

# Rotarians hope to raise \$50,000 for water filters

► *About two-thirds of the world's population do not have access to clean drinking water.*

## ROCKFORD

By Matt VandeBunte  
The Grand Rapids Press

When Bob Hildreth moved to the Dominican Republic, he was surprised to see people line up with buckets at the well outside his home.

It was a shocking introduction to the fact that many of his neighbors are among the two-thirds of the world's population without access to clean drinking water.

"People are walking a mile or two to fill up buckets of water," he said.

Since then Hildreth, coordinator for international Rotary projects in the Dominican Republic, has been working to change that by giving water filters to families in the part of the Caribbean island where he lives.

The 1-foot square concrete devices contain gravel and sand that filter about one quart of clean water per minute. They cost about \$60.

He received \$10,000 from local Rotary clubs last year to purchase filters, but he was in West Michigan last month urging area clubs to help him expand the project by raising another \$50,000.

"The water you wash a car with is a precious commodity that 65 percent of the world does not have access to," Hildreth told Comstock Park Rotarians. "Water is a really big issue, and we just take it for granted."

Hildreth also spoke to Rotarians at Rockford Ambulance in Cannon Township and other local clubs.

At least five area Rotary clubs plan to respond to the \$50,000 goal, and that money could be matched by the Rotary Foundation and used to buy nearly 2,000 filters for residents near Puerto Plata, where Hildreth lives.

"The goal right now is to help Bob raise \$50,000," said Pat Delaney, treasurer and past president of the Comstock Park Rotary. "We've committed that we'll be part of the program. It's the right

thing to do, and we'd like to see (the program) grow."

Comstock Park was one of the clubs involved last year at the request of Jim Bodenner, then-president of the Rockford Rotary Club. Bodenner and other Rockford Rotary members have been to the Dominican Republic several times over the past decade, donating ambulances and fire trucks and helping build a nursing home.

That's how he met Hildreth and got involved in the water effort. Bodenner runs Bishop Hills Elder Care Center with his wife, Susan. Two years ago, the center's residents helped buy 10 home filters. Bodenner then recruited Rotary clubs in Cedar Springs, Comstock Park, Lowell and Plainfield-Sunrise to join the cause.

Those groups raised \$10,000 last year — enough to buy 173 filters. A group of 13 local Rotarians visited the Puerto Plata area in January to see the filters in action.

"We got a chance to see the impact of what those filters could

do," Bodenner said. "There's a huge need for it."

Bodenner hopes to recruit at least five more local Rotary clubs to join this year's effort.

"We're looking to continue the project in the Dominican Republic and expand it to Haiti," Bodenner said.

Hildreth thinks the program can become the next big project for Rotary International, which has raised about \$500 million in the past two decades toward the eradication of polio.

Hildreth estimates that the original 10 filters funded by Bishop Hills probably were shared with a total of 50 families and 300 people. The 173 filters purchased last year may have affected as many as 5,000 lives, he said.

"We want to develop this, fine-tune it and export it to the rest of the world," Hildreth said. "Rotary could readily be looking at this as the next Polio Plus. We'd be saving more than one million lives each year just by providing potable water."