

# Going public

Members say Rotary needs to promote itself.

by Anthony G. Craine

When she was invited to join the Rotary Club of San Marcos, Calif., USA, Joan Boughton needed to do some research. She had heard of Rotary, but she didn't know what it did. Her first stop was [www.rotary.org](http://www.rotary.org), Rotary International's Web site.

"I was shocked to learn what Rotary does," Boughton says. "I had no idea. I said, 'Wow. Rotary is the world's best-kept secret.' My second thought was, 'What a shame. Why aren't they telling their story?'"

Six years later, Boughton – who owns a public relations firm and has served as District 5340 public relations chair – understands the vexing challenges of letting out "the world's best-kept secret." She believes that actively promoting Rotary is a necessity and that the emphasis must come from the top down. She says yearly leadership changes have a negative impact because they leave Rotary's public image susceptible to lapses in attention.

"What I see in the organization is a lack of consistency," Boughton says. "If the public image of Rotary is not in the forefront each year then we start sliding back to where we were. Leadership changes. Goals change. However, the basics should never change. I'm a firm believer that the promotion of Rotary needs to remain a permanent goal. Just like giving to The Rotary Foundation, it needs to be consistently pushed every year."

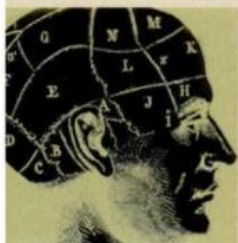
In 2001-02, RI developed a strategic plan to guide the organization and develop consistent objectives. "Enhance public image" was identified as one of seven major goals. Boughton says she understands that for many years, a prevailing philosophy was that

Rotary didn't need to seek out publicity. Rotarians' good works were supposed to speak for themselves. And she knows that, even now, in some parts of the world, self-promotion is considered off-putting. She says the International Assembly is "a great opportunity to speak to the district governors worldwide and share the reality that Rotary is a business and that we're trying to compete in an incredibly competitive world," Boughton says. "Each culture has a different approach to promoting business in their countries, and we have to look at that and encourage them to promote Rotary in a way that is sensitive to cultural diversity."

Rotarian Gary Froseth, who has worked in broadcast journalism and public relations for more than 40 years, thinks Americans would be receptive to an aggressive Rotary public image campaign in their country.

"I wish the board of directors would be more willing to look at the possibility of spending some extra money on doing publicity for Rotary on a national basis," says Froseth, a member of the Rotary Club of Harrisburg East in Pennsylvania, USA. He says RI's free public service announcements "will wind up being heard late at night, and that's not where the audience is that you want to reach."

"Either Rotary has to make a concerted effort to buy this time nationally or it needs to help districts with some financing on buying time," he says. "I realize we're talking big bucks here, but I think it's something that has to be looked at. I don't think you always get what you want through public service announcements."



## perception:

Rotarians are self-serving business people.