

Introduction

As Rotary International celebrates a century of global service in 2005, Charlestonians should be proud of the thousands of local Rotarians who have provided decades of service to the community.

The Rotary Club of Charleston, the father of six clubs in the Lowcountry, got its start in 1920 thanks to the efforts of T. Wilbur “Buddy” Thornhill and Louis C. Fischer.

Thornhill had, in 1914, tried to form a club, but couldn’t get the help he needed from Charleston’s Chamber of Commerce, according to Club records. After his service in World War I, however, a newly-invigorated Thornhill reinforced efforts to start a local service club that could give back to the community.

About the same time, Fischer became interested in forming a local Rotary Club. An active Shriner, Fischer met Rotary founder Paul Harris when in Chicago for a Shrine convention. Upon returning to South Carolina, Fischer had a detailed plan to organize a club.

On Feb. 3, 1920, Thornhill, Fischer and 20 other businessmen held their charter meeting. A month later, the Rotary Club of Charleston officially was chartered. It was the ninth club formed in South Carolina and the 624th Rotary Club ever formed.

In the 85 years since that first meeting, the Club has attracted major civic leaders from Harris, pilot Amelia Earhart and Rotary International presidents to major political leaders, such as presidential candidates George W. Bush and Sen. John McCain.

More importantly though, Club members have contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to local projects and have provided leadership that led to real ways to help people. Among the local institutions that the Rotary Club of Charleston helped to start are the Coastal Community Foundation, the local Boy Scouts movement and the distinctive Charleston Rotary Fund, which contributes to many admirable causes and awards scholarships.

Throughout this book, you'll find hundreds of examples of outstanding community service. Nestled between, you'll occasionally find the odd tidbit. For instance, the Club paid for its president in 1947 to attend the Rotary International Convention. But while there, he sent a letter of resignation as president and never returned to Charleston!

No work like this would have been possible without the diligent record-keeping and archiving of past club historians and secretaries. In particular, the late Rucker Newbery and still-active Jerry Nuss should be singled out for much of the information in the yearly reports you'll find on the pages that follow. Also to be thanked are the outstanding team of contributing editors who honed information gathered over the years into a better product. They include David Abel, Bob Baldwin, Amy Jenkins, Peter Lucash, John Milkereit and, of course, Jerry Nuss.

The Charleston that Rotarians faced daily when the Club began eight decades ago is vastly different than today's high-speed, interconnected business environment that sometimes seems to devalue relationships and people.

But today's Rotarians in Charleston share the same community zeal that founders had that inspired generations of "Service Above Self." Reading through these 85 years of Rotary's contributions to Charleston, members can take pride in the Club's accomplishments and how it has helped to improve people's lives. More importantly, the stories in this book can rouse Charleston's current and future Rotarians to do even more for the community in the years to come.

— Andrew C. Brack
General editor and director of the Rotary Club of Charleston
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