



SPACE CENTER ROTARY -
Making a Difference

by Tom Weir

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HOW AN IDEA OF ONE OF OUR CLUB MEMBERS BECAME AN EXPANDING FORCE THROUGH ROTARY.

In early 1989, Carson Stephens, our Youth Committee Chairman, found an article in the January 1989 Readers Digest that powerfully outlined the debilitating effects of drug abuse on individuals and society. The article, "There was a Nation" by Paul Harvey, recapitulated the history of 19th century China, whose growing dependence on opium led to disease, the breakdown of the national infrastructure, war with the Western powers, and ultimately the rise of communism in the middle of the 20th century. The parallel between the effect of the opium of 19th century China and the drugs of 20 century America is unnerving.

The Youth Committee, then made up of Carson Stephens, Dr. Huey Barnett, Dr. Sam Marullo, Joe Skelly, Steve Waldner, Julia Vidal and Billy Weseman, agreed that the article would make an excellent teaching tool for young people in our public schools. They also agreed that one way of disseminating the information would be through an essay contest conducted in cooperation with the schools but under the auspices of the Rotary Club. Thus was born the Space Center Rotary Drug Awareness Essay Contest.

The committee wanted the essay contest to be an in-depth, educationally sound one with adequate teaching materials made available to the teachers. Mr. George McKinnis, then assistant principal of Clear Lake Intermediate School, with the help of his English department, worked with the Youth Committee to outline a curriculum that would meet standard educational requirements. Each student, it was decided, should be given a copy of the Readers Digest article and the teachers should take whatever class time they wished to use the material as a springboard to stimulate further discussion.

By March of 1989 the first contest was ready to go with all 1400 students of Clear Lake Intermediate School participating. The Incentives, arranged by our club, were an all-expense paid trip to Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama for the Grand Prize winner and a season pass to Astroworld for six first prize winners.

Although the judging committee was almost overwhelmed by the massive participation, they selected very outstanding essays. The venture was judged to be very effective, especially amazing for the way it had gone from an idea to fulfillment so quickly.

BUT READ ON— for enters now THE POWER OF ROTARY AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL.

District Governor Sonny Nichols tapped Space Center Rotarian Terry Hesson for the job of heading up the Drug Abuse Awareness Committee for District 589. Terry presented his committee with the idea of getting Space Center Rotary's essay contest into every intermediate school in the nine county area served by District 589. The district committee accepted his idea with the modification that only eighth grade students would participate. That way the contest could be conducted annually using the same materials. It turned out that even that was a monumental task. There are 55 clubs in the nine county district and it was soon discovered that there were 44,000 eighth graders in the intermediate schools served by those clubs. (Our own club, now following district guidelines, expanded its local contest to include eighth graders in all four intermediate schools in the CCISD.)

Many Rotarians from all over the city of Houston and surrounding areas helped the committee conduct the contest on the district level. Space Center Rotarian Sammye Massey chaired the awards sub-committee while Carson Stephens chaired the contest implementation sub-committee. Donations by Shell Oil, Reader's Digest, Astroworld and HCA Hospitals made the motivation. An awards dinner held on May 12 at the George R. Brown Convention Center was attended by 400 Rotarians and contestants—no small event!

BUT THERE MAY BE MORE! On October 6, Terry Hesson and Carson Stephens were asked to present a report about the contest at the Zone Institute (a meeting of all the Rotary District Governors from twelve states) which met in Shreveport, Louisiana. Now we wait to see if the magnificent Rotary mechanism will spread the contest throughout the nation and into other parts of the world.

We already know our club, through dedicated members, has made a difference— and has developed a mechanism to continue making a difference. You may want to be part of that. If so, see Dr. Huey Barnett, current Youth Committee chair.

—The beat goes on at Space Center Rotary!