

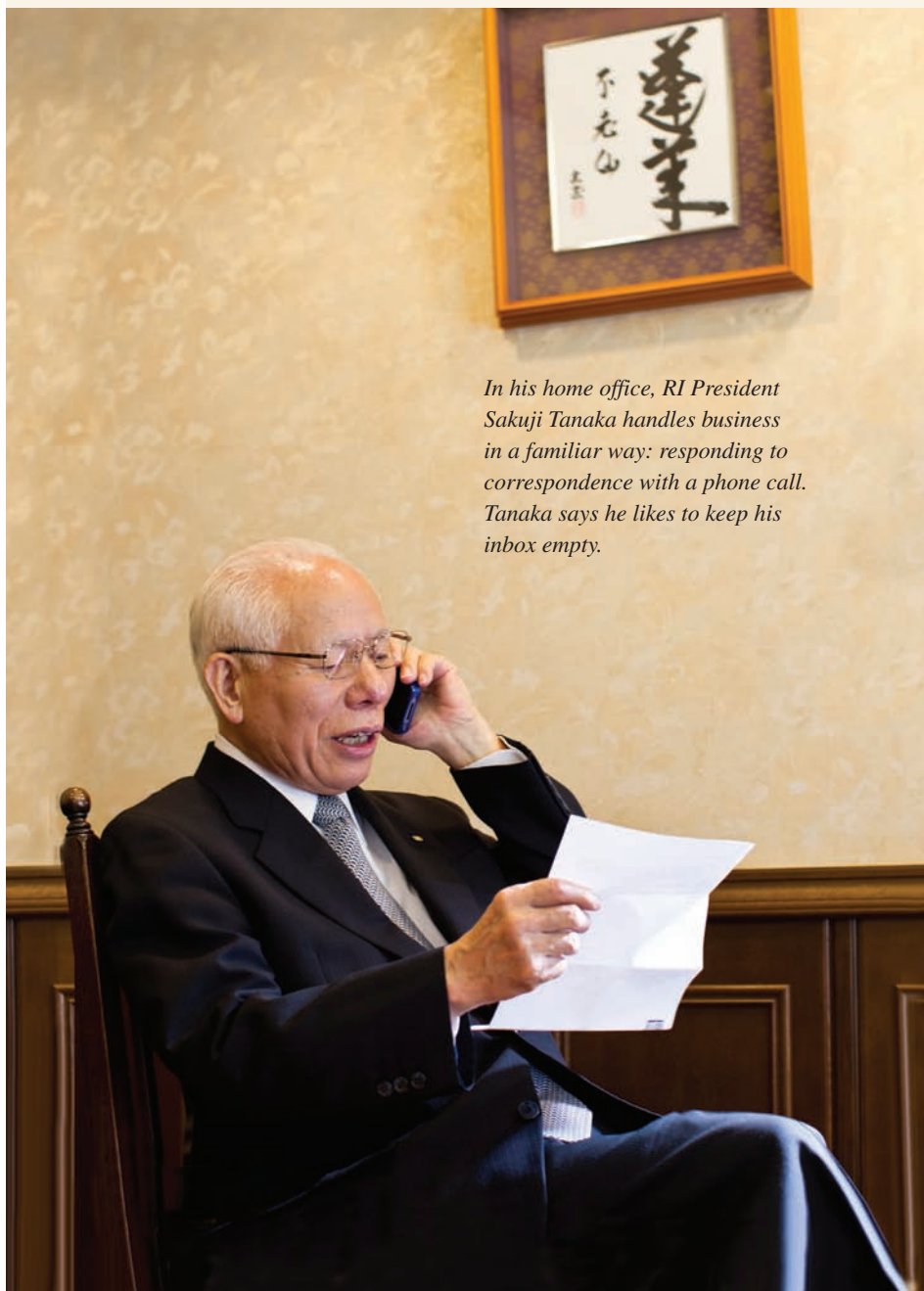
For about a year now, we here at Rotary International have had the pleasure of sharing the elevator, the cafeteria, the lobby, and a corner of the 18th floor with a white-haired man of impeccable manners, who laughs easily and seems genuinely happy to see us. A smile erupts on his face when he says hello, bowing his head and adding a gentle chuckle. He moves among us gracefully — with his interpreter Eiko Terao in tow — maintaining his signature cheer without revealing whatever else might be on his mind. But he’s probably thinking about Rotary. To hear him tell it, the only time Sakuji Tanaka is not thinking about Rotary is when he’s sleeping and eating. And that only goes for when he is not dining with other Rotarians.

“Rotary pretty much occupies my every waking moment,” the new President of Rotary International playfully admits.

Tanaka says his wife, Kyoko, would describe him as “a Rotary nut.” A glance at his résumé supports this claim. He’s been a member of the Rotary Club of Yashio, Japan, for 37 years and has served Rotary at every level, including District Governor, training leader, Regional Rotary Foundation Coordinator, member of the Polio Eradication Advocacy Task Force and Future Vision Committee, Chair of the 2009 Birmingham Convention Committee and Permanent Fund Committee for Japan, RI Director and Rotary Foundation Trustee. Through it all, and after 49 years of marriage, Kyoko has been a willing companion on his Rotarian journey. Together, she and Tanaka are Paul Harris Fellows, Benefactors and Major Donors. Although she doesn’t speak English, he says his wife has a knack for communicating with people through gestures and body language, and that she is a “jolly, uplifting person.”

The couple have also remained close throughout Tanaka’s career in the wholesale industry. When scheduling conflicts have prevented him

The View From Japan PRESIDENTIAL PROFILE OF **SAKUJI TANAKA**



In his home office, RI President Sakuji Tanaka handles business in a familiar way: responding to correspondence with a phone call. Tanaka says he likes to keep his inbox empty.

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Top: Tanaka and his wife, Kyoko, share a laugh at a Japanese restaurant. When he is travelling, Tanaka says, the thing he misses most is his wife's cooking. She is, hands down, his favourite cook. Bottom: Tanaka says peace begins at home through patience. Here, he cheerfully endures the testing of his own patience as he tries to do origami with his grandchildren. Of origami, he says: "I have no interest in it, and I'm not very good with my hands."





Left from Top: Tanaka strolls the campus of International Christian University with a group of Rotary Peace Fellows. He has established an endowed Rotary Peace Fellowship; Tanaka sings at his Rotary club meeting.



“Being considerate and patient with your partner is the secret to a successful marriage,” Tanaka says. “I’m a lucky man to have a wife who is so patient with me.”

from attending business meetings, she has been known to stand in for him. When he is away from home, he calls her every day.

The Tanakas have three grown children — a son and daughter who live in Japan, and a daughter who lives in Malaysia — and six grandchildren, with another on the way. The family

gets together at the couple’s home in Yashio every year for New Year’s.

“Being considerate and patient with your partner is the secret to a successful marriage,” Tanaka says. “I’m a lucky man to have a wife who is so patient with me.” He adds that in Japanese society, “men probably have more freedom to express their anger

or their frustration than women do. I consciously try to be patient, not only with my wife but with other people.”

Tanaka balances this patience with practiced efficiency. The former president of the National Household Papers Distribution Association of Japan says he has learned the value of a clean desk, in a literal and virtual sense. He uses email extensively and maintains a lean inbox, saving only the messages he needs. “My personality is that of someone in a hurry,” he says. “It’s not my style to let things pile up. I like to get things done and move on.”

However, in his home office, he has a 10-footlong bookcase that houses both diaries and work documents. He doesn’t let them accumulate for very long, he says, and periodically pitches large amounts of them when their utility to him has expired. In some cases, Rotary-specific material goes to his club.

When he is travelling, Tanaka says, the thing he misses most is his wife’s cooking. She is, hands down, his favourite cook. He prefers Japanese food to all other cuisines, but notes that the versions he finds outside Japan do not measure up to what is available in his country. Ramen noodles taste different away from home, and it is difficult to find a satisfying sukiyaki. To make up for the culinary hardships of travelling, he often gravitates to other fare. He admits to a weakness for the distinctive taste of Korean barbecue, and Terao volunteers that you can always distract him with a bowl of spaghetti, as long as it is in a marinara or other red sauce. He favours it plain otherwise, as he faults food of any kind with “too much cheese.” He has noticed America’s growing passion for Japanese cuisine, including the booming business that sushi restaurants enjoy in the United States, and thinks

“People would see me and others spending the day cleaning the area in front of their houses. Eventually they would join in and, even better, would keep the area tidier on their own.”



Tanaka helped begin a cleanup effort in his neighbourhood that led to 59 groups joining in a formal campaign across the city of Yashio.

this speaks more to Americans' increasing concern about their health than an endorsement of the authentic food one would find in Japan.

Tanaka is not all business all the time, but even when he is in relaxation mode, he puts forth his best effort. During one evening of karaoke, he set a personal record by singing 54 consecutive songs, without a break. He recalls that three-hour crooning marathon with shy pride and quickly doubts that he would ever have the energy or stamina to do it again. But those who know him well may not be so quick to agree.

They might recall that not so long ago, Tanaka and a Rotarian friend began to clean the streets in their neighbourhood. Tanaka would pull weeds, pick up litter and cart the trash away. He would even remove the occasional dead dog or cat. "Before," he says, "there were some very dirty places. But people would see me and others spending the day cleaning the area in front of their houses. Eventually they would join in and, even better, would keep the area tidier on

their own." What started as a two-man effort soon evolved into a project of the local Rotary clubs, which carried out a neighbourhood cleanup once a month. This expanded into a communitywide effort, with 59 groups covering neighbourhoods across Yashio twice a year, and the city's mayor coming out to participate and address the volunteers.

Tanaka has said that after joining the Yashio club, he realised that "by helping others, even in the simplest of ways, I could help to build peace. Peace, in all of the ways that we can understand it, is a real goal and a realistic goal for Rotary." He has established an endowed Rotary Peace Fellowship, and in January, he announced that he'd chosen *Peace Through Service* as the RI theme for his year. "Peace is not something that can only be achieved through treaties, by governments or through heroic struggles," Tanaka said. "It is something that we can find and that we can achieve, every day and in many simple ways."

He later elaborated: "Peace and conflict resolution should start at home. The family is the smallest unit

of society, so we should start from there. If you are mindful of peace with your partner and your family members, that gives you an opportunity to reflect on your family life and to spread that sense of peace by example. Peaceful families lead to greater peace for everyone."

The Japanese tradition of putting the needs of society above the needs of the individual parallels the Rotarian concept of Service Above Self, Tanaka says. He notes that this view has been instrumental in helping Japan rebuild after the tsunami and earthquake that ravaged the country in March 2011.

The cooperation among individuals throughout the recovery effort also presents a positive lesson that the world can learn from, he says. "I believe that Rotary is contributing to that lesson, especially in training and educating members of the younger generation through its Rotary Peace Centres. They will bear the personal responsibility to society and work to make the world a better place."

John Rezek

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