

Bloomington Rotary Club History

The Bloomington Rotary Club was chartered April 13, 1918. It was the seventh club established in what is now District 6580, and the 403rd in Rotary. A large delegation came from the sponsoring club in Indianapolis for the installation.

The first officers were Dr. J. E. P. Holland, physician and part-time Indiana University physician, president; Joseph N. Nurre, glass manufacturer, and W. Edward Showers, furniture manufacturer, vice-presidents; U. H. Smith, I. U. Bursar, secretary; Nat U. Hill, banker, treasurer; Robert Hamilton, furniture sales manager, master-at-arms; and Fred Matthews, stone quarrier, and Roy O. Pike, banker, directors. From the beginning Rotary brought town and gown together, setting a pattern later followed by other service clubs.

Early in the club's history, an adequate water supply became a major political issue. Bloomington had periodic water famines. Four Rotary charter members were in the majority of the city council that gave Bloomington an adequate water source. Because the city could not finance the new plant, citizens turned to a new idea, a holding company, and Rotarians gave it a financial push.

Allen Wylie, an early member, was the father of Bloomington's park system, and Ralph Mills, in later years, spearheaded the park expansion a growing city needed. To recognize Rotary International's 50th anniversary, Bloomington Rotary gave a basketball court to Bryan Park and provided manpower and money for Rotary Park in the city's system.

Paul Harris, founder of Rotary International, came to Bloomington in 1940 for dedication of the round table, conceived by the president, Roger F. Allen, and built as a huge Rotary wheel. During the years of its annual use, 50 representative citizens, only a few of them Rotarians, gathered around it to brainstorm the community's needs. The first session produced the impetus for reviving the dormant Chamber of Commerce.

Bloomingtonians split again during the late 1950s and early 1960s over whether to expand Bloomington Hospital or build a second one. Rotary set aside two meetings, one for each faction to present its case, and then provided leadership for a committee to mediate differences. Out of this came a united effort, resulting in today's Bloomington Hospital, a regional medical center.

Through the years, Bloomington Rotary has given scholarships to local high school graduates, sent young people to Boy's State and Girl's State, supported a Little League baseball team, and aided Junior Achievement. The rest home for tuberculosis patients, at one time maintained in the county, was one of the several services to which Bloomington Rotary contributed.

Bloomington is in a unique position in international service, as attested by its weekly display of many banners from all parts of the world. The past membership of Leo Dowling, Past District Governor Walter E. Burnham, Donald E. Wendling, and Kenneth A. Rogers, all principal advisors to foreign students at I.U., helped to make contact with students from 80 nations, especially with Rotary Foundation scholars. Past President Floyd Arpan, former director of the State Department's Foreign Journalist Program, brought a score of journalists from abroad to a meeting each year.

Bloomington Rotary sponsored the founding of Bloomington North Rotary Club in 1974, largely through the efforts of Past District Governor Harold Jordan. We were also involved in the creation of the Sunrise Club, led by Past District Governor Randy Bridges.

Our club members have also served beyond the local club. Bloomington Rotary has been the home club for many district governors. Oscar H. Cravens and the Reverend A. E. (King) Cole served when the district included all of Indiana, and King went on to become a director of Rotary International. Governors of the district have included George H. Smith, John E. Stempel, Walter E. Burnham, Harold W. Jordan, Ralph L. Johnson, Robert R. Sturgeon, A. Pat Riggins, Jr., Douglas R. (Randy) Bridges, and Judith Witt.

Since the creation of the Assistant District Governor (now called Assistant Governor), Ron Jensen, Judith Witt, and Paul Hazel have served in that role. In addition to King Cole's services as director of Rotary International, Past District Governor (PDG) Stempel served Rotary International as chairman of the magazine and the publications committee and member of the public relations committee.

In January 1987, Bloomington Rotary inaugurated its own foundation designed to assist worthy community projects that have trouble getting started. The first grant was awarded to Monroe County C.A.R.E.S., which coordinates all adolescent substance abuse programs in the county. The Bloomington Rotary Foundation helped fund the Funbrellas for Mills Pool. In recent years, the Bloomington Rotary Foundation has provided support for Teachers Warehouse, our Centennial Rotary Project, and for Volunteers in Medicine.

In the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, the community was distressed over the question of how to dispose of massive accumulations of industrial toxic wastes (PCBs). The situation was a complicated legal, chemical, economic, logistical, and political issue. The Club initiated a series of representation, auditions, and fact finding steps to inform the membership and bring renewed focus to an issue which was splintering the community. The interest of Rotary provided a strong motivation for all sides to come together in an effort to resolve the issues.

Numerous other important developments occurred in the same era. In 1987, when women were nationally declared to be eligible for membership, the Bloomington Rotary Club immediately recruited several of the most outstanding female community leaders and has added more each year. At the same time, it undertook to expand its membership toward the 150 mark, which it reached in 1990 with an average attendance of 80%.

Another outstanding accomplishment was the Club's response to Rotary International's Polio Plus Campaign to eradicate polio worldwide. Given a target of \$22,000 by RI, the Club raised more than \$103,000. This was by far the largest amount raised by any club in District 6580 and was among the largest in the state. Past District Governor Dr. Pat Riggins led this campaign for the district and the Club.

The Bloomington Rotary Club and its leaders have also been recognized in recent years. Bryan Price was named "Club President of the Year" by the District Governor for 2002-03. In 2003-04, Judy Witt was recognized as "Club President of the Year" for clubs of over 50 members. Also in 2003-04, the Club received the Membership Growth of the Year Award with a 6% increase in membership, bringing

the membership to 158 Rotarians. The Bloomington Rotary Club was named “Club of the Year” in 2003-04 for clubs of over 50 members by the District Governor, and the Club also ranked second in the District in annual programs fund giving.

In sum, since its origins in the spring of 1918, the Bloomington Rotary Club has worked steadily to serve the larger community both through its efforts as an organization and the leadership and stewardship of its members as individuals.