

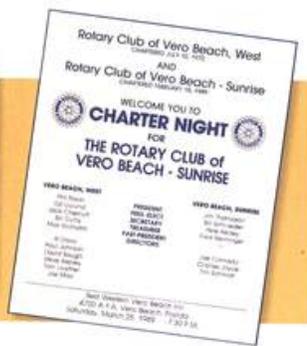
SUNRISE ROTARY VERO BEACH CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY

February 2019



In the late 1980's there were two Rotary Clubs in Vero Beach, The Rotary Clubs of Vero Beach and Vero Beach West. Both were suffering attendance problems, as many members felt that club meetings took too much time from work responsibilities. As a result the West Club, with the support of its "Mother Club" to the east began efforts to organize a breakfast club. On August 28, 1988, then District Governor Phil Gaarder (two a's, not a typo) asked Section 7 representative (they're called Assistant District Governors now) Jack Sherman to help those efforts along. Accordingly, on October 12, 1988, the first organizational meeting of what was to become The Rotary Club of Vero Beach Sunrise was held at the Golden Corral Restaurant at the intersection of U.S. Route 1 and 20th Street, where the Murphy and Walker Law firm is now located. District Governor Phil, a surprise visitor, joined 14 prospective members at the meeting and was sufficiently impressed that he declared the group a "provisional club" on the spot.

The provisional club began holding regular meetings at the Golden Corral. They frequently featured a speaker, "most of whom were awake by the time breakfast was over and it was time to speak". The new organization grew and prospered and received its charter from Rotary International on February 15, 1989. Next month, on March 25, 32 new Sunrise Rotarians gathered at the Best Western Vero Beach as Governor Phil presented the Club's Charter to Charter President Jim Thompson. President Jim had a brief tenure, (during which one member resigned "because all you guys do is eat breakfast") as he handed the gavel to his successor on July 1 when the new Rotary Year began. But the new club was off and running, with many members new to Rotary and learning to be Rotarians.



In 1925, Vero Beach was a small "boom town" of 2,300 hardy folks who settled here to seek their fortune despite oppressive heat and even more oppressive mosquitos. A rickety wooden bridge had opened 5 years earlier connecting the mainland with the barrier island, and 20 or so Florida East Coast Railroad trains rumbled through town each day. But dreams of progress – and a dispute over the showing of Sunday movies in the newly opened Vero Beach Theater - led community leaders to push through legislation that resulted in the creation of Indian River County from the northern portion of St. Lucie County by Governor John W. Martin that year. Most of the community leaders propelling that effort would soon become Rotarians.

Twenty years earlier, in 1905, Rotary International was founded in Chicago. The movement spread rapidly and by 1921 there were 1,500 Rotary Clubs, including Clubs in Tampa, Jacksonville, Key West and St. Petersburg. In early 1925 preliminary talks were held between Fred D. Bacon, an insurance broker, and Dr. C. H. Pettibone, pastor of the Community Church, about starting a Rotary Club here. Meetings soon began on an informal basis, but the search for a sponsor club revived the Sunday movie dispute. Still smarting from the formation of Indian River County, members of the Ft. Pierce Rotary Club refused to sponsor the new club and so that honor fell to the Rotary Club of West Palm Beach. On May 28, 1926, the new Club received its charter, number 2377, from Rotary International. Soon after, on June 9, 1926, 100 guests gathered at the Royal Park Inn (on the site of what's now the Royal Point Condominiums on Ponce de Leon Circle) for a gala dinner at which the new Club's charter was formally presented to Dr. Pettibone, the new Club's charter President.

Weekly luncheon meetings were held at Dr. Pettibone's Community Church; the lunches cost 50 cents and were prepared and served by the women of the church. Annual dues were 1 dollar. One of the new club's first official acts was joining with other local organizations in contributing to a relief fund for

victims of flooding in the Mississippi River Valley. In 1928 the club helped form a junior baseball league and in 1929 in began many years of active work with the Boy Scouts, organizing Troop 50 under its leadership. Beginning in the early 1930's the club made sure that needy families and children weren't forgotten at Christmas.

The Great Depression hit the community and the Club hard. It had difficulty meeting its financial assessments to Rotary International, and dues had to be reduced to 25 cents. But as economic recovery began to take hold the club was able to increase its lunch price to 60 cents. The Club continued to grow and prosper, with many of its programs devoted to youth and education, including a student loan program that was established in 1939. During World War Two, Rotarians helped with blood banks and war bond drives, raising over \$65,000 by April 30, 1943.

In April, 1975, the Vero Beach Rotary Club hosted its first "Home Stay", welcoming visiting District Governors-Elect from other countries on their way to the International Assembly into members' homes, much as they do today. This initiative coincided with RI's relocating the International Assembly (a week long training seminar for DG's – Elect) from Lake Placid, N.Y. to Boca Raton. An edition of the *Press Journal* from that time records that the Home Stay guests "enjoyed seeing your little city"...fishing, boating, exploring our beaches, jaunts to Disney World and Cape Canaveral, tours of a citrus grove and juice concentrate plant and – somehow – a bit of "free time", too. Home Stay continues as a local Rotary tradition, now in its 43rd year and participated in by all five Indian River County Rotary Clubs.

Vero Beach continued to grow and prosper, and so did interest in Rotary. The "Mother Club" sponsored the formation of the Rotary Club of Vero Beach West and on September 26, 1972, presented the new Club and Charter President Angelo Sanchez with its charter at a gala banquet held at the Holiday Inn



West. Among the reasons for a second Rotary Club in our community was the heavy traffic across its sole causeway and the difficulty of getting to and from a luncheon meeting in a timely fashion. The new club's charter members were a mix of Vero Beach Rotary Club members who found the new club's meeting location more convenient and other community leaders interested in advancing Rotary's ideals.

In 1987, following a lengthy legal battle over the admission of 3 women as members of the Duarte, CA Rotary Club, the United States Supreme Court, in a unanimous 8-0 decision (Justice Harry Blackmun, a Rotarian, recused himself) ordered that women be admitted to Rotary membership. And so, at its regular weekly meeting on March 30, 1989, District Governor Phil Gaarder installed 3 women – realtor Linda Hayes, accountant Linda Parish and travel agent Trish Scattergood – as the first women members of the Rotary Club of Vero Beach.

Also in 1988, the Rotary Club of Vero Beach sponsored the Rotary Club of Sebastian, which became Indian River County's third Rotary Club. Phil Sherman served as Charter President, but his term was cut short as he died while in office. Larry Napier served the remainder of his term and continued as President for the new club's second year.

Attendance issues continued to plague the two Vero Beach clubs as busy schedules and the length of Rotary lunches caused many members to miss meetings. In 1987 discussions began about the possible formation of a "breakfast club", and soon the Rotary Club of Vero Beach West, with the support of its counterpart on the barrier island, began efforts to organize a new club.



The very first organizational meeting of the Rotary Club of Vero Beach Sunrise was held at the Golden Corral Restaurant on October 12, 1988, attended by 14 prospective members. The new group was an instant success, as District Governor Phil Gaarder attended the meeting and declared it a

"provisional Rotary Club" on the spot. It subsequently received its charter from Rotary International on February 15, 1989. Governor Phil presented the new club's charter at a dinner held at the Best Western Vero Beach and Charter President Jim Thompson accepted the charter on behalf of the new club's 32 members.

The Rotary Club of Orchid Island became the County's fourth Rotary Club when it was awarded its charter on April 20, 2001.

Back in 1931, the Rotary Club of Vero Beach had erected a public drinking fountain, built of coquina rock, in Pocahontis Park at the corner of 14th Avenue and 21st Street as a tribute to its founder, Dr. Pettibone. The fountain, with a brass plaque commemorating Dr. Pettibone's service, was dedicated on March 20, 1931 and served the community faithfully for over 30 years. Due to the deterioration of the coquina rock and disuse of the fountain it was demolished in July, 1962 and replaced by a stone marker bearing the plaque dedicated to Dr. Pettibone.

In celebration of Rotary International's 100th Anniversary in 2005, Indian River County's five Rotary Clubs joined together to create and donate today's Rotary Centennial Fountain, which was designed by Rotarian Michael Wangen, supported by local architects Peter Moor and Mary Juckiewicz. The new fountain stands proudly at its original site and continues to honor Dr. Pettibone, with the original plaque dedicated to him now permanently affixed on the east side of the water basin, and serves to remind the

community of the enormous contributions Rotary and Rotarians have made across the 90+ years of Rotary presence in Vero Beach.

In 2008 then District Governor Betsy Owen suggested that Indian River County might benefit from an evening Rotary Club and on January 20, 2009, under the leadership of Karl Steene and Elaine Jones, the first organizational meeting of the Rotary Club of Vero Beach Oceanside was held at the Indian River Shores Community Center with approximately 25 attendees. Two months later, on March 27, 2009, the new Club was granted its Charter from Rotary International, with Karl Steene serving as Charter President and Elaine Jones as Secretary. The new club meets, then as now, at 5:30 p.m. and its wine, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres format has long proved popular with members and visitors alike.

In 2010, all (then) six Indian River County Rotary Clubs came together and held the first "Oktoberfest" at River House. An afternoon and evening of fellowship, food and, of course, beer became the first of what's now an annual fund raiser for Polio Plus, Rotary International's initiative to rid the earth of Polio. To date, Rotarians and their guests at Oktoberfest have raised over \$60,000 in support of Rotary's signature international cause.

The Rotary Club of Vero Beach West had changed its name to the Treasure Coast Rotary Club in 2006 and had remained an active club that continued to make many positive contributions to the community. But it fell on hard times and ultimately disbanded on June 30, 2012. Many of its former members stayed in Rotary, joining one of the other remaining clubs, and many remain active in Rotary today.

Local Rotary Clubs are now in their 92nd^t year of service to the residents of Indian River County, and to the world. With five clubs and well over 200 Rotarians, the world's largest and best community service organization has never had a greater or more positive impact in Indian River County, nor more local Rotarians committed to helping make our local communities, and the world, a better place. Want something worthwhile done? Call a Rotarian!

