



WA Rotary veteran receives PolioPlus Pioneer Award

At the recent Rotary International District 9455 Conference, past RI director and past trustee of The Rotary Foundation, Dr Ken Collins, was presented with the *PolioPlus* Pioneer Award.

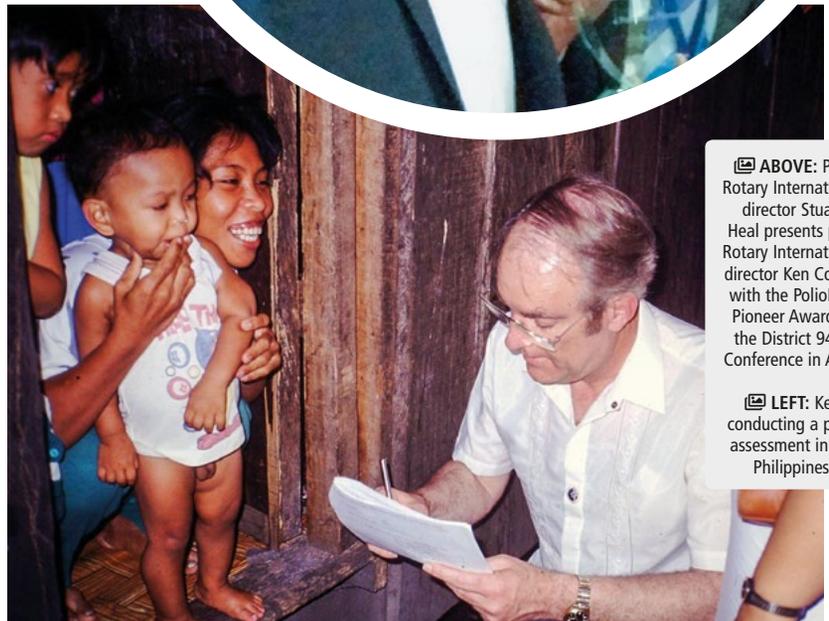
Dr Collins is one of just 16 Rotarians recognised worldwide in 2018-19. The award honours Rotarians who gave extraordinary service to the Polio Eradication Program between July 1985 and November 1992.

Ken's dedication to polio eradication is largely due to his first-hand experiences with the disease, and the desire to save others from living through the horror. He started school in February 1942, just after the second major polio epidemic in Australia in 1941, which had killed some 200 Australian children and paralysed more than 2000. Everyone lived in fear of this frightening disease, which struck without warning.

In mid-August 1945, during the next epidemic, he watched his older brother being placed in an ambulance, having been diagnosed with polio. He was placed in isolation and Ken did not see him for two months, during which time he feared never seeing his brother again.

In 1949, while playing cricket, Ken discovered he had lost the use of the muscles in his right shoulder. He too had become a victim of polio.

In 1985, Ken attended the International Assembly as an incoming district governor. Dr Albert Sabin



ABOVE: Past Rotary International director Stuart Heal presents past Rotary International director Ken Collins with the PolioPlus Pioneer Award at the District 9455 Conference in April.

LEFT: Ken conducting a polio assessment in the Philippines.

came onto the stage and stated that, although vaccines had been available for 30 years, there were still 500,000 cases of polio occurring each year in 150 countries. Albert begged the incoming district governors to help him achieve his dream of a polio-free world. Ken's mind immediately flashed back to the fear experienced in the 40s, and he vowed to do all he could to help eradicate polio.

Ken spearheaded the fundraising campaign in his district between 1985 and 1988. Following this, he participated in *PolioPlus* surveys to the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, represented Rotary International at a World Health Organisation (WHO) meeting in Indonesia, and initiated a matching grant project to provide equipment for a viral laboratory in Thailand.

However, his service did not end there. For 34 consecutive years, Ken

has worked at club, district, national and international levels, including representing The Rotary Foundation at WHO meetings in five countries and attending National Immunisation Days in Myanmar and India. In 2005, Ken obtained a contribution of \$2.5 million from the Australian Government.

But his greatest contribution occurred in July 2011, when he and Chris Maher from WHO met with two advisors of then Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd, seeking a donation of \$50 million. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Perth three months later, then Prime Minister Julia Gillard confirmed that the government would contribute \$50 million to the *End Polio Now* program.

Ken truly has been a dedicated pioneer worthy of this honour, and we congratulate him on both his ongoing service and his award. •