

Duarte: The Mouse That Roared

The year was 1976. About 12 miles east of the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, near the intersection of I-210 and I-605, is Duarte, a small town in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. Between Monrovia and Azusa on Route 66, about 20 miles east of Los Angeles, Duarte is a quiet bedroom community with a very small Rotary Club.



Only eight members, including the Superintendent of Schools Dr. Richard Key, the club votes to invite three women to join the club. Two school principals, Mary Lou Elliott and Donna Bogart joined the same day. Just a few months later, in the spring of 1977, psychologist Rosemary Freitag became the third woman member of Duarte. The club had nearly increased 50 percent in size with the addition of women.

The late Paul G. Bryan, from Pasadena, was the Governor of [District 530](#) (now 5300) in 1976-1977. On his advice, the club listed the women with only their initials for their first names and the data was sent to Rotary International.

On June 1, 1977, the Duarte club held its 25th Anniversary Celebration. In front of the backdrop of RI officialdom, who were present for the celebration, the three women were introduced as members. Needless to say, official Rotary International representatives expressed alarm at the presence of women in the Duarte club. Word spread rapidly throughout Rotary International. Requests to terminate the women were rejected by the club.

Eight months later, in February of 1978, Rotary International revoked the charter of the Duarte club. The club requested a hearing with RI's Board of Directors. The Board told Duarte that it must remove women members. They refused again. Undaunted, the club members raised funds to send a club member, Luke McJimpson, to Tokyo for the next Council on Legislation. The club began fund raising in earnest, and the entire Duarte community supported the fundraisers.

On March 27, 1978, the Rotary International Board of Directors officially revoked the Charter of the Duarte club after the appeals process was concluded.

Duarte member Luke McJimpson flew to Tokyo for the Council on Legislation. His instruction from the club was that they would take no legal action before appealing to Rotary's Council on Legislation. Jack Davis, President of Rotary International wrote the COL, "The unity of Rotary International was jeopardized by a single club's unilateral move to change bylaws."

The matter is heard and discussed. The vote is 1060 to 34 against changing the constitution of Rotary International to admit women to Rotary. That vote upheld the previous decision of Rotary International's Board of Directors.

Upon McJimpson's return, the entire club met, and decided to continue to meet as a quasi-Rotary Club. An X was placed over the Rotary insignia, new pins were made, and the club was called: The Ex-Rotary Club of Duarte.

A month later, in June of 1978, the Rotary Club of Duarte, California, filed suit in Los Angeles Superior Court, helped by Sanford Smith, an attorney from a neighboring Rotary Club, and Carl Agate, a member of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Immediately upon service, Rotary International's attorney petitioned to transfer the California State Court suit to federal court, using the theory that all Rotary International board members are not Californians. If jurisdiction had been changed to Federal court, the Rotary International board would have gained the advantage of a 1976 Federal court decision which upheld exclusionary rules for private clubs. However, the Federal court rules that the battle be fought back in state court.

The case finally goes to trial in 1983. California State Judge Max Deutz refused to reinstate the club. The Duarte club immediately appealed the decision. In 1986, the State Appeals Court reversed Judge Deutz, stating that Rotary Clubs are business establishments subject to regulation under the state's Unruh Act which bans discrimination based on race, gender, religion or ethnic origin.

Rotary International immediately appealed the case to the California Supreme Court. That court then refused to hear the case, meaning that they agreed with the State Appeals Court ruling reversing Deutz.

Rotary International then appealed the decision to the U. S. Supreme Court. The RI attorney argued, "...threatens to force us to take in everyone, like a motel."

Unbeknownst to the Duarte club, the Seattle-International District club, on July 31, 1986, had unanimously voted to admit women. Because it was believed that admitting only one or two women would create pressure on those individuals, the Seattle-ID club decided to admit several women, and ultimately 15 were proposed and admitted.

In order to prevent their charter being revoked by RI like that of Duarte, the Seattle-ID club kept silent about its admission of women until it was ready to seek an injunction in Federal court, to prevent expulsion. In September, 1986, the Club hired Margaret McKeown of the Perkins Coie law firm as counsel, filed its suit, and announced its admission of the women. Subsequently, Seattle-ID joined Duarte in the Supreme Court case.

[The United States Supreme Court](#), However, by the time that the Duarte case went to the U. S. Supreme Court, things had changed in District 530 regarding the Duarte club. Of the three original women, only Mary Lou Elliott remained. Rosemary Freitag had moved out of California, and Donna Bogart had moved to Fresno to take over a school there. The club had continued to welcome women as members, and its membership included Marabelle Taylor, Elaine Benthuis, Donna Georgino and Sylvia Whitlock, along with Elliott. In fact Whitlock, who joined in 1982, was the club's president-elect in 1986-87.

In late fall of 1986, District 530 **[Governor Tim Keen Siu](#)** sent to the Duarte Club and incoming president **[Sylvia Whitlock](#)** an invitation to attend California PETs and a notice of the district dues schedule.

<http://www.rotaryfirst100.org/women/issues-legal/duarte/index.htm>

California PETs took place in February, 1987, prior to the United States Supreme Court decision. However, it was incumbent on all California clubs to obey the ruling of the State Court of Appeals. At PETs, the attendance included 310 men and one woman, Sylvia Whitlock, and all were requested to bring a coat and tie for pictures to be taken. [District 530 Governor Siu](#), in the district session, told of the Duarte Club's actions, the court ruling, and the decision of Rotary International to appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States. His comment was, in direct reference to the club's small number, "This is a case of the mouse that roared."

The club, in deference to their pride in the "roar," chose that phrase to appear on the club's new banner.