

# Detroit Lakes Rotarian given Distinguished Service Award

By **JAMIE MARKS**  
Staff Writer

Sure David Fihn was given the Rotary Foundation's Distinguished Service Award.

And yes, it's the organization's highest award, given to only 50 of the 1.5 million Rotarians worldwide each year.

But the really big news is his 18 years of perfect Rotary attendance.

For you non-Rotarians, that means the Detroit Lakes dentist hasn't missed a single weekly meeting in all those years. And that gets to the heart of Dr. David Fihn's commitment to the organization's credo — Service Above Self — and about why he was presented the Distinguished Service Award at the district convention in Grand Forks last weekend.

According to noon Rotary Club secretary Ken Wernli, Fihn has perfect attendance *worldwide*.

"He's made up many weeks of Rotary in... other countries during his travels."

Be it in the wilds of Brazil or the steamy heat of the Philippines, Fihn can be found attending Rotary meetings.

His purpose is to spread the gifts of humanitarian assistance, worldwide peace and global understanding.

He does it one tooth at a time.

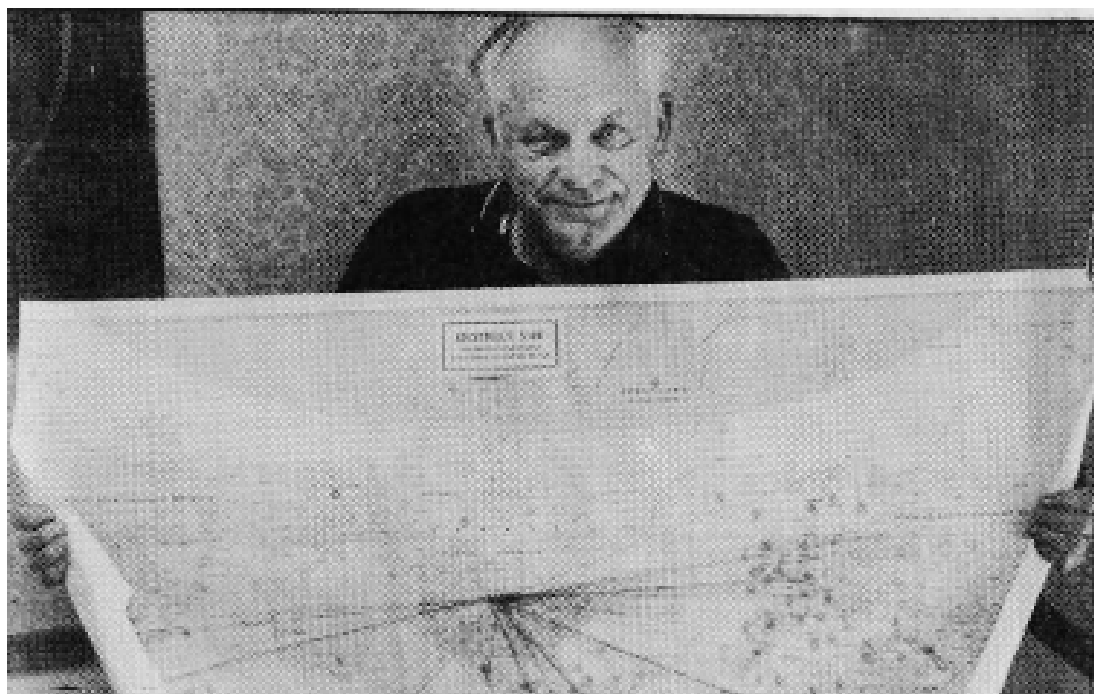
Offering dental care to peasants in the Third World, he has visited Jamaica twice, the Amazon Basin of Brazil once, Southeast Asian refugee camps in the Philippines and in Hong Kong each once, and Gracias A Dios Province, Honduras, where he served the Indian population.

His biography of Rotary service is lengthy — he has both led and hosted various types of international exchange and education programs, has led several fund-raising drives, has attended conventions all over the world, and has already earned many awards.

But also contained in his biography is perhaps the philosophical nugget that explains all his efforts.

"My parents were persistent and good examples of the responsibility to return to the community, to the best of my ability, both personal skills and financial commitment. They did so — they expected the same from me."

As a young man serving overseas during the coldest phase of the cold war, Fihn learned about the need for international relations.



Rotarian Dave Fihn recently received the club's Distinguished Service Award. Through Rotary, he has offered dental care in various Third World countries, and has charted his trips and those of fellow district Rotarians on a map. Photo by Jamie Marks.

international relations.

"As I matured, I realized that the community did not mean the location in which I lived, but that we are all a small part of the world community. Rotary has furnished me with the perfect medium to attempt to use whatever skills I possess to that goal of service."

Obviously, Rotary believes he has achieved his goal.

"Your exceptional record of service to the Foundation has proved you to be a most deserving recipient of this, the highest honor bestowed by The Rotary Foundation," wrote trustees chairman Charles C. Keller in a letter informing Fihn of his honor.

"Your efforts to promote the ideals of the Foundation have greatly contributed to the success of its many international programs. You represent the best that Rotary has to offer, the caring, the concern, the hope of a better life for those less fortunate than ourselves."

When Fihn joined Rotary in 1962, however, he had no idea he would later receive the club's two highest honors, the Distinguished Service Award and the Citation for Meritorious Service, awarded him in 1987.

In fact, he had never heard of Rotary before moving to Detroit Lakes.

But as a U.S. Army dentist in Munich, West Germany, he already saw the need for global understanding.

"We were badly in need of it then," he recalled.

He and his wife, Shirley, also lived in the Soviet Union for a time, where trust of foreigners was a scarce commodity.

"That's the pits. That's really the bottom. And it seemed to me, Rotary was much the opposite."

He now has friends all over the world, people with whom he regularly exchanges mail and visits.

Accompanying him on each of his humanitarian trips is his wife. Together, they endure the primitive conditions, and live with the threat of danger and disease.

And they would have it no other way. This, they believe, is what it's all about.

"You work like mad, and you're tired, but you really don't worry about OSHA; you don't worry about workers comp," he explained.

To his fellow Rotarians, Fihn indeed represents what Rotary is all about.

"We're one of the few clubs in our district of 60 that are favored with a member such as Dave, with his traveling experiences," Wernli commented.