

## **International Commodore's Report 2019-20**

Sometimes it is as well that we do not know what lies ahead. This has been a most unusual year, starting well and then changing in ways which could never have been foreseen.

It started upbeat, after my installation, but before I took up post as International Commodore, with the charter, on behalf of PIC Guillermo Arteta, of the first fleet in Ukraine, the Cherkasy Ukrainian Fleet. This was a Charter Ceremony outside in beautiful warm sunshine, followed by a sail on the Dnipro River, in the form of a regatta.

My first official duty as IC was in Sweden, when I had the pleasure of installing Hasse Alfredson as Regional Commodore for Europe North at a lunch at Marstrand. Ann and I spent a very happy few days with Hasse and Yvonne in Gothenburg and had a good look around the area. Unfortunately, the weather prevented our intended sail on their boat through the Archipelago.

As there are already a number of established regattas held each year for members to attend, I have been encouraging the idea of cruising in company for members who do not like racing. In September, with this in mind, Marko Murn invited Ann and me to join his Slovenian crew in the Serbian Rotary cruise to raise money to provide scholarships for talented Serbian students. It was held in the Ionian sea, sailing from Lefkas, and along with members of the Serbian Fleet and some from our own Clyde Fleet, I felt it gave a great start to the idea, proving to be a most enjoyable few days. Here's hoping the idea develops and, if so, we will advertise it widely and encourage members to participate.

Staying in Greece, but switching to the Aegean Sea, the Area 1 Annual Meeting was held in Athens, organized by the Hellenic Aegean Fleet Commodore, Lila Kyriakopoulou-Schliebener and her team. The main idea of these Area meetings is to allow members from around the Area to come together and get to know one another, having fun as a group. In Athens there were about 90 members present from 17 different countries, who, during the event, visited the Parthenon, including the new museum, and took a trip by ferry to Aegina, a neighbouring island. The meeting was enjoyed by all and was a great success.

Then it was further afield to South America, to first charter the Brazil South Fleet in Pelotas and then the Montevideo Fleet in Punta del Este, in Uruguay, as reported in the Area 2 Report. These were both wonderful events, really happy occasions, at which we were made truly welcome. They also afforded us time to see the local areas and we were looked after magnificently by our hosts. From there we were taken to Argentina, where we were welcomed to a dinner by the Delta and the Rio de la Plata Fleets, another most enjoyable event, before being entertained to a couple of days sightseeing in Tigre, including a sail within the Delta rivers in a member's new motor yacht.

It was then that things started to change, as were to go on to Chile to Charter the Iquique Fleet, but due to civil unrest developing rapidly throughout Chile, we had to cancel it and

return home from Buenos Aires. This theme of civil unrest continued, as our next event was the rescheduled Area 3 AGM in Macau. It was originally to have been held in Hong Kong but had to be cancelled because of the protests there. However, it was another most enjoyable event and allowed us to visit another new, and very different, place. We did manage a day in Hong Kong and were very well looked after. However, when left on our own, we inadvertently wandered across the remnants of a demonstration!

At the end of November, it was nearer home to the charter of a new squadron in Slovenia, the Slovenian Coast Squadron, another successful and most enjoyable event.

2019 went out on a sad note as we learned of the passing of PIC Ferit Biren. Ann and I were privileged to attend a meeting in Istanbul in February held in Ferit's memory and I was pleased to be able to pass on the thoughts and condolences of the International Bridge and Past International Commodores to the members of his family and the Turkish Region and to express their feelings about a man who was very highly admired and respected. While it was sad to say goodbye to Ferit, it was great to be able to look back on many aspects of his life and to recall the good times so many people enjoyed with him over the years. He will be well remembered with great affection.

2020 heralded more fleet charters in Taiwan, Tokyo and two in Ukraine but there were more surprises to come, in the form of the coronavirus, COVID-19. This grounded us and brought the postponement of all four charters. Hopefully, they can now go ahead this year, with the easing of the restrictions due to the virus. However, the fleets are formed and functioning, with the official charter ceremonies to be arranged as soon as possible.

Just before the stranglehold of the virus descended on us, Area 2 were able to hold a very successful AGM in Colombia, as reported in the Area 2 Report. Unfortunately, Ann and I were unable to attend, as it coincided with Ann's Mother's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday and there were many family members travelling to join us in the celebrations. However, I was lucky enough to be able to speak to everyone at the AGM during their Business Meeting, through the use of Skype. As reported, it was a very successful and enjoyable event and thankfully everyone returned home safely afterwards.

As everyone knows, the RI Convention in Honolulu was cancelled, and consequently so were all our IYFR events. However, a virtual RI Convention was organised and contained a virtual House of Friendship, at which we had a booth. This was open 24 hours a day during the Convention and then throughout the month of July. At the time of writing this report, we have had about 350 visitors to the booth. Our contact details were provided for interested Rotarians and some enquiries have been received. We offered a few zoom meetings to allow both interested Rotarians and existing members to meet up for a chat – much like a real booth and we had the pleasure of getting together with some good friends from all three IYFR Areas.

The San Francisco Fleet also ran a virtual regatta, as a fun event, and invited all members to participate. There were a number of very different entries from members from all three Areas, demonstrating most successfully how 'IYFR Connects the World' and these were also displayed at the HOF.

With all the IYFR events being cancelled, including the PCC and the AGM, I took the opportunity of arranging a virtual AGM after the end of June, when we could present reports for the full year 2019-20. It seemed sensible to display all the reports on the IYFR Website or Rotafloat for members to read and comment on before the meeting. This would keep the virtual meeting short and to the point, without having all the reports read at the time, especially as it is difficult to find a time which suits everyone around the World and so for some it will not be at an ideal time. This led to a virtual meeting in August.

The idea of zoom meetings has grown during the pandemic and a number of fleets have used them to keep members in touch with one another and to stage events when they have been unable to sail. I am sure we will see more use made of this form of meeting once the threat of the virus is over.

Another change this year, is that of the format of 'Rotafloat'. You have seen the report from Andre Hawryliw, the Editor, and I hope you like the idea of the changed format. This should give members a readily accessible newsletter on [www.rotafloat.org](http://www.rotafloat.org), informing them of what has happened and what is planned to take place throughout IYFR. It should provide up to the minute information but, of course, depends on members providing it. Please make use of Rotafloat and make any constructive comments you may have, which will be most welcome.

In summary then, I am pleased to say that overall our membership numbers are holding up, as new fleets and increased numbers in some existing ones are compensating for losses in some of our older fleets, where numbers are declining. We still have over 3500 members spread throughout 41 countries around the World. Area meetings are being well attended and good fellowship is being enjoyed across all three Areas. It will be a blessing when COVID-19 is finally dealt with and our sailing returns to normal, whatever 'normal' will be in the future.

I thank you all for your support throughout the past year, in spite of all its difficulties and I still hope to visit a number of you at some stage during the coming year, depending on the course of the virus.