

Rotarians learned a lot

India LN-4 Team's reward: Tears, joy, smiles

By Michael Dacquisto, Rotarian, Spillway Writer

I was not sure to expect when boarding the Emirates flight from San Francisco to Dubai recently (15 hours non-stop) and then to Ahmedabad, India (3 hours non stop) to begin our LN-4 project. We arrived at 3 am on 9/30/10, expecting to be greeted by a hotel shuttle. Instead we were greeted by a contingent of Rotarians including Mohan Kamath, our trip contact and on the ground leader who stayed with us for the entire time (9/30/10 through 10/11/10 at 4:25 am when we left for 2 days in Dubai on the way home), and the Ahmedabad North Rotary Club president Devidas Bhanushali.

A description of our daily activities in India would take 50 pages, (or 49 more than most would care to read). We spent the first 4 days in Ahmedabad, the largest city in the State of Gujarat. Our time there included a Rotary meeting with the local contact club Ahmedabad North, visits to the Akshardham temple, the Gandhi Ashram, the Blind People's Association, the old portion of the city in Ahmedabad and one day of fitting the LN-4 hands.

Nice Bath: We spent the 5th day traveling to Sayla, conducting one day of fitting the Ln-4 hands and training local fitters, and then traveling to Bhuj. Both cities are located in Gujarat. This was the longest and most tiring day. We traveled from Sayla to Bhuj in a jam packed ten person van, which included an air conditioner on the roof of the van that thought the water condensation was best removed by emptying into the van. At one abrupt stop the whole pan of water emptied out the front of the air conditioner, giving me a nice bath.

We spent the next 4 days in Bhuj. In 2001 an earthquake of approximately 8.0 magnitude struck this area and resulted in casualties of approximately 25,000+. It also generated many upper arm amputations and multiple candidates for the LN-4 hand. During our time there we spent one day training 5 people and showed them how to fit and use the LN-4 hand, one day fitting hands, and two days shopping and sightseeing. We saw the old fort in Bhuj, last used by the king of the province of Kutch, the old city in Bhuj which had survived the earthquake and local shopping areas.

Train Ride: The last 2 days in India were spent with a train ride back from Bhuj to Ahmedabad, more shopping, and a final visit with the hosting Rotarians.

All told in the name of Redding Rotary, we delivered 200 LN-4 mechanical hands to India. Approximately 50 were fitted in the three clinics. The remaining hands were left at each location for future use. I believe the Bhuj fitting was the most beneficial. After that time I understand more than 20 people have come to the Bhuj clinic for evaluation and fitting with an LN-4 hand and more than 10 have come to the Sayla clinic.

The personal benefit for me, and I suspect for the seven other team members, from this project was enormous. Providing this simple mechanical hand to a man, woman or child who has had no use from a hand for many years and seeing the reaction to this marvelous gift cannot be described in words. Sometimes tears

broke out. Sometimes smiles suddenly appeared. Happiness and joy permeated the room. Here a picture really is worth 1,000 words.

Our team included the Lascelles, the Michiels, the Dacquistos, K. Anderson and A. Ward.

Some Random Thoughts and Views: The following observations and opinions, given in no particular order, are mine alone. Feel free to accept them, reject them, repeat them, change them or ignore them as you see fit. I had never been to India before. Other than anecdotes from others who had been there and some back ground reading about the country I did not know what to expect or what I would see and experience on this trip. Having traveled to other countries in the world I had an expectation, but wanted to see firsthand what the country was really like.

Hospitality: Every person we met, without exception, was gracious and hospitable. Our comfort and happiness was their first concern. On the streets, at the hand fittings, while shopping and sightseeing and anywhere else we traveled people would come up to us, ask where we were from, often want a picture with us, and generally express an interest in speaking with us and learning about why we were there. I'm not sure why they wanted a picture with us because the odds of follow up in the future would be small. Many knew "America" or "USA" while few knew "California." This friendly attitude and outpouring of interest and curiosity is something not seen in the United States. When was the last time you went up to someone who looked like he was from another country and asked for a picture with him or asked him anything about where he was from?

All of the Rotarians we met were warm, welcoming, interested in the LN-4 project and constantly expressing concern for our well being and comfort. We attended two regular rotary meetings, exchanged club flags and gifts and experienced good fellowship with our counterparts. They expressed as much interest in our lives and interests as we expressed in theirs and the time spent with them, one on one and in small groups was very valuable.

No PPs to Chastise: Rotary meetings are generally more formal in India than in Redding. Often there will be a master of ceremonies to keep things moving (someone other than the President), and pre determined agenda. The club president, club secretary and any important dignitaries would sit at a front table for the whole meeting. It was a far cry from the usual lunch meeting we hold at Riverview. The clubs were much smaller, usually with a membership of about 50 to 70. At one meeting applause was done by tapping on the table, not by clapping out loud. Generally there were no interruptions and I never heard a past President chastise the current President. Recognitions as a fund raising opportunity are not used but an occasional recognition for a personal accomplishment would be permitted.

We attended three more formal functions, held in conjunction with each hand fitting clinic. Those meetings would include press members, local project sponsors, club presidents and officers and an occasional present district governor or past district governor. They would last about 30 minutes and include the standard fare of speeches, greetings and self congratulatory accolades for the wonderful nature of the project and its anticipated benefits, all coordinated by

the designated master of ceremonies. Our team was asked to say a few words at each of these functions and each team member took his/her turn at this task.

Dues 6,250 Rupees: I learned that yearly Rotary dues for the Ahmedabad North club were 6,250.00 rupees (or about \$120.00). This included the mandatory international dues. The club budget would generally be met by contributions from sponsors or a small amount from club members. There was nothing like the recognitions we use here to raise money for projects. Their project money was raised almost exclusively by obtaining sponsors in the form of local businesses. For the LN-4 project two local banks were recognized as the principal sponsors.

A note to Greg, Tiger and Amelia and all past Presidents. In India if the club president cannot meet the yearly budget it is his/her personal responsibility to come up with the shortfall, out of his/her pocket.

Traffic in India can best be described as organized chaos. Vehicles are driven on the left side of the road and are equipped with a steering wheel and controls on the right hand side, both dating from the days of British rule. In the two weeks I was there I never became accustomed to this fact.

Hitting Cow Is Bad: The roads are used by pedestrians, bicycles, motor bikes, motor scooters, auto rickshaws, cars, trucks, cows, goats, dogs and the occasional camel and elephant. The animals, mostly cows and dogs, would come and go at their pleasure, anywhere on the road, at any time of the day or night. Hitting a cow with your vehicle was a very bad thing to do. Hitting a pedestrian, bicyclist or other vehicle was not a big deal. Our trip to Bhuj had a very interesting incident with a pedestrian, his posterior and a passenger side mirror. Here Dugan Barr would have been right on the spot, but not in India. There the only thing that happened was a sore posterior, a broken mirror, and a pissed off van driver who lost his mirror. Stopping after the incident would have been too difficult and not productive, so it did not happen.

The roads are constantly packed. Traffic signals and lane markers, where they existed, are considered mere suggestions and nothing more. Drivers use their horns constantly. Horns are used to let other vehicles/pedestrians/animals know of one's presence behind them and to warn that a passing maneuver is about to occur. The ultimate rule of the road is size wins at the end of the day. Drivers believe that if there is more than one foot of distance between their vehicle and any other vehicle, pedestrian or animal, at any time or in any direction, they are not going fast enough or are not following close enough. When I asked about this and the constant horn honking I was told: (1) this is normal. and (2) when Indians came to America and drive they find that Americans are angry with them for this behavior. I explained that in the USA lane markers, signs and signals are meant to be followed, tailgating and using the horn every second while driving are not considered proper driving technique and that generally after an accident a driver stops, makes sure there are no serious injuries and exchanges information. I asked about people being injured because of the failure to follow traffic rules and because of the jam packed streets. I was told this was not a big deal and that most injuries were not serious because "the streets are so

crowded that nobody goes very fast so nobody ever gets very hurt.” Apparently the personal injury litigation profession is not big in India.

Sleeping accommodations in Ahmedabad had Tiger and Susie staying at the home of club president Devidas. Mark and Mary, Tina and I and Amelia and Kathy stayed in an apartment belonging to the mother in law and father in law of Rotarian Rajeev Chandel.

Bucket Showers: I learned about bucket showers, yes it’s just what it sounds like, western toilets and TP (or the general lack thereof) and Indian toilets. Yes, it is just as you have heard about and possibly imagined. I was informed that one reason people in India wear larger pants is the constant need to squat. I will leave the rest for your imagination.

I learned that for some reason there was a lack of trash cans in the rooms where we stayed. I never got an answer for this question. Perhaps the cheap cost of labor and the ready availability of people to come in and clean decreases the need for trash cans.

Chai Tea Grows On You: I learned about Chai Tea. It is the standard drink offered at all times of the day and night. It tastes like tea, with milk and a chocolate flavor, or with an occasional mint flavor in it. After a while it grows on you.

I learned the state of Gujarat is a vegetarian state and a dry state. Gandhi was born in Gujarat. He is the equivalent of George Washington for Indians. His beliefs in vegetarianism and in not drinking spurred these things.

Alcohol License: I learned that a tourist in Gujarat can purchase a license to buy alcoholic beverages. I learned that an Indian citizen can get the right to purchase alcoholic beverages with a doctor’s prescription saying a drink is needed for medical purposes. We met two such Rotarians and attended two “cocktail” parties at which alcohol was available. I explained the California medical marijuana situation to them and opined that their program and California’s program seemed to have much in common.

I learned that there are approximately 1 million ways to prepare vegetables and some form of starch/carbohydrate. The people we met seemed to eat more often than we do in the United States. At every meal they were always asking if we had enough food. It was difficult for them to take no as an answer. I was told that it would be considered offensive if I declined to take more food (unless I really did not want it).

Morning Exercise: Mark and I went out one morning with Rajeev for the old folks version of exercising. We walked on a track for about a half hour, watched some cricket players and other sports, and then stopped for some tea. Our discussion that morning dealt with a variety of topics including the caste system (still alive and well), Indian politics, American politics how the US is viewed and portrayed overseas and many other things. This was one of the most interesting times I had on the trip. Once again Rotary fellowship rears its head.

Our group will be putting on a program to give our up close and personal view and remembrances of this trip. If you want to see pictures of the trip take a look at these links:

- <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/pages/Redding-Rotary-LN4-India-2010/117061231680963>
- <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/profile.php?id=1122990805&v=photos>
- <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/album.php?aid=2057864&id=1494579186>
- <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=2057864&id=1494579186&l=9b49da7d83>

If the links do not work, get on Facebook, look up Redding Rotary - LN-4 – India 2010 and you can access the page. You can also try to get on Tiger Michiels page, Tina Dacquisto's page or Mary Lascelles page (if they let you on as a friend) to see more pictures.