



# ROTARY NEWS

## Celebrating women in Rotary

**Grafton Rotary Club member Brenda Thompson gives a brief history of the long process involved in allowing women in Rotary clubs.**

Rotary Clubs got their start from the visions of Chicago attorney, Paul Harris, who formed the first Rotary Club in February 1905, so professionals with diverse backgrounds could exchange ideas and give back to their communities, while forming meaningful, lifelong friendships.

Although the clubs have been dedicated to the idea of service for more than 100 years, many were not always fond of the idea of allowing women to join the clubs.

Grafton Rotary Club (Australia, District 9640) member Brenda Thompson, as the fourth female member to be in the Grafton Rotary Club, gave a brief history of the long process that took place in order for women to be allowed to join Rotary Clubs across the nations, during their meeting on Wednesday, as the club celebrated the 30th anniversary of women in Rotary.

According to Thompson, it was in 1950 that the first step was taken by a Rotary Club in India, who made a proposal that the word “male” be deleted from the Standard Rotary Club Constitution.

The Council on Legislation for the Rotary International (RI) Convention voted for the proposal to be withdrawn, this would also be the outcome for the next two proposals, made in 1964, to allow women into the clubs.

By 1972, more women began reaching high positions in their professions, and more clubs began lobbying for female members. It was in this same year that a United States Rotary Club proposed admitting women into Rotary at the Council on Legislation.

In 1977, despite three more proposals being made, women were still not permitted to be members. The Rotary Club of Duarte, California chose to admit women as members in violation of the RI Constitution and Standard Rotary Constitution. Because of the violation the club was terminated in March 1978.

Between 1980-1986, more and more clubs from all over the world began pushing to allow females to join their clubs, and the Duarte Club filed a lawsuit against

Rotary International, who won the case.

In 1986, a breakthrough finally came for women wanting to join Rotary, when the California Court of Appeals reversed the lower court's decision.

The California Supreme Court refused to hear the case, and the appeal was moved to the United States Supreme Court, where the Duarte club was reinstated.

37 years after the first proposal to allow female members into Rotary, on May 4, 1987, the US Supreme Court ruled that Rotary Clubs could no longer exclude women from membership on the basis of gender.

That same year the Rotary Club of Duarte elected the first female club president.

With women being welcomed into Rotary Clubs around the world, by 1990 there were approximately 20,200 female Rotarians, worldwide.

“By 1995, there were eight female Rotary District Governors, and by 2005, a female had been appointed as a trustee of The Rotary Foundation,” shared Thompson.

Today, there are well over 200,000 female Rotarians, working alongside their male club mates, to serve their community.

“We’ve come a long way, as women in Rotary. It may not have been done as quickly as I would have liked, but I am very thankful that the decision was made to allow women to join,” expressed Thompson.

Thompson revealed that her reason for joining Rotary was the want to get back into community service work.

“I can’t provide irrigation to Haiti by myself, and I can’t feed the hungry by myself, but together we can, and you’ve given me the opportunity to be a part of that together,” she proclaimed.

Fellow female club member, Aleesha Tocco, shared that her reasoning for joining the Grafton Rotary was also a desire to give back to her community.

“I heard about the club and began asking about it, and it seemed like the best and most organised way to volunteer my time to the community,” commented Tocco.

The women of the Grafton Rotary Club were treated to cookies, and presented with a gift from Rotarian Pat White.

In addition, club president Boyd Vanhorn presented each female Rotarian with a wooden rose.

“We sure do appreciate the women of our club. I think maybe they keep us men in line, and some of them even work a little harder than the men,” joked Vanhorn.