

## A Brief History of Rotary

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, that’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead, famous U.S. anthropologist

When lawyer Paul Harris and three other businessmen met in the first Rotary meeting on February 23, 1905, they were more concerned with making friends in a large city than they were with changing the world. In Chicago, Paul said “People were everywhere, but nowhere a friend.” The other three were Gus Loehr, a mining engineer, Silvester Schiele, a coal dealer and Hiram Shorey, a tailor. They decided to meet regularly and rotate the location of their meetings, and hence the name “Rotary.” Soon they were established as the Rotary Club of Chicago.

After a time these Rotarians realized that fellowship and self-interest were not enough to keep busy professional and business people together, and they reached out in Community Service, to erect a public comfort station near City Hall, to replace the horse of a doctor who did home visits, and in other ways. "Service Above Self" became Rotary’s motto.

News of the first Rotary Club spread rapidly and clubs were established in other cities and countries. In 1908 the second Rotary club was organized in San Francisco CA, and in 1909 clubs formed in Oakland CA, Seattle WA, Los Angeles CA, New York NY, and Boston MA. In 1911 the first club outside the U.S. was organized in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada and a year later Rotary crossed the Atlantic with the admission of clubs in London, England, Dublin, Ireland and Belfast, Northern Ireland. The National Rotarian magazine was launched and in 1913 changed its name to “The Rotarian.” An “International Association of Rotary Clubs” was organized and the name changed later to “Rotary International,” with “Service Above Self” and “He Profits Most Who Serves Best” as mottoes.

Even during World War I Rotary grew from 83 to over 300 clubs. In 1917 its sixth President, Arch Klumph of Cleveland OH, announced the formation of the Rotary Foundation—for the purpose of “doing good in the world.” Clubs spread to every part of the world and by the end of the 1920’s there were about 3,000 clubs. The annual convention was rotated to different countries, branch offices were organized, The Rotarian was published in several languages, the Rotary Club of Nashville TN sponsored the first Institute of International Relations, and regional conferences to build peace and international cooperation were promoted.

As the first service club, Rotary helped pave the way for Kiwanis International and Lions International, founded in 1915 and 1917 respectively. Professional women’s organizations modeled after Rotary were also started. Rotarians were the basis for organizing the International Society for Crippled Children and also UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), which grew out of a Rotary conference in 1942.

Rotary grew slowly during the 1930s but was set back by the Civil War in Spain and by World War II. At the end of that war there were 5,400 Rotary clubs, barely 400 more than at the start of war in 1939, and membership was only 247,000. But the number of clubs

increased to 7,100 in 1950, 10,700 in 1960, and over 14,000 by 1970. By 1986 Rotary counted 1 million members. Today there are over 35,000 clubs in 170 countries and over 1.2 million Rotarians. Rotary is organized in 530+ districts worldwide, each with an experienced Governor who visits clubs and supervises activities in his/her district. The chief administrative body is a 19 member Board of Directors, only six of whom are U.S. citizens. Since 1987 women have been admitted as members and have added an extra spark to Rotary's activities.

Though started in 1917, The Rotary Foundation remained small until 1947, when the death of Paul Harris set off an avalanche of funds which poured into Rotary's headquarters in Evanston, Illinois.

In 1947 the Rotary Scholars Program began with 18 students going abroad from 11 countries. Today, over 60 years later, Ambassadorial Scholarships make up the Foundation's largest program, with about 800 students studying overseas annually.

In 1965 the Group Study Exchange program began, involving 4-6 week exchanges of groups of business and professional men and women between districts, with team members staying with Rotary families in the area visited. At about the same time, the Foundation launched humanitarian projects, e.g., World Community Service projects involving clubs in wealthy and poor districts who work together to improve health, add to education, or increase food supply where needed. Many of these projects have received Special Grants from the Foundation, some as large as a half million dollars.

Since July 2013, The Rotary Foundation has transitioned into its FUTURE VISION, so that all the programs have been redesigned and become much more focused towards the SIX AREAS OF FOCUS.

In 2002, the World Peace Fellowship Program began, offering 2-year Masters Programs in Conflict Resolution and related fields, at 6 worldwide Rotary Centers for International Peace Studies. A seventh Rotary Center has been established in Thailand, offering a Professional Development Certificate program in Conflict Resolution, during two 3-month sessions per year.

Most of the \$166 million spent in 2013 by the Foundation was raised from contributions from Rotarians. The Permanent Fund was established as an endowment fund for The Rotary Foundation, to receive legacies and large gifts, whose proceeds will be employed to finance projects approved by the Trustees of The Rotary Foundation.

A 3-H Project that began in the Philippines to vaccinate children against polio expanded to become Rotary's greatest international project—PolioPlus. Starting in 1985, with a goal of protecting all the world's children from Polio, a disease costing the lives of 20,000 children a year and maiming thousands more for life, Rotary International set out to raise \$120 million—the total raised was \$245 million! Rotary clubs and volunteers continue to immunize children on every continent—and contributions continue. Over 2.5 Billion children have been immunized. In 2014, Polio is still endemic in 3 nations – Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. Rotary's goal was the complete elimination of polio by the year 2005, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Rotary. However, wars, political turmoil, religious opposition and migration have hindered the immunization process. Since late 2007, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have given Rotary \$555 million to help with

Rotary's Polio Eradication project. Rotarians and Rotary clubs matched that incredible gift with \$200 million by June 30, 2012. Continuing contributions to the Polio Eradication project will reach into the billions, in Rotary's determined effort to rid the world of polio – once and for all.

And so Rotary has begun its second Century of service as the oldest service organizations, with Rotarians working to achieve the goal set by Paul Harris in his Adventure In Service:

“Rotarians must accept their own personal challenge to strengthen club service, for this is the foundation of all service;

to serve and dignify their profession, and to exert leadership to raise the standards of their business or profession;

to serve their community more effectively, so that their town or city will become a better place in which to live and rear their children; and

to explore every possible means, with their own club and in cooperation with other groups, to increase international understanding—thereby hastening the time of peace and goodwill.” (edited)

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