

## Rotary Bulletin – 9 March 2026

### RYDA

16-20 March. 4 people per day. Contact Nigel.

### Youth Music Festival

23 May 2026. Contact Steve Paterson.

### Circus Quirkus

28 May 2 shows at PNBHS. Contact Mike.

### Red Tulip Walk in the Manawatu

11 April, Support World Parkinson's Day.

### Rotary Community Leader RCL

Become a RCL – nominations close 23 March – visit [www.rotarysouthpacific.org](http://www.rotarysouthpacific.org) for details.

### Monday lunchtime 16 March 2026

**Guest Speaker:** President Dave  
“The Year Ahead for PN & Awapuni Rotary.”

Intro/Thanks	Stu Schwartz
Sergeant	Liam Hehir
Corporal	Shaun Kay
Parting Thought	Steve Paterson
Bulletin Editor	Dave Gaynor
Attendance	Martin Townend

### Merger of PN and Awapuni Rotary Clubs

The proposal by President Dave to merge Palmerston North and Awapuni Rotary Clubs from 1 July 2026 was seconded by Alan Ford and approved by the members of PN Rotary Club present. Both Clubs have now approved the proposal and a formal request for the merger will be sent to District 9940 and through them to Rotary International for final approval.

### Summary Dr Hilary Smith’s Speech 45 Years at Volunteer Service Abroad – a personal perspective.

Dr Hilary Smith reflected on her 45-year journey with Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA), sharing how her early experiences shaped a lifelong commitment to language education, cross-cultural understanding, and international development.

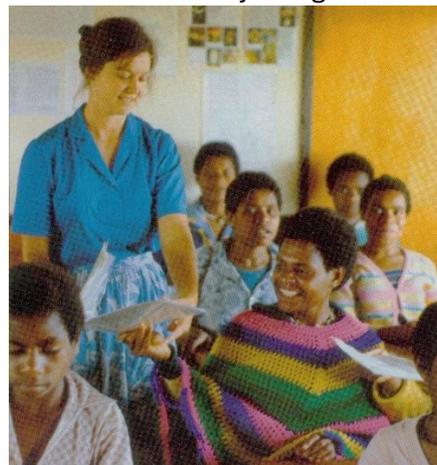


### Early Life and First Assignments

- She first learned about VSA as a child and volunteered straight out of university.
- Her first assignment was in Tonga at age 21, teaching English. She described adventurous experiences, close friendships, and the strong sense of community there.



- After returning to New Zealand to train formally as an English teacher, she sought a more challenging role and went to Papua New Guinea, teaching in a remote boarding school.
  - This sparked her interest in language policy, especially the impractical “English-only” school rules given the country’s linguistic diversity.



### Work in Laos

- Dr Smith later spent three years in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, arriving during a period of strong socialist influence.
- She taught at a teachers' college and then with the Ministry of Tourism on English language programmes.
- She shared insights into:
  - Life in a communist country,
  - Buddhist cultural ceremonies,
  - Navigating restrictions on interaction between foreigners and locals.
- Her experiences influenced her later Master's research, which focused on Lao refugee communities in Wellington.



### Long-Term Involvement with VSA and International Projects

- After returning to New Zealand, she remained deeply involved in VSA through local branches, the VSA Council, and community events.
- Over the decades she continued international development work across:
  - Kiribati, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Nepal, Fiji,
  - and later with Aboriginal communities in Australia on language preservation.
- She emphasised the two-way nature of volunteering, where volunteers both contribute and learn.

### Current Roles and Ongoing Advocacy

- Dr Smith remains active in:
  - Applied Linguistics Aotearoa New Zealand,
  - Languages Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand,
  - various language advocacy initiatives.

- She described recent work supporting heritage language reclamation with Aboriginal women.



### VSA Today

- She outlined VSA's updated strategy and principles, including:
  - respectful partnerships,
  - cross-cultural collaboration,
  - volunteer diversity and innovation.
- Modern volunteer assignments are now more flexible and shorter-term, opening opportunities for a wider range of people.

### Discussion & Q&A Highlights

- Responded to questions about:
  - Political neutrality of volunteers—generally maintained despite government funding.
  - Differences with the US Peace Corps, especially regarding local investment in volunteers.
  - The role of China and Taiwan in the Pacific, particularly in agricultural projects.

### Parting Thought: Martin Townend

*"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."* — **Mahatma Gandhi**