World Polio Day: Rotary Club of North Stafford-County-Garrisonville works to fight polio worldwide with The Purple Pinkie Project.

Rotary nears halfway mark in $200 million campaign, as new polio vaccine is approved for countries still battling the disease

(Stafford, Virginia, USA: 24 October 2009) - In recognition of World Polio Day, The Rotary Club of North Stafford County-Garrisonville, District 7610’s newest club, launched The Purple Pinkie Project with their sister Rotary Club of Stafford and with the cooperation of Stafford County Public Schools. The project is an initiative that promotes educating the public about Rotary’s biggest challenge to “END POLIO NOW” worldwide by re-enacting the dying of the pinkie purple when a child receives the polio vaccine in developing countries. During the National Immunization Days (NID) in countries where polio outbreaks still exist, this marking system, with Gentian Violet dye, is done as a measure to insure that the polio vaccine is not accidently administered twice to the same child. However, during October, 2009, the children of the Stafford County and the surrounding area were given an opportunity to receive their H1N1 Flu inoculations and receive an education on what is polio and why they don’t have to worry about contracting it. In a gesture of support, children and adults donned a purple pinkie for their donation of $1.00 to pay for nearly two doses of the polio vaccine for those less fortunate in other countries. This project has been promoted by Rotary District 7610’s Governor, Horace McCormack since last spring during the District’s Club Leadership Training Seminar, (CLTS).

In a September 29th press release, Valerie Cottongim who is not only a Rotarian from the North Stafford Rotary Club but also the Chief Information Officer of the Office of Public Relations in Stafford County Public schools wrote;

“The North Stafford County Garrisonville Rotary Club, has partnered with Stafford County Public Schools to bring the Polio Purple Pinkie Project to our community in a unique way. The Rotary will host an information and Pinky Painting table at each of the five community H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine Clinics being held in Stafford County’s high schools during October.”

With the blessing of Stafford’s Superintendent, Dr. David E. Sawyer, a Charter Member of the NSC-G Rotary Club and Polio survivor, this new club used this opportunity to make lemonade out of lemons. Cottongim wrote, “[It’s] an opportunity to educate the community on the continued need for Rotary to provide polio outreach to developing nations.” This venue allowed Rotary to get parental permission for pinkie painting as a creative way of teaching children what Rotary volunteers do while administering the polio vaccine in Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India.
Charter President of the North Stafford Rotary Club, Andrea Coble, and their Vocational Chair and Charter member Mark Smith Sr. felt from the word “Go” that this is a fantastic Vocational project as well as an International service project in that it involves educating children as to why they are so blessed to live in a country where they receive the polio vaccine as babies and how they can help other children who are not so fortunate in other parts of the world. Since this program's main platform is education and awareness that the fight to eradicate polio is not over, it made perfect sense to pull in their sister club, the Stafford Rotary Club who are the sponsors of all five SCPS high school Interact clubs.

On the cover of the Purple Pinkie Handbook put out by the creator of this project, the Rotary Club of Lake City, Florida www.rotary6940.org, they appropriately title it;

Purple Pinkie Project Handbook, “Making Children a Part of the Solution”. Within the pages of this wonderfully written handbook, it lists the many benefits of this program. The fifth one being: “By partnering with Interact and fellow Rotarians, service relationships will be developed.”

The NSC-G Rotary club and the Stafford Rotary club could not agree more. Both clubs rolled up their sleeves and managed to raise $1200, (where 100% will go to fight polio) with the generous support from local sponsors like Dan’s Wellness Pharmacy who donated the Gentian Violet dye. Other local sponsors, McDonalds, Nationwide Insurance-Smith Agency, Chick-Fil-A, Wal-Mart, Wacky Bear, Sport and Health, CiCi’s Pizza and Huntington Learning Center rewarded those who donated $1.00 to fight polio with generous giveaways and discounts.

Children and parents who waited in what seemed to be mile long lines that wrapped around the school building were greeted by Rotarians who were there to assist and comfort. Once they
reached the recovery area, Rotarians pointed out the Purple Pinkie table to them and gave the parents a flyer to read to their children about the wonderful job the Lake City Florida Rotary Club did to raise awareness about Rotary’s biggest challenge to END POLIO NOW…and how SCPS wants to emulate their amazing efforts. “Our main job, however, was to perform community service by monitoring the recovery area where the inoculated had to wait for 15 minutes to see if there were any reactions to the H1N1 shot. The Purple Pinkie project was a wonderful way for them to spend their time while having to wait”, Coble said.

Long Lines were greeted by Rotarians

Children watch informational videos about Ending Polio Now for those less fortunate with the guidance of the NSC-G Rotary Club’s International Chair, Mario Alfaro.

Parents signed a waiver and children proudly printed their names prior to their pinkies being dyed.

Local sponsors donated wonderful giveaways as a way of thanking the children for their generosity. NSC-G Rotary Vocational Committee member, Roberta Schreiber, and her friend had the pleasure of surprising the children with treats. President Andrea Coble states, “It was beautiful to witness the smiles that formed on children’s faces (some still wearing tear stains from their H1N1 shot) because they knew that their $1 donation and purple pinkie paid for almost two inoculations for those less fortunate. Parents even thanked the Rotarians for empowering their children to give back. Best of all, the Interact club of Brooke Point High School showed how “cool” it was to sport a Purple Pinkie. The craze
was to find the Rotarian or Interact student who taught them about Rotary’s fight to end polio and give them a “Purple Pinkie high five”, Coble said.”

Children smiled and felt empowered. Rotarians Nelda Mohr, Carol Foley, Lynne Fournier and Mike Hull demonstrates generosity and team work!

Three Rotary Avenues of Service were represented: Community Service, Vocational Service and International Service. Go Purple Pinkie!

Rotary International is celebrating a major milestone reached in its global fundraising campaign to eradicate polio - nearly US$100 million raised toward its US$200 million challenge.

As part of a US$355 million challenge grant awarded to Rotary by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Rotary clubs worldwide are aiming to raise a total of US$200 million by 2012. The funding will provide critical support to polio eradication activities, including the distribution of a new, more effective bivalent polio vaccine that was recently approved for use in the coming months, for countries still battling the disease in parts of Africa and South Asia.

A highly infectious disease, polio causes paralysis and is sometimes fatal. As there is no cure, the best protection is prevention. For as little as US 60 cents worth of vaccine, a child can be protected against this crippling disease for life. After an international investment of more than US$6.22 billion, and the successful engagement of over 200 countries and 20 million volunteers, polio could be the first disease of the 21st century to be eradicated.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is spearheaded by the World Health Organization, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). It includes the support of governments and private sector donors.

Rotary is an organization of business and professional leaders united worldwide to provide humanitarian service and help to build goodwill and peace in the world. It is comprised of 1.2 million members working in more than 33,000 clubs in 200 countries and geographic regions.

Rotary invites the public to support the polio eradication initiative by visiting rotary.org/endpolio. Cell phone users can donate $5 by texting the word “polio” to 90999.

For further information visit, www.rotary.org/endpolio or www.polioeradication.org.