CONVENTION
A night at the opera

As you arrive in Sydney, Australia, for the 2014 RI Convention, 1-4 June, you might glimpse the rooftop “sails” of the Sydney Opera House from the plane. And on 2 June, you can hear the Sydney Symphony Orchestra perform at a Rotary-only event there.

The opera house was the brainchild of Danish architect Jørn Utzon, who won an international competition conducted by the New South Wales government in 1956. One story has it that American architect Eero Saarinen discovered Utzon’s design among entries already rejected by the other judges.

With more than 2,000 pre-cast concrete sections, some weighing as much as 16 tons, the structure’s distinctive roof is intended to evoke a ship at full sail. In the Concert Hall, the 10,000-pipe grand organ is the largest mechanical organ in the world.

Officially, the first performance at the opera house was a production of Prokofiev’s War and Peace in 1973 by the Australian Opera. Unofficially, it was Paul Robeson, who sang to construction workers at lunchtime one day in 1960. The largest turnout was for an open-air concert by the Australian rock band Crowded House in 1996.

Each year, the opera house hosts hundreds of events, from the Mr. Olympia bodybuilding competition to an address by Pope John Paul II in 1987, and now to the June Rotary performance. Guided tours are available in several languages, and advance reservations are recommended. Learn more at www.sydneyoperahouse.com.


DISPATCHES
In remote areas, school supplies ease hardship

Rebecca Wilks gets chocked up talking about the families she met in Guatemala. Wilks, a member of the Rotary Club of Peoria North, Ariz., USA, traveled there in February, visiting nine schools that had received textbooks, computers, teacher training, or scholarships through her club’s support of the nonprofit Cooperative for Education. The last school she visited was in La Joya, a remote village whose middle school serves about 60 students. “It was two hours out on a dirt road,” she says. “But it was my favorite place. The parents would stop us and say, ‘I can’t believe you came all the way out here to see us. Our government and ministry of education have forgotten us.’” As she helped deliver textbooks in La Joya, Wilks snapped this image of a student who had just received a new pencil along with her books. “Education presents a financial hardship for many families,” Wilks explains. “But we’ve found that schools with the textbook program have cut their dropout rate in half.” Among all the photos she took on the trip, this one stood out, she says: “Here’s this bright girl who will now have much more of a chance to do what she wants to do in the world.”

-- Vanessa N. Clavinskas

FROM OUR PAGES
JULY 1954

“A merchant who approaches business with the idea of serving the public well has nothing to fear from competition.”

J.C. Penney, businessman and Rotarian, 1875-1971