

Dean Cummings Memorial

Much of the information in this article was taken from the June 2, 2020, copy of the River Valley Beacon. Thank you very much for letting us use it.

It's all part of the adventure. A statement Dean Cummings lives by, and no matter the situation he reinforces that thought.

In June of 2020 Cummings was the recipient of the first ever Lifetime Achievement Award by the Newport/Priest River Rotary Club. A prestigious gesture for a life dedicated to the betterment of others and fitting that he was chosen to be the inaugural Rotarian.

He joined the Rotary Club of Las Vegas in the 1970s which had over 300 members. He was very proud of being a coordinator their Continental Congress. He helped choose 2 students from 14 Las Vegas High Schools who were tasked with rewriting the Constitution of the United States. He remembers that the students were engaged and passionate and came up with rewriting the constitution so that Supreme Court Judges were elected. To this day, the updated annual decade news pamphlet for Rotary includes Cumming's name.

Cummings came to the Newport, WA area in the 1990s. in 1996 he noticed a sign at the Pend Oreille County Fair Grounds indicating that the Newport/Priest River Rotary Charter Party was being held. He crashed the party and turned out to be the first non-charter member of the club.

Dean assumed the duties of Club president in 1998-1999 and again in 2017-2018. Dean also took a turn as assistant Governor under Club 21's Lloyd Gray who was the District Governor that year.

In a 2020 interview Cummings said "Besides Africa, I am most proud of the Oldtown Rotary Park and all the service Rotary members gave to the development. I was able to share my passions with the likes of the Rotary Club in Spokane who were also touched by my stories and gave me an unheard of standing ovation. To be honored by your peers is incredible." At that time, the club had a great mix of talents in the membership, including an engineer, grant writer, idea person, computer geek, laborers, and Dean with is practical knowledge and heavy equipment. The Club has been able to make improvements to the park that value over \$1,000,000 since 1996.



Also, in the 2020 interview he said "There are so many stories and adventures that got me to this point. I look at the Africa pictures often and feel good that I could help make a difference. Several experiences stand out in my mind the one I'm most proud of was my son and grandson joined me on a trip to Africa and we could see the effects of what progressed from the initial wells, and we were greeted on M'Fangano Island (on Lake Victoria) by about 1,400 students."



His life changing experiences in Africa began with a visit from University of California - San Diego journalism graduate student Dennis Onyango from Western Kenya. He expressed his lifetime goal to get portable water to his home village in Nyattike, Kenya. Cummings took his story to heart and his enthusiasm and tenacity began.

The inaugural trip to western Kenya to explore sites, check conditions and see what supplies were available was set to begin on September 11, 2001. He was joined by fellow Rotarian Doris Dale, of course the pair was turned away at the airport that morning because of the tragic events. The trip was rescheduled to November. Twelve trips over several decades have led to a great variety of adventures, and many more projects than water a water well.

Cummings and crew started a positive chain of events by installing a garden water pump for a home for widowed women on M’Fangano Island. The widows in turn were able to make a small profit on the vegetables they sold at market. This allowed them to give the many Aids orphans on the island a home. This domino effect of the act of caring and helping is something Cummings recalls as a favorite memory.



Several local Rotarians, a pediatrician and a Public Utilities worker joined Cummings on a trip in 2004. They were able to see firsthand the difference the water wells and spring improvement had made and how much the locals appreciated Cummings. So much so that Dean knew of 28 babies that were named Dean in his honor.



This group helped set up solar panels, batteries, and computers in schools beyond the reach of electricity. They also oversaw the building of 500 school desks. The students were called to the construction site to carry the desks several miles to their schools as motorized transportation was not available. Local children were uneasy at first but quickly



warmed up after having their picture taken. Passing out soccer balls as gifts also helped calm their nerves.

The group was so impressed with how clean everyone’s clothes were, despite the struggles with water they were so proud to look good and felt honored to serve everyone lunch in the villages and share what little they did have to offer.

Cummings was so much more than the water well guy. He was also a Pend Oreille County Commissioner, instrumental in the Scenic Pend Oreille River Train ride, a member of the Selkirk Loop Board and helped start the Rotary and Selkirk Loop sponsored WACANID bike ride.

As a board member promoting the Selkirk Loop, The WACANID bike ride was the brainchild of Cummings who thought the 350-mile trip would showcase the area, help the economy along the way, and provide a great fundraiser for Rotary Clubs around the loop. It grew from 10 riders to 150 over the last decade. Nine Rotary Clubs in Washington, Canada and Idaho show their support and hospitality by hosting the riders on each leg of the 6-day trip around the loop.

Newport/Priest River Rotary honorary member Steven R. Brown remembers Dean this way, “As a former Trustee and Vice-Chair of The Rotary Foundation I have had the opportunity to work with Rotarians around the globe, Dean Cummings stands out as one of the most committed and tireless workers I have ever had the opportunity to know. Over the 20 years in which I have known Dean, I have been witness to his many civic accomplishments, not only locally and regionally, but also to his timeless hands-on volunteer leadership to provide clean water to many villages in Kenya through numerous trips to the country”

Brown has visited some of the sites where clean water was made available through Cumming’s leadership. “The local village leaders expressed their praise and admiration for Dean long after his services had been provided,” Brown said, “In reflecting on Dean’s many accomplishments and his dedication to Rotary’s motto ‘Service Above Self’ I cannot think of a person I have known who is more deserving of the Newport/Priest River Rotary Clubs Inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award than Dean Cummings,

Larry Coulson from Spokane’s Rotary Club 21 wrote this about Dean:

If you spent much time with Dean Cummings you would find that he was able to solve just about any problem (mechanical or social) with a simple long-lasting solution. You also knew he was a race car driver a few decades ago. You might know Dean was a businessman who worked his rock quarry with heavy earth moving equipment. You might

say: "Dean had a heart that was larger than most." You would know that Dean improved the lot of a great many in all corners of the earth. It would be difficult if not impossible to find even a fraction of them.

Dean had a knack for seeking the root cause of a problem. Like in Kenya, Dean found that the Rift Valley woman must fetch the water for their families, sometimes walking many miles each way each day and the water source was often putrid. Dean knew a water well would save hours each day for these women, not to mention improving the water purity. When getting well water to villages in Kenya, Dean found that the animal herds would get all the water as their owners held power above most. Dean said best to drill the well on school property. The village school board would control the water. Then, distribute out from there to: school, village clothing washing stations and finally out away from the school to water troughs for the fly covered herds.

Dean put a lot of thought into designing such beautiful solutions that would recognize reality while fitting the social norms of the people he served. There was plenty of time for such solution development in Dean's African life as often the drive to the Maasai village took hours. The conversations were most enlightening and enjoyable. Dean was a man of simple solutions that delivered big, long lasting results. A Rotary Giant, Dean Cummings was a member of the Priest River Rotary Club.

Lawrence Allan Coulson



Rotary goes by the four-way test which states: of the things we think, say, or do, FIRST, is it the Truth? SECOND, is it fair to all concerned? THIRD, will it build goodwill and better friendships? and FOURTH, will it be beneficial to all concerned? Cummings uses this every day and knows if everyone lived by this it would change the world. Dean and his wife Tammy were married for nearly 60 years, he is a proud father, grandfather, and foster parent of many kids.

Dean's legacy will live on in the memories of all those who participated in and benefited from his many adventures.