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Life

Rotarian vaccinates children in India

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Trenton dentist Dr. Noel Jackson recently helped vaccinate children in India against polio as part of an ongoing Rotary International effort worldwide. He returned from “the trip of a lifetime” on Feb. 20, and called his visit “an incredible experience.”

Jackson said he found India to be “visually rich” and “absolutely amazing.”

Rotary made a commitment to eradicate polio 25 years ago, and has nearly succeeded. In 1985, the crippling disease was endemic in 125 countries. Today, the disease remains in only four nations — India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. Once, as many as 350,000 children contracted polio each year. Last year, the number was less than 2,000. Rotary’s global initiative has helped reduce polio levels by more than 99 percent.

Jackson and 20 other Rotary volunteers from the Midwest and southwest Ontario headed to India on Feb. 4 to administer polio vaccine to children. They arrived in Uttar Pradesh, India, and were they were joined by 500,000 other volunteers across the country to take part in the effort. The Rotarians were able to vaccinate 172 million children in just one day of their trip. From Mumbai and Delhi to the smallest rural villages, the volunteers sought to vaccinate every child younger than 5.

The vaccination process is simple and effective. The vaccine is given orally. Two drops on the tongue of each child will protect him or her for life. No needles are required. Rotary officials estimate the last four countries with polio could be completely protected within three years, and the world could be considered free of the disease within five years.

Rotary works with the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the Centers for Disease Control for the program, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has pledged \$355 million toward the effort if Rotary will match \$200 million of that. So far, Rotary has raised \$100 million globally toward that goal.

On their visit to India, Jackson and his fellow volunteers also contributed more than 1,360 pairs of donated eyeglasses to be matched with people in need of them throughout the nation.

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