

A ROTARY HISTORY

THE BEGINNING. In 1905 in Chicago, Illinois, founder and attorney Paul Harris likely had a much smaller vision for his Rotary than what has come to be known throughout the world for its dedication to service and international goodwill. Raised in a rural village in Vermont, Harris envisioned a new kind of club for professionals that would kindle the fellowship and friendly spirit he had known in his youth.

On 23 February 1905, Harris and three friends - Silvester Schiele, a coal dealer, Hiram Shorey, a merchant tailor, and Gustavus Loehr, a mining engineer - met at an office in downtown Chicago. They discussed Harris' idea that business leaders should meet periodically to enjoy camaraderie and decided to enlarge their circle of business and professional acquaintances. Meeting weekly, this new club limited its membership to one representative from each business and profession. Though the men didn't use the term Rotary that night, that gathering is commonly regarded as the first Rotary club meeting. Soon, after enlisting a fifth member, printer Harry Ruggles, the group formally organized as the Rotary Club of Chicago.

The original club emblem, a wagon wheel design, was the precursor of the familiar cogwheel emblem now used by Rotarians worldwide.

By the end of 1905, the club's roster showed a membership of 30, with Schiele as president and Ruggles as treasurer. Paul Harris initially declined office in the new club but served as its president two years later. With membership growing, meetings moved from offices to hotels and restaurants, where many Rotary club meetings are held today.

The **ROTARY FOUR WAY TEST** – "Of the things we think, say or do: Is it the **TRUTH**? Is it **FAIR** to all concerned? Will it build **GOODWILL** and **BETTER FRIENDSHIPS**? Will it be **BENEFICIAL** to all concerned?" – was adopted by Rotary in 1943 as a way of promoting high ethical standards in member's professional lives. This test was created in 1932 by Rotarian (later, RI president) Herbert J. Taylor as a tool to save a company facing bankruptcy, to be an employee guide in sales, production, advertising, and in all relations with dealers and customers. That simple philosophy was credited with the saving of the company. Since 1943, the **ROTARY FOUR WAY TEST** has been translated into more than a hundred languages and published in thousands of ways.

Today, **ROTARY INTERNATIONAL** is a worldwide organization of business and professional leaders, providing humanitarian service, encouraging high ethical standards in all vocations, helping to build goodwill and peace. Approximately 1.2 million Rotarians belong to more than 32,000 Rotary clubs located in more than 200 countries and geographical areas.

LAREDO, MAY 1, 1920. With 24 members, **The Laredo Rotary Club** received its charter, with officers F.A. Matthes, president; Charles Deutz, vice president; R.K. Mims, treasurer; C.A. Richter, sgt.-at-arms; and J.R. Moore and G.C. Hiatt, directors. Since that time, this beginning club sponsored the beginning of the Laredo Daybreak Club (1984), and the Laredo Under Seven Flags Rotary Club (1992). Laredo Rotary Club members helped organize the Laredo Gateway Rotary Club (1987).

LEADERSHIP BEYOND ITS CLUB. The Laredo Rotary Club has provided a governor eight times to District 5930, which now covers the area from Victoria to Brownsville, and Corpus Christ to Laredo. Charter member Robert Lee Bobbitt served 1929-1930; Joseph C. Netzer two terms, 1939-1940 and 1941-1942; Robert V. Dublin, 1949-1950; Elmore H Borchers, Sr., 1973-1974; David C. Leyendecker, 1987-1988; Fernando E. Cuellar, 1994 – 1995; and Arturo R. Barrera, 1999 – 2000.

PDG Leyendecker has served Rotary International's presidents twice as a representative at District Conferences. Leyendecker and PDG Cuellar served the District at three triennial Legislative Councils, Leyendecker in 1998 and 2001 and Cuellar in 2004.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS for The Laredo Rotary Club have been numerous over the nearly 90 years. Standing high among these is the Club's **participation in education.** In 1923 the Club established an education loan fund, with low interest and long payback time, to finance college attendance. This turned to outright scholarships about 1933. In this connection, the Club recently helped to fund a \$100,000 scholarship endowment at both Laredo Community College and Texas A&M International University. Still, the Club maintains a fund to provide direct scholarships for high school graduates who will attend local institutions.

The club also works with high school students through its Diploma Plus program, in which selected at risk seniors are given a stipend of \$50 per month to help finish high school and encourage college entrance. The stipend carries with it a provision that students have passing grades and at least a 95 percent attendance record. Starting in 1999, students in this program have recorded a 95 percent graduation rate.

The Club has sponsored nine winners in **Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholarships**, which sends people for study in foreign countries. College scholars have studied in foreign countries for a year. Also, a group study exchange, the group consisting of a Rotary team leader and other members, sends teams for a four to six week visit to a foreign country Rotary District, where the team lives in Rotarian homes and visits people in their profession.

Members have participated in the annual **Vocations Day at Laredo Community College** since 1947, usually a two-day event accommodating some 2000 area seniors each year, Rotarians and other professionals present information about their various careers to help students determine what field they want to enter.

One of the greater Rotary International projects is **Polio-Plus**, announced in 1985 to eliminate polio worldwide. During PDG Leyendecker's term as district governor (1987 – 1988), The Laredo Rotary Club pledged \$24,000 and funded \$45,000. The Club gave another \$9,000 in 2002 – 2003, the year Rotarians worldwide raised more than \$118 million for a final push in a program that will total about \$600 million contributed by Rotarians.

Another health area, the Club participates in an annual health fair, **Shots Across Texas.** Combining with the other Laredo Rotary clubs, this health fair provides immunizations, health exams, eye test, and dental exams, all free of charge. More than 2000 people receive this service each year. Also, at this event school supplies are handed out to needy students.

In 1987, the Laredo Rotary Club sponsored the first Interact club at St. Augustine High School. In 2006, it brought on another charter at Nixon High School. Interact is a Rotary International

program that introduces high school age people to the Rotary ideal of service.

Add to this many other projects, such as Little League, support of the Boy Scouts, international help to our neighbor clubs in Mexico, and Christmastime Bell Ringing for the Salvation Army and you have just scratched the surface of what The Laredo Rotary Club involves itself in, following the RI motto **Service Above Self**.

FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENT. Cecilia Garza, Ph.D., professor at Texas A&M International University, is the first female president of The Laredo Rotary Club. She is serving the 2006-2007 Rotary year. The club began the year with 88 members, 16 females and 72 males. Rotary International began accepting women as members in 1988.