

Cochabamba Rotary Club Warmly Welcomes Old Friend

By Mark Baker
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When Dr. David Crane walks into the Cochabamba Rotary Club Tunari, he's greeted as if he's an old and long-lost friend.

It's no surprise, really. He *is* an old friend of the Bolivian club.

For 19 years, Crane has headed a humanitarian and educational mission to Cochabamba. Central to his program is the link between the Rotary Club of Chippewa Falls, and the Rotary Club Tunari of Cochabamba.

Members of the Cochabamba Rotary Club Tunari respect, admire, and yes, even love Dr. Crane for all that he's done for Bolivia during the past two decades.

The Rotary Club is a non-political, non-sectarian organization of men and women in business and professions who provide humanitarian services, encourage high ethical standards in all vocations, and help build goodwill and peace in the world. Its motto is "service above self."

The Chippewa Falls Rotary Club was founded in 1950. It now has 76 active members. It is one of 27,750 clubs in 154 countries throughout the world, with over 1.2 million members.

The Chippewa Rotary Club focuses on four avenues of service, including:

- Club projects, such as its annual Rose Day sale each November. Money raised from this event goes toward scholarships for high school seniors heading to college or technical school.
- Vocational service, where a senior from Chi-Hi and McDonell are invited to attend weekly Rotary meetings throughout the school year.
- Community service, from contributing funds and labor to build a new playground, to helping with Agnes' Table for people who are in need of a hot meal.
- And finally, international service, where the club sponsors a foreign exchange student, and supports Dr. Crane's mission to Bolivia.

The Chippewa Falls Rotary Club meets each Tuesday at noon at the Avalon Restaurant. Meetings, including lunch, take about an hour.

The Rotary Club Tunari meets on Thursdays starting at 8:30 p.m. Meetings, including socializing and dinner, can last until midnight.

On March 23, three Rotarians from Chippewa Falls – Dr. Crane, Andrew Dane, and yours truly – joined a half dozen other guests at the Tunari meeting. We spent the first 15-20 minutes being welcomed, with various club members introducing themselves and asking about our visit.

Vicky Crane, Dr. Crane's wife, also came to the meeting, even though it was her birthday. Sarah Williams, a dental hygienist from La Crosse, came too, as she was partially sponsored by the La Crosse Rotary Club. Our Bolivian guide and translator, Tim Johnson, is a member of this club.

The meeting is called to order, and members and guests are seated at long tables set up like a giant U, with the president and club secretary in the middle. After some preliminary remarks – all in Spanish, of course -- President Carlos Flores turns the program over to the club historian. He delivers a five minute speech, in which he implores members of the club to set an example for the rest of Bolivian society, to turn away from corruption and cutting corners, and to stand for the principals by which Rotary was founded. Tim Johnson sits behind us and quietly translates the speech into English.

Next, the club moves to an animated discussion on how to handle a project slated for the coming weekend. A Rotarian who is also a dentist is spearheading an effort to bring dental care to poor people living in barrios around Cochabamba. The club, which owns several vehicles, is discussing whether to allow the use of its vehicles for the work.

It turns out that the rural screening program was started three years earlier – with the help and backing of Dr. David Crane. They expect to provide dental care – cleaning of teetch and filling of cavaties -- for 120 children this weekend.

Eventually, the proposal wins everyone's backing, and President Flores turns to his attention to his guests. He invites Dr. Crane to stand and say a few words. Dr. Crane stands, thanks the club for hosting us, notes that it's good to be back in Cochabamba, and says he appreciates the support it's given over the years by his old friends.

Word spreads that each guest is expected to say a few words. Andrew Dane speaks to the club in fluent Spanish, but my basic skills can't keep up with his comments. When it's my turn, I speak in English, depending on Tim to translate. I tell the club that it's good to see Dr. Crane enjoying himself, because back in Chippewa Falls, he's considered one of the more quiet members of the club. That drew a hearty laugh from the Bolivians.

I note that I am there, as a journalist and fellow Rotarian, because of the stories I've heard over the years about Dr. Crane's work in Cochabamba. It is obvious that Dr. Crane loves their country and its people, and with good reason. And the trip has given me a greater understanding of the good that Dr. Crane's program is doing.

Others address the group, including Vicky Crane and Rotarians from Washington State and Illinois, and the atmosphere grows more festive with each little speech. Then the club president calls for the guests to come forward, and the guests are hugged and presented

with a small club banner of the Rotary Club Tunari. They insist on a group photo, and suddenly bottles of champagne appear. It is, after all, Vicky Crane's birthday. When everyone has a glass, they raise a toast to her. And then the men and women of the Rotary Club Tunari sing happy birthday – in their best English – to Vicky.

For more on the Chippewa Falls Rotary Club, go to <http://www.chippewafallsrotary.org/>