

A. S. Venkatesh ("Venky")



After earning an engineering degree from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras and an MBA from Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, Ananthanarayanan S. Venkatesh entered civil construction at age 23. He now leads a firm that employs more than 1,400 people.

Known in Rotary as "Venky," Venkatesh joined in 1999, initially for networking and friendship. But during his first service project, a conversation with a young girl transformed his perspective. His club had donated benches to a school, and he noticed one girl sitting alone.

"I asked her why she wouldn't budge, and she told me that this was the first time in her life she was sitting on a bench and not on the ground," Venkatesh says. "That changed my entire perspective of what I wanted to do in Rotary."

Since then, he has championed literacy and the empowerment of girls and women. "By educating a girl, we're educating a family and generations thereafter," Venkatesh says. "The return on investment is very high."

Venkatesh has played a key role in the India Literacy Mission as joint secretary and national executive committee member, supporting teacher training and literacy programs across 2,964 schools. He has also served as director of two Rotary Action Groups.

Venkatesh served as RI director from 2021 to 2023 and as treasurer in 2022-23. He has also served as Rotary membership coordinator and learning facilitator. A frequent speaker at presidents-elect learning seminars and club leadership learning seminars, Venkatesh has attended more than 10 Rotary International Conventions and chaired the South Asian receptions at the conventions in Montreal and Seoul.

Venkatesh is passionate about the connection between Rotary's public image and membership growth. "One day, people will ask us more often 'Can I join Rotary?' rather than us going around asking 'Will you join Rotary?'"

For Venkatesh, part of Rotary's appeal comes from how it affords its members a streamlined way to make an impact. "Rotary gives me a conduit, a platform, and an organized set-up where not only do I give back to the community, but my contribution becomes manifold when it reaches the community," he says. "It's a multiplier."

Venkatesh enjoys competitive bridge and traveling to Malaysia and seaside destinations. His wife, Vinita, is a member of the Rotary Club of Chennai Anchorage. They are Major Donors to The Rotary Foundation.