

In the President's Chair

Introducing Rotarian President Roma Puni

Rotarian Akua:

On 1st July, the Rotary Club of Accra Ring Road Central, after 4 consecutive years of male presidents, ushers in a female president, Rotarian Roma Puni. After dodging the presidency for several years, she is finally ready for the hot seat.

Rotarian Akua:

Congratulations Roma! How are you feeling? Is your heart racing? Has it been a case of sleepless nights? Are you nervous?

RP Roma:

Thank you very much. What can I say? When I was elected, I had mixed feelings. You know I had been a runaway bride for years. But I was excited. As my role changed to president-elect any time I thought of it, my heart did miss a little beat. Sleepless night a teeny weeny – this is the Rotary club of Accra – Ring Road Central, the pace setters.

Gone were the days when club presidency was a walk in the park. With technology, innovation and creativity, things are a lot different now. You have got to make a difference, sometimes a big difference. So I guess I had a little of all you mentioned as the time drew nearer. However as I mentally prepared myself for the role and had lot of chats with other Rotarians, my nerves kind of calmed down. The beauty about Rotary is you are elected eighteen (18) months in advance so you enough to prepare for the role.

Rotarian Akua:

It is good to know that you are mentally set for the challenge. As you know, the seat of the president of the biggest and most dynamic club - RRC can get very hot. What is your greatest fear?

RP Roma:

My first thoughts went to the famous greatest fear quote. (laughs as she tries to quote it). Yes, that. The bar in the club have been set high by my forerunners, which makes us the envy in the district. My greatest fear is maintaining these standards and surpassing them – to keep up the dynamism of the Rotary Club of Accra – Ring Road Central.

Then comes COVID, which presents its own challenges and increases this fear. How do I achieve this? How creative and innovative can I be to achieve this? Having a board with first time directors didn't help to curb this fear. However, when we met as the team the love was instant as we are all in the same boat. We have since explored and continue to explore different opportunities to achieve this feat. It's exciting!

Rotarian Akua:

It sounds like you have finally accepted your fate. How prepared are you to

take up this daunting task of being the President for the year 2020/2021?

RP Roma:

Of course, I am prepared. I have spent the last eighteen months reading and learning about everything I can on the role of being a club president. I have chats and discussions with a lot of Rotarians, friends and my babies who told to always smile. I knew the latter could not be that hard. On joining Rotary, I took interest in learning a lot about Rotary and developing myself. I took everything I did seriously and with passion, always going the extra mile. I enjoyed it immensely.

In the close to 30 years, I have been in the Rotary family, I have had the opportunity to played many many many roles from secretary to committee directors to district chairs to assistant Rotary public image coordinator. Without realizing it, all these roles build your confidence and prepare you for leadership. So yes, I am prepared. And you would not believe the number of chief of staff and advisors I am blessed with. It's amazing.

Rotarian Akua:

You have friends and people you look up to when it comes to leadership in RRC and Rotary. You've obviously received some advice, what is the funniest advice given you?

RP Roma:

Oh yes. I had asked a senior Rotarian what advice she had for me as club president. All she said (in fante) was that "I should drink water, lots and lots of water at Rotary meetings. A question is asked, drink water or comment is passed, drink water."

Rotarian Akua:

You have been a Rotarian for a number of years now, what is your most memorable experience?

RP Roma:

I have many many memorable experiences since I joined the Rotary family but one that has always lived with me as a Rotarian is our Asempaneye project. We were building a six-classroom block for the children in Asempaneye from a dilapidated structure. So we would go over on weekends as a group and assist with the construction, getting really really dirty. The progress we made week after week, year after year mixed with the camaraderie that went on anytime we visited made it worth the while.

The joy in seeing the building finished was not as exciting as the kids' smiles on the day of the commission. Not sure whether it was the classroom building or school bags and stationery they each received. It did give a sense of fulfillment though. I would like us to go back to the days when had hands on project, got dirty after a service project, interacting and working with the community members. That I miss a lot and look forward to when Rotarians can work with our hands again and closely with the communities that we serve. Of course when the pandemic is over.

Rotarian Akua:

For those who don't know you, Who is Roma? what kind of person is Roma?

RP Roma:

Roma is the first born of a doctor and teacher, born in Sekondi – Takoradi and grew up in Akim Oda. My family is made up of my five siblings, their partners and my eight babies. She attended St Roses in Akwatia, University of Cape Coast and University of Leicester. She worked in advertising all her life, working with top agencies such as Lowe Lintas, Young & Young, Ogilvy, and developed herself into a marketing communications person. She currently runs an event company called Zenzi where we specialize in social events, vacations packages and marketing communications. She loves to read, dance and seeing new places.

What kind of person is Roma Puni? July borns have been described as rare to find, not one to mess, smart, fun & sweet, sunshine with a little hurricane. I would say I am kind, caring, reliable, hardworking, principled, fun, adventurous, inspiring and devoted to family & friends. My greatest joy is to help others, that's why I am a proud Rotarian.

Rotarian Akua:

What is your ideal routine? Are you an early bird or a night owl?

RP Roma:

I would say a night owl and not particularly a morning person. I usually stay up doing things I enjoy – reading, watching movies or listening to music. In the morning, after I drag myself out of bed, I get ready to sit behind my computer to start my day with whatever I have going on with Zenzi. My to-do for the day determines how my day flows. Ideally I wish I could fit a walk in after the drag.

Rotarian Akua:

What's your favorite food? Both local & international.

RP Roma:

Red Red with gari has forever been my favourite food. As a child, we had that for lunch every Saturday. I love French and Italian cuisine. I can't seem to choose which one I love most.

Rotarian Akua:

What is your favourite childhood memory?

RP Roma:

It was my parents wedding anniversary and I cooked an idea to get them out of the house so I could surprise them with a candlelight dinner. They absolutely loved the idea, after they got over their anger for tricking them.

Rotarian Akua:

What's your favorite RI convention destination?

RP Roma:

Bangkok 2012. As I would every year, I organized the travel and accommodation for the club and other Rotarians. And this was by far the easiest so I was able to enjoy the convention without worrying if something would go wrong. I loved history and culture and there was plenty of that at the Thailand convention

Rotarian Akua:
Come June 2021, what do you want to have achieved?

RP Roma:
The main focus for the Rotary year is as follows:

- *Grow membership*
- *Get members more involved and bonding more*
- *Increase our social media presence*
- *Have hands-on and impactful service projects*
- *Contribute more to the Rotary Foundation*

Rotarian Akua:
With Covid 19 and its effects, how will fellowship and bonding work among member since it's an integral part of being a Rotarian?

RP Roma:
COVID-19 pandemic has definitely changed the ways that many of us experience Rotary. But every challenge also opens opportunities. Rotary is built on fellowship and service. So it makes it hard for most of us. However, we will adhere to all safety measures put in place by the government till its safe enough to fellowship and bond physically. We will find ways achieve that virtually for now even though it would never be the same. I look forward to a time when we can fellowship every week and enjoy all the other events and activities we love so much but for now we must be safe.

Rotarian Akua:
For someone who feels that being a President of a Rotary Club is a 'mission impossible', what can you tell them?

RP Roma:
Each mission impossible movie ended successfully. For me, I have always known I would be president of my club but I allowed my inner fear to take a better part of me, telling me I was not ready. Once I calmed that fear down, prepared adequately it didn't feel like a mission impossible. The key in my opinion is getting involved at all time, build your Rotary knowledge and prepare, prepare, prepare. I have been blessed with fantastic team that is excited and ready to take up this role so it isn't a mission impossible. It's a fait accompli!

Rotarian Akua:
Any plans on going for a District position after presidency?

RP Roma:
I have worked in the district and beyond. I was the District Chair for Public Image and RYLA in 2016/2017 and 2018/2019; Assistant District Chair for Public Image 2017/2018 and worked in various District HOC. I was Assistant Rotary Public Image Coordinator from 2015 to 2018. I have even worked the strategic planning committee for Rotary International. So yes most definitely if the opportunity arises again. I am ever ready to serve!

Rotarian Akua:
We wish you well, praying for the spirit of Service and Leadership. This year is going to be fantastic - thus, "the Hippy year". Congratulations once again!