

John Ockenfels (left) and Peter Teahen stop in Honolulu during a 26,000-mile flight to raise funds for polio eradication.



PROFILE

To eradicate, circumnavigate

Piloted by two bold Rotarians, the Flight to End Polio took the route less traveled

John Ockenfels
Rotary Club of
Iowa City A.M.,
Iowa

Peter Teahen
Rotary Club of
Cedar Rapids
West, Iowa

The message, sent from somewhere over the Pacific, arrived at One Rotary Center on the last Tuesday of July. “Greeting via satellite phone from N732WP,” it began. “We are at 11,000 feet. We departed Hawaii at 4:20 a.m. ... and saw a magnificent sunrise an hour after our departure.” Next stop: Oakland, California.

N732WP was a single-engine Cessna 210, and the message had been sent by two Iowa Rotarians, John Ockenfels and Peter Teahen, during the final days of their audacious three-month, round-the-world Flight to End Polio. The two men had begun planning the flight four years earlier, working through multiple delays brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which necessitated a major overhaul of their flight plan. Ockenfels and Teahen funded the trip themselves, to the tune of about \$100,000 — which meant that every penny they raised went toward eradicating polio.

Before they finally took off from Cedar Rapids on 5 May, Ockenfels and Teahen announced that, with matching funds from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, they had already raised \$1 million for The Rotary Foundation. Over the next 12 weeks, N732WP would make 37 stops in 19 countries; at press time, money raised at 24 fundraisers along the flight’s route had yet to be tallied.

After traveling about 26,000 miles, the intrepid polio pilots landed safely 30 July at the Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids, where they were welcomed with a pancake breakfast. They were especially happy to have achieved their top priority. “Our number one goal was to come home alive to our families,” says Teahen. “And that’s what we did.” — GEOFFREY JOHNSON

According to the Institute for Economics and Peace’s 2023 Global Peace Index, the global economic impact of violence last year was \$17.5 trillion.

Global Handwashing Day, which promotes hygiene awareness, is 15 October. The theme is “clean hands are within reach.” Learn more at globalhandwashing.org.



This month, district governors can nominate Rotarians and Rotaractors for the Service Above Self Award. Learn more at rotary.org/awards.