

The Pebble That Creates

Ripples

By Carol Metzker



A YEAR-AND-A-HALF AGO, Chester County residents Dennis Wallace and his wife, Carol, were sailing around the windward islands of the West Indies. Avid sailors familiar with that area of the Caribbean Sea, Dennis saw something new on the island of Mayreau: storage tanks to catch rainwater at each little house. “It never occurred to me that there could be a water problem on the island,” he said. He noted something else along with the cisterns: a sign attributing the water storage tanks to Rotary International and a local Rotary club.

Two thoughts followed. First, Wallace said, he realized the impact of Rotarians worldwide. Rotary projects—such as fresh water for the inhabitants of Mayreau—affected individuals, their families and their communities across the globe every day. Second, as a Rotarian he realized he had the wherewithal to spark other improvements—to talk to Rotarians and others, to raise funds and to facilitate collaboration for additional projects where people need help.

Back home on land, he hit the ground running. With the idea of starting a water project on the leeward Caribbean island of Antigua, he consulted Vasanth Prabhu, a Chester County Rotarian known for his dedication and expertise in humanitarian projects. Word traveled back from the island to Prabhu and Wallace. Needed even more than help with water, Antigua’s only



Dennis Wallace (Right) and dignitaries at the dedication of the ultrasound machine

hospital needed an ultrasound machine.

Wallace went to work. Through internet research he learned that Mount St. John’s Medical Centre was the only hospital serving the 100,000 residents of Antigua and the small population of Barbuda, the adjacent island. Antigua’s main industry, tourism, had taken a hit when the U.S. economy took a downturn; 29 percent of the population was at or below the poverty line or vulnerable to falling below it with a natural disaster or another economic shock. The island was one of contrast—home of affluent resorts and neighborhoods, and areas where money didn’t trickle down. Wallace also found website information about an ultrasound machine that would cost \$20,000—an amount of money he felt certain he could raise.

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When Wallace called the company that manufactures the ultrasound machine about a deposit, ordering time, installation and user-training, however, the picture looked completely different. A machine that could show details of a heart, thyroid, pregnancy and other organs cost nearly \$70,000. The amount seemed way beyond the realm of possibility. He dreaded telling fellow Rotarians, friends who had taken interest in the project and potential recipients that the dream seemed to be going up in smoke.

When Wallace met with Prabhu to deliver the bad news, however, the experienced Rotarian had some solutions of his own. Bit by bit, money from Rotary clubs elsewhere and matching grants began to add up. Friends of the Mount St. John's Medical Centre, a hospital auxiliary, raised a boatload of funds.

Close to the goal, Wallace—more determined than ever—called friends and invited them to a dinner party. He asked them to bring their checkbooks, hardly a typical gift for a party host. Besides feeding his friends, he explained the situation—the need, the cost and the possibility. That night, “friends opened their hearts and their checkbooks,” Wallace recounted. The Rotary Foundation came through with a matching grant for the equipment. Wallace was able to place the order.

On August 12, 2013, Dennis Wallace and his wife, Carol; Vasanth Prabhu; and additional Rotary dignitaries from the United States and West Indies unveiled the new ultrasound at the Mount St. John's Medical Centre in Antigua.

With the ultrasound now in use in Antigua, and the sailors and other guests back at home, Wallace reflected on lessons learned during the project. Successful projects require leaders' financial, emotional and physical involvement. They also need the support of other people. There were difficult moments during the planning and executing, but “we—all of us—did it; we made the ultrasound machine happen,” he said. “And now maybe someone else will recognize the sign for the ultrasound machine as a Rotary project and will be inspired to effect change.”

To talk about what matters to you and the world you want to create, contact Dennis Wallace at 484-888-2001 or dennis.wallace@lpl.com. 



Although the island of Antigua (pictured above and below) is the home of affluent resorts and neighborhoods, there are pockets of poverty and need.

