992/93. Garry had already put out the call out around Bendigo for our first volunteer trip immediately after the cyclone had hit.

Garry: ***Prior to going to Samoa we tapped into Bill Gray's local knowledge. Due to Bill's business connections with Samoa, we were able to start a relationship with members of the Rotary club of Apia. Our relationship remains as strong as ever as we now enter our 22nd year of working on different projects in the many village communities of Samoa. On this first visit we were also introduced to a local Samoan, Tamasone Esera, who at the time was a business colleague of Bill's and provided great local assistance. In fact this association led to Tamasone later joining the Rotary Club of Apia and later as Club President. He has remained the one constant contact for us in Samoa as other members have continually change roles. With every project he has been there with us and without that assistance I am sure we would not have achieved what we have and continue to do.***



Bill Gray with Tamasone Esera and Dr Tuale

Who was on our first trip to Samoa in 1993?

Brian Kinross, Bill Gray, David Brown, John Flood, Garry Gunnell, Robert McLeod, Charlie Martin and Garry's father, Max, represented the Rotary Club of Bendigo on our very first working party to Samoa. John Langley and Richard Naudi from the Rotary Club of Bendigo Sandhurst also participated.

Garry: ***Malcom McClure from the Rotary Club of Castlemaine was also a member of the team.***

Two working parties were formed from the participants to erect shelters in the villages of Vaisala and Tufutafoe. This was a very important trip for our Club's international project work as its success would ensure it was possible to set up a long term relationship for any future participation.



Garry: ***the reason we do it.***



From tragedy on our first trip came huge benefits!

On our first trip, both Bill Gray and John Flood were taken to hospital with severe injuries. After seeing first-hand the lack of medical supplies in the local Vaisala Hospital, Bill Gray and Charlie Martin on their return to Bendigo, acquired \$25,000 worth of medical supplies from donations for the local hospital with the cooperation of the Rotary Club of Apia.

Bill Gray: ***the medical equipment, medicine and drugs were obtained from the Inglewood hospital. The medicines, etc. were identified by the late Bob Vanstan and his daughter, Helen Buttolph.***

How did we formalize our relationship with Samoa?

In February, 1995, following inquiries to the Australian High Commissioner, a formal agreement was reached to facilitate future projects in Samoan schools; consequently, the Rotary Club of Apia would become our local sister Club.



Garry Gunnell and Joy Bruce attending the Rotary Club of Apia with the Club president.

Garry: *During 1994, I visited twice and discussions with the Australian High Commissioner led me to a representative for AusAID and a project they were developing to strengthen the roofs on all schools in Samoa to a cyclone proof standard. They had a local team, but with over 80 schools to do and a time frame of twelve months they needed assistance.*

Amongst members of the Rotary Club of Bendigo, a strong bond developed with our new friends in Samoa after learning of our formal relationship. Members were very committed to ensure that we continued to assist Samoa in the years ahead.

Working parties to Samoa increase!



Garry: *In this photo I can see Brian Doherty, Charlie Martin, Paul Kirkpatrick, Colin Burns, Max and Garry Gunnell, Matt Gallagher (without hair) and local community members.*



Garry: ***In front of a toilet block constructed at a village school. I can see John Gallagher (and son Matt), Charlie Martin, Alan Spalding, Garry Spence, Colin Burns, Paul Kirkpatrick, Garry Gunnell plus a number of workers from Jimmy Possum.***

In 1995/96 there were two working parties from our Club sent to Samoa to reinforce school buildings from the risk of future cyclones. Team members from the working parties entertained all members of the Club on their return with a show in full Samoan regalia which further cemented our bonds with our brothers and sisters in Western Samoa.

Garry: ***With my connections in District and National RAWCS, I was able to arrange for 40 Rotary volunteer teams from all over Australia to participate with each team allocated a school to undertake the work. The response from the Rotary Club of Bendigo and surrounding clubs was again strong and teams departed in 1995/96.***



At the meeting with the village chief. Sticks are Kava sticks - a traditional gift given at a significant function.

In 1996/97, water tanks became a major project for our work in Samoa with the assistance of the Rotary Club of Brighton and a Matching Grant from the Rotary Foundation. The following Rotary year (1997/98) Rotary tanks were also sent to Tonga.

Garry: *While rain is significant in the wet season, its catchment is poor and we were asked to assist with the provision of water tanks. Again, members from Bendigo and surrounds were prominent in Samoa during 1996/97. The design of these tanks were experimental and did require a number of follow up visits over the next couple of years to rectify major issues. With this experience, the decision was then made that for future projects we would also manage the project organization and volunteer resource from a club level. This would ensure we had full control as to what was provided. During this time, we were also instrumental in obtaining a matching grant with financial support from other district clubs to provide some 20 water tanks to schools in Tonga. These were of a more conventional design and we also sourced a number of teams from Victorian districts to assist with the erecting.*

1997/98 and 1998/99 projects on the water tanks plus more general maintenance works were carried out at a number of village primary schools.



Garry about to attend an official village committee meeting.

Garry: *Somewhere around this time John Gallagher participated in one or two volunteer teams to work in PNG on the Rotary Kokoda Hospital project.*

In conjunction with Bendigo TAFE, 24 word processors were sent to Samoa. Importantly, the Club sponsored Wilma Skidmore from Bendigo TAFE to ensure the word processors were correctly installed. Sewing machines, typewriters and wheelchairs were also sent.

Garry: *Over the years a number of containers of goods have been sent and distributed throughout Samoa.*

In 1999/2000, the Club worked very hard to ensure they would receive a matching grant with the assistance of the Rotary Club of Melbourne South for further projects in Samoa. During this year, Garry, Charlie, Jack Gallagher and Max Gunnell investigated further projects with the assistance of a Carl Millar Discovery Grant.

Garry: *We also stopped over in Tonga to survey the work carried out on the water tank project and were very happy with the final outcome.*

Our work in Samoa this Century by Garry Gunnell:



Garry with Tamasone Esera, our long term contact and adviser in Samoa.

Over the period 2000-2009, many volunteer projects were determined and carried out by mainly volunteers from the Rotary Club of Bendigo, with family and friends lending a hand and of course Paul Kirkpatrick was always a willing participant.

During this period, a strong friendship was developed with local Rotary member and parliamentarian Dr. Leao Tuitama. With his and Tamasone's assistance we planned and carried out 3 significant projects over a 3-4 year period in the villages of Maasina, Uafato and Lona.

These projects saw the construction of toilet blocks, a teacher's residence, new classrooms, a computer room and many general maintenance items at the 3 village primary schools. Dr. Tuitama remains a close contact in Samoa and is now the Federal Health Minister for Samoa.

Another highlight during this period was a club organized visit with some 25 members and partners travelling to Samoa to see what have been done over the years.

This was a fantastic experience for all and with the many activities arranged by local Rotary members it further cemented our long standing relationship.

I can still see the look on President Ian Monotti's face when at an official village function he was presented with a 100kg plus cooked pig to take back to Bendigo in appreciation of our club's work.

Off to the Rotary Meeting.....



An international incident was in the making as he did not want to offend, but it was all a set up and all in the village would have eaten well that night!



Why are these ladies queuing?



Enjoying a great night at Aggie Grey's.



A night out with the U.S. Ambassador.

Samoa has had its share of disasters over the years and in 2009 one of its worst when a Tsunami (as a result of an earthquake out to sea) struck completely wiping out many villages and causing nearly 300 deaths. Aid agencies were quick to act and within weeks John Gallagher and Colin Burns were able to travel to access what we as a club could do to help our many friends in great need.

It was decided that while significant aid was being made available for the immediate needs, we would be best served to look at a more long term view in the rebuilding process. The areas where most damage was caused was again the benefit of the aid required. This Tsunami affected everyone in Samoa in not just a material way, but personally as all had family or friends who suffered loss of life. We decided, we should look to the areas perhaps with less actual damage, but still had a great need within the villages - especially assisting the primary schools.



Colin Burns took over the major organizing role at this stage and a Rebuilding Samoa Appeal was set up with the assistance of the Bendigo Bank's Community Foundation. Money raised from this and also money over the years I have been able to source has resulted in many projects from 2009 to the present day with at least one team per year working with the local community.

In general, these have all been in remote village primary schools with water tanks, water pumps, computer rooms and libraries a major component of each project. General maintenance and painting also high on the job list.

The reason for working in a primary school is that after original construction, it becomes the responsibility of the local community to maintain the school. The only government support a village receives is payment of the teacher's wages. All maintenance work is funded and carried out by the school committee. Without ongoing funding, not a lot can be done. The teams that are sent today are around six members and would be on the job for 2-3 weeks. Part of our local work is involving the local villagers so they can take ownership of the work and also provide accommodation and meals for the team. Compared to our standards, the accommodation and food is very basic. It is actually this interaction and living in a different culture which brings the greatest benefit to team members.



The last finished project, late last year, was at a village primary school in which upstairs flooring was replaced. The lower part of the school timber weatherboards were replaced with concrete blocks. Similarly, the timber beam under the veranda and timber columns were replaced in concrete as all had severe termite damage. All the blocks and concrete were made on site by hand as one cannot call up a ready-mix concrete truck! This job was on the second Island (Savaii) of Samoa which also requires a 2 hour boat trip. Then, about 2 hours by road to reach this village.

With Colin moving to Perth I am back in the role of major organizer and we have a project underway at present in which we have provided funding to assist with the building of a school/community hall and repainting of the primary school. This project was set up in a previous visit where Joy Bruce and myself sat under a tree in conversation with the village Matai or Chief. Our current funds, despite being relatively small, have been enough to be the catalyst with obtaining a local Government grant to cover most of the cost. We are also providing funds to fully repaint the school so that with the new building it will be revitalized. Labour for these projects is from the local community which is being funded from the grant obtained. It is hope a number of us will be able to travel around March/April for an opening function. At the same time, we will investigate and set in motion the plans for the next project to follow with a volunteer team assisting sometime later in 2015.

So our work continues and if you would like to be part of a volunteer team to Samoa then speak to myself, or Tom Dobeli as we always need willing volunteers.

Final Note: Hugh was unable to be a volunteer on the first team but has been part of a number of subsequent volunteer teams. Paul Kirkpatrick from Bendigo Sandhurst and later Colin Burns became regular team members. In recent years, Tom Dobeli and Ken Gilchrist are now in that classification. There have been so many other members of our club, plus Greater Bendigo clubs, as team members over the years -without who we would not have achieved what we have so far. It is also now a common part of a volunteer team to include an apprentice or two as a Rotary vocational award.

At a guess I have now made some 30 trips to Samoa on either working or pre-planning teams, Charlie, Big John, Colin and Paul Kirkpatrick probably 20 plus. If you add in his work visits Bill would have more than any of us hence the nick name, King Billy.

Newspaper and Rotary World Articles

Rotary volunteers head for Samoa

VOLUNTEERS from the Rotary Clubs of Bendigo and Bendigo-Sandhurst have responded to the call for workers to erect cyclone-proof shelters in Western Samoa.

Cyclone Val was the latest in a string of three destructive cyclones to hit Western Samoa in as many years.

Winds of up to 130 knots and seas which rose to 16 metres resulted in the destruction of 80 per cent of all buildings on the island of Savai, and 80 per cent on the island of Upolo.

Representing the Bendigo Club will be Brian Kinross, Garry Gunnell, Rob McLeod, Charlie Martin, David Brown, Bill Gray and John Flood. Mr Kinross was recently installed as club president.

The Bendigo-Sandhurst

Rotarians making the trip will be John Langley, Richard Naudi and builder Max Gunnell.

They have volunteered under Rotary's FAIM (Fourth Avenue in Motion) project, and will form two teams, each working in a different village.

Each group of volunteers will erect a cyclone shelter for use by local residents.

A spokesman said this was a fine example of Rotarians applying the motto, "Service above self" — giving of their time and money to participate in an activity of world community service.

The volunteers will leave for Western Samoa on August 1. The Rotarians will live in the village community for two weeks.

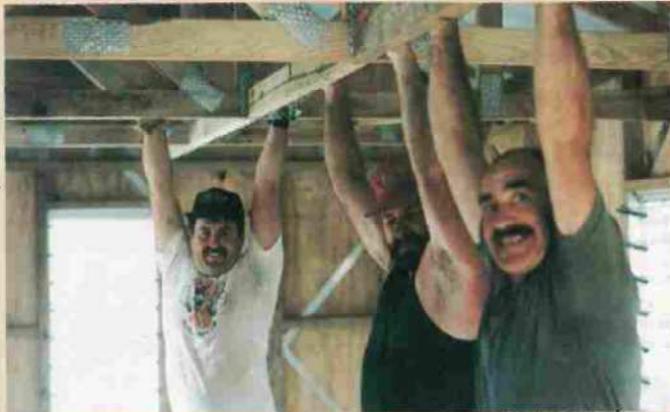
They will be housed in traditional village huts and eat local food.

This Rotary World

million he sought help from his N.S.W. colleagues. A Rotarian dentist co-ordinated the local appeal and the Rotary Club of Wahroonga donated \$A1,000. Other substantial donations, including two X-ray machines, were received from dentists and suppliers. William Green P/L generously donated two dental units. Much of the hard work of collecting, sorting and packing was done by Christine Crawford of Hornsby, N.S.W., Susan O'Reilly of Pymble, N.S.W., and Marilyn Riches of Thornleigh, N.S.W. All are members of the staff of the co-ordinator. Kwikasair transported the 36 cartons to Western Australia and a mining company delivered the consignment to Ghana via Belgium. The project should build goodwill and better friendships.

Holiday, so FAIM service

Sixteen Rotarians from Central Victoria and volunteers from the community have spent their holidays working on a Fourth Avenue in Motion (FAIM) project in Western Samoa. They came from the Rotary clubs of Bendigo, Bendigo Sandhurst, Bendigo South and Castlemaine. All took part in the construction of cyclone shelters designed by structural engineer Stuart Thompson, a New Zealand Rotarian. The shelters are designed to protect a community of 100 people and came about after two cyclones, 18 months apart, had struck Western Samoa. Rotary clubs in New Zealand and the Rotary Club of Apia, Western Samoa, were involved in the program, the New Zealand clubs raising the funding to purchase 16 shelters. The Apia Rotarians met the freight costs and negotiated with the Western Samoan Government to have import duties waived. The Bendigo district Rotarians, along with a volunteer builder, worked on the project at Vaisala and Tufutafoe. Interaction with the Samoan people in sharing meals and



Can't budge it ... the combined weight of three well-nourished Rotarians in Rob McLeod, Charlie Martin and John Flood was easily resisted by the cyclone shelter built in Western Samoa in a Fourth Avenue In Motion (FAIM) project. All are members of the Rotary Club of Bendigo, Vic.

working together highlighted the experience. The teams were 20 km apart and had extremes in situations. At Vaisala the chief owned a holiday resort with self-contained motel-styled units. The volunteers had ensuite, overhead fans and meals in the resort restaurant! At the other site the volunteers were in a village with no running water, showers, flush toilets or electricity. With the construction completed, the villagers at each site hosted a celebration. It is hoped that the shelters will not have to be used for the purposes intended for many years to come, but in the meantime they will be used as health centres and as women's meeting places. — Past President David Brown, Rotary Club of Bendigo, Vic.