



## rotarians ophthalmic initiative (ROI) press release november 2007

[www.roisight.org](http://www.roisight.org)



### Helping to make blindness history

#### Stevenage Rotarians launch a project to help save the sight of over 500 people in Mumbai, India

According to the World Health Assembly, developing countries already account for 90% of the world's 37 million blind people. Up to 2 million more will go blind next year and yet 75% of impending blindness is treatable or curable at little cost.

Motivated by the potential benefits of a locally designed and manufactured product, which is suitable for use in remote locations, Stevenage Grange Rotary Club saw an opportunity to *help make blindness history* for many. The Club supported development of the Optys e™, a global award-winning, lens free ophthalmoscope, invented by retired Lister Hospital surgeon Mr Roger Armour. Roger lives in Hitchin. In partnership with global eye-care charities SightSavers International, IMPACT, Stevenage's Mercy Ships and others, some 1,120 ophthalmoscopes are already being used in 41 developing countries.



With funds donated by local residents as well as Rotarians, just £550 was pledged towards a Rotary matching grant project with a value of £12,500. The balance of funds was pledged by various Rotary bodies, including Rotarians in Mumbai and the Rotary Foundation (TRF).

TRF is possibly best known for its PolioPlus campaign. Through the efforts of Rotary and its partners in the fight against polio, more than one billion children worldwide have been immunised since 1985. By 2005, Rotary's financial commitment reached over a half billion US dollars. TRF is also the world's largest privately funded source of international scholarships designed to further world understanding and peace. Each year some US\$90 million is invested annually in these and programmes such as the *Make blindness history* programme being sponsored by Stevenage Grange.

According to Stephen Sypula, its co-ordinator, Stevenage Grange's project in Mumbai will fund the purchase and distribution of 80 ophthalmoscopes at just £27.50 each, for use by trained volunteers to screen some 5,000 people for cataract and other life threatening conditions. These conditions include: Heart disease, diabetes and brain tumours. It will also fund 500 cataract operations and provide essential eye-care equipment for the Rotary Medical Centre in Mumbai.

President of the Rotary Club, Andrew Fraser of Orchard Crescent, Stevenage said "Roger's simple invention when linked into our Rotarians Ophthalmic Initiative (ROI) has already helped screen many thousands across the globe. This project in Mumbai is a great development of the Initiative. Not only can we help accelerate early diagnosis, but with the help of other Clubs and organisations, as well as our own Rotary District 1260 and TRF, we can do more, by facilitating matching funds to undertake wider preventative treatments and much needed surgery. Amazingly, with volunteer surgical support, cataract operations in developing countries can cost as little as £10."



Ian Begg (right), Chairman of the Club's ROI Committee being examined by Roger Armour, adds "A child who goes blind in a developing country is twice as likely to die before his or her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. A saved sight regenerates personal esteem. It also generates economic benefits for the local economy and therefore supports the 'Make poverty history' campaign, so effectively promoted by Bob Geldorf."

Stephen Sypula adds "If you personally, your school or your employer wish to support Stevenage Grange's campaign to help *Make Blindness History* and help eliminate avoidable blindness by 2020, either by way of a Christmas donation or on a longer term sponsorship basis do contact me at [stephen@sgrc.org.uk](mailto:stephen@sgrc.org.uk)

Donation and Gift-aid forms are available on [www.roisight.org](http://www.roisight.org). The website publicly acknowledges all donations. In addition we provide a personal certificate to each donor. Each donation could deliver more than 6 times its value through our matching grant process ... and there are no administration fees."

So if you are stuck for a Christmas or birthday idea for someone who might appreciate the opportunity of giving the gift of sight, why not consider making a gift-aided donation to ROI where, for every 3 ophthalmoscopes donated at £27.50 each the taxman donates a fourth ... now that is a good ROI.

# Press Release – Helping to make blindness history this Christmas

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## **Notes to the Editor**

### **The Mumbai project**

This is about to commence. Should you wish to be kept informed on how local donations are being put to great effect please do let me know so that we might provide follow up copy.

### **The Rotary Foundation**

The mission of The Rotary Foundation is to enable Rotarians to advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace through the improvement of health, the support of education, and the alleviation of poverty. The Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation supported solely by voluntary contributions from Rotarians and friends of the Foundation who share its vision of a better world.

For further details see <http://www.rotary.org/en/AboutUs/TheRotaryFoundation/Pages/ridefault.aspx>

### **Matching Grants**

The Rotary Foundation gives 50p for each £1 donated to qualifying projects. It also contributes £1 for each £1 pledged by the Club's local District body in support of a qualifying humanitarian project

### **The Optyse™**

Was invented by Mr Roger Armour, a retired vascular surgeon. Roger previously worked at the Lister Hospital. He lives in Hitchin, Hertfordshire.

It has received a number of awards: These include 'Best Innovation to improve Global Health Care' awarded by Medical Futures. It was placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Saatchi and Saatchi 'World Changing Ideas' global competition in 2006 and won the Edward de Bono Medal for simplicity and design.

The Optyse™ is manufactured by Ophthalmos Ltd of Cambridge. Contact 01799 532755 <http://www.ophthalmos.co.uk/>

Mr Armour is not a Rotarian.

### **The Rotarians Ophthalmic Initiative (ROI)**

Is promoted by the Rotary Club of Stevenage Grange. It looks to create awareness of avoidable blindness by supporting World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions, coordinated jointly by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). ROI works in association with Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, Sightsavers International, the IMPACT Foundation and other global eye care charity programmes, as well as the Rotary Action Group for Blindness Prevention in helping to eliminate unnecessary blindness by the year 2020.

Full details, and a downloadable 10 minute video, narrated by past Prime Minister Sir John Major and Vision 2020 Ambassador, & internationally acclaimed author Ken Follett, which was recorded at the Studios of HertbeatFM, are available from the ROI website.

**Stevenage Grange Rotary Club** comprises people drawn from all walks of life. It meets at the Cromwell Hotel, High Street, Old Town, Stevenage on most Mondays at 19.45 for 20.00. The Club's President is Andrew Fraser who lives in Stevenage Old Town. The Club celebrates its 21<sup>st</sup> Charter in 2008.

New members are always welcome. Please email the Secretary, Ian Begg on [ian@sgrc.org.uk](mailto:ian@sgrc.org.uk) Details of our programme, activities & what the Club does can be found on the Club's website [www.sgrc.org.uk](http://www.sgrc.org.uk)

The Club, one of over 1,835 clubs in Great Britain and Ireland, is part of a world wide community service organisation with 1,180,000 members operating in 166 countries.

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