



Conference Ambassador Story By Harry Pease

They say all you need to be an ambassador the Isle of Man's Visitor and Conventions Bureau is a love for the island and desire to bring members of your association or institute here. These are two requirements that Castletown resident Harry Pease easily fulfills. In September 2005 he was instrumental in bringing 600 Rotarians from his own District 1280 to the island for their annual conference and a further 500 a fortnight later from the adjacent District 1050 for their conference. Both events were viewed as a total success, so much so that District 1050 are likely to return in 2009 whilst District 1280 have already decided to return again in 2010.

Since 2004 the Isle of Man Department of Tourism and Leisure has actively sought to increase the number of conferences and meetings held on the island and it's a policy that has brought significant bottom line benefits to the Manx economy. In 1999, The Isle of Man hosted just three conferences which generated £310,000 in revenues and sold 220 four-star bed spaces. After the launch of the Conference Board by the DTL in 2004, the Island saw 42 conferences generating more than £8 million pounds and realising sales of 3100 four-star beds in the very first year.

An important part of this initiative is the creation of the Conference Ambassador programme which enlists the help of local members of academic, professional, business and other social organisations to encourage their organisations to choose the Isle of Man as the place to hold meetings and conferences. Harry Pease was among the initiative's first recruits and since that time he's become one of its most effective advocates.

Mr Pease and his wife, Margaret, settled on the Isle of Man in 1987 but he has family ties here going back to the 1800s. A chemical engineer, he settled here after a long and distinguished career with Unilever, one of the world's leading suppliers of fast moving consumer goods, which took him to the four corners of the world map. Living in such far flung areas as the Far East, South America and both East and West Africa opened the Peases's eyes to the plight of their fellow men and awakened a desire to serve the communities in which they lived. Following his retirement from Unilever, Mr Pease held directorships of many successful companies including Rea Brothers, an independent merchant bank, and other consulting firms, but along the way he has always volunteered in the community. He has been Secretary and then Chairman of the IOM Branch of the Institute of Directors. For ten years he was a Director of the Enterprise Agency, where he was involved with the team of consultants that helped to start more than 200 businesses.

But his real passion has been his involvement with Rotary where he has held various roles over the years including a term as President of his local club, Rushen and Western Mann and another as Governor of his District 1280, the first Rotarian from the Island to do so.

Rotary International is a global network of service volunteers. It's the world's largest service organisation for business and professional people, with some 1.2 million members operating in 168 countries world-wide.

There are more than 58,000 Rotarians in Great Britain and Ireland in 1,845 clubs, helping those in need and working towards world understanding and peace. Rotarians — men and women alike —

volunteer their efforts to improve the quality of life in their own communities and further afield. The world's Rotary clubs meet weekly and are non-political, non-religious and open to all cultures, races, and creeds. Club membership represents a cross-section of local business and professional leaders.

They initiate community and educational projects that address many of today's most critical issues, such as violence, drug abuse, youth, AIDS, hunger, the environment and illiteracy. A twenty year long programme to eliminate polio worldwide is almost complete. During this campaign, over two billion doses of vaccine have been funded, distributed and delivered. From about three hundred thousand cases per year, the number of new cases is down now to just about 100 last year, in corners of India and Central Africa which are very difficult to reach.

Each year national conferences are held and each District also holds an annual meeting. In addition there are a number of smaller meetings, such as Past Governor's Annual Reunions. And thanks to Harry, the Isle of Man has hosted three District Conferences already and three more are scheduled over the next few years. So far the Rotary conferences have added almost £500,000 to the Manx economy.

“Conferences are both educational and inspirational,” explains Harry Pease. “We have speakers on various Rotary topics including district news and reports on local, regional and international rotary projects. There is often a short non-denominational religious service, sit down meals and side trips for members to enjoy the attractions the island has to offer.”

It's a busy programme and planning and organising the logistics of a successful conference is a significant task. There are flights, ferries, accommodation, catering, conference facilities, entertainment and so many other details to look after. And that's where the Isle of Man's Visitor and Conventions Bureau comes in. They take a partnership approach to conference planning, working closely with the organisation to make sure nothing is left to chance. They help to find the right venue, host inspection visits, prepare bid documents and support bids in other ways, often attending, by invitation, other conferences of the same group. They prepare civic hospitality applications, welcome packs, give promotional support and arrange entertainment appropriate to the type of organisation and age group of the delegates.

Richard Cuthbert, conference officer at the Isle of Man Department of Tourism & Leisure says, “Harry Pease has been a very good ambassador for the Isle of Man. He has always been available to assist when called upon. He has a great deal of experience when it comes to conferences and is extremely good at organising – he is very methodical and does not leave anything to chance.”

But according to Harry Pease, Rotarians like coming to the Isle of Man for three reasons. First of all, is the incredible beauty of the island and the wide range of things to do outside the conference. Delegates are encouraged to turn a conference visit into a holiday break so that the event becomes an 'Isle of Man Experience'. “There is something for everyone here from the arts, to heritage, to watersports and the great outdoors. About the only thing we can't arrange here is F1 racing!” says Harry. “We can provide the kinds of experiences that make the difference between an adequate conference and one that's remembered for years to come. Richard's team organised Gaiety Theatre tours and a reception by the Mayor for our conference.”

Secondly, the Isle of Man government's Department of Tourism and Leisure and the various municipalities consistently demonstrate a positive, 'can-do' attitude in solving problems and creating opportunities for conference organisers and delegates alike. “They have a real burning desire to make each and every conference a total success,” says Harry. “They listen. They are incredibly flexible. There is no one size fits all with the Conventions Bureau. They endeavour to meet all needs for each distinct event. There is a lot of autonomy at the district and club levels of Rotary. And each District likes to do things its own way. The DTL fully appreciates these differences.”

He cites the time that the Royal Hall was transformed from a conference set up to a dinner and

dance venue with just two hours notice. “It was important to us that we keep the focus on one venue and the staff at the Villa Marina really pulled out all the stops for us.”

But the single, most crucial factor in the Rotarian's continuing love affair with the Isle of Man is access to superb facilities without cost except for staffing expenses, according to Harry. Without this unique proposition from the government, Rotary Conference Directors wouldn't be able to consider the Isle of Man as a conference destination. “The cost of transport alone would put it out of reach if the venues were priced like the competition,” Harry explains. “And it eliminates an incredible amount of hassle too. Some venues will haggle over price and conditions that are dependent on the final attendance. Negotiations have been known to take up to two years, which makes it very difficult for organisations to budget accurately beforehand and thus set registration fees at the correct amount. The DTL's policy eliminates all that so we can focus on creating the best conference experiences.”

The Rotary motto is "Service Above Self" and it seems tailor made for Harry Pease.