

A Centennial Tale: Our First Quarter Century



Rotary arrived in Canada in 1910 with the formation of the Rotary Club of Winnipeg – the world's 35th club. As the Winnipeg Club boasts, its inception turned Rotary into an international organization. In a sense, therefore, 2010 is Rotary International's centennial year.

Only nine years after the first Rotary meeting in Chicago, the organization issued a Calgary charter. Formed in 1914, the Rotary Club of Calgary was the first in Alberta and the seventh in Canada. It preceded by two years the Rotary Club of Edmonton, which was co-sponsored by Winnipeg and Calgary. Today there are 13 clubs in Calgary alone, with the 12 relative newcomers all able to trace a line of descent from the Alberta original.

Centennial came along in 1985 – a year which started out well. The city was already one of the world's great petroleum centres, and the newly elected federal government was on course to eliminate the last vestiges of the National Energy Program. The NEP and a severe economic recession had led to a horrendous three-year home-price crash, but real estate prices were bottoming and ready to recover. Super-high interest rates and inflation were on the decline. Oil prices were high – nominally \$30 per barrel, but nearly \$100 in inflation-adjusted terms (2009). Pipelines planned or under construction would soon open up more natural gas markets in the United States. The city was optimistic as it began celebrating its civic centennial.

The most popular song of the day was the charity single "We Are the World," which several dozen mostly American pop stars had recorded to raise funds (ultimately \$63 million) to help feed the hungry in famine-ravaged Ethiopia. A then-unknown Canadian paraplegic athlete and activist, Rick Hansen, had just set out on a 40,000-kilometre, 26-month Man in Motion circumnavigation of the world by wheelchair. With single-minded determination and great personal charm, he ultimately raised \$26 million for spinal cord research.

In those days to be "high tech" meant you had a fax machine and an expensive PC with 40 megabytes of storage, a monochrome monitor and a clunky black-only dot-matrix printer. Virtually all the computer could do was run primitive spread sheets and handle your word-processing needs. Telephones had rotary dials.

Charter Members

In this heady environment the Rotary Club of Calgary West sponsored 27 men – only men were permitted in Rotary in those days – to form the first breakfast club in Calgary and the second in Alberta. It would probably be impossible to figure out how many Rotary clubs were chartered around the world before we received our charter. We have always met in the downtown core, as has the original Rotary Club of Calgary.

Our charter president was architect Dennis Bathory, who presided over the club after we received our Rotary charter on April 5, 1985. At a dinner-dance event at the Croatian Cultural Centre, District Governor Gardie Shaw formally presented the new charter. As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, three



A Rotary bonspiel in 1986; from left, skip Reed Markle; third Jerry van der Linden; second Rod Chernos; lead Tele Paszek. Centennial won the B event.

itself, however. A number of developments from those early years still influence the work we do.

charter members are still active: Arvid Leinan, Lorne Plantje and Jerry van der Linden.

Dues for those charter members were \$120 per year. To commemorate the city's first century, our charter members named the new club the Rotary Club of Calgary Centennial. Appropriately enough, one charter member was city alderman Al Duerr, who served as Mayor from 1989 to 2001.

The club's first "year" was actually only three months long – April, May and June, after which the Rotary year turned over. Accordingly, the club's initial humanitarian efforts were small: \$660, most of which went to the Calgary Sexual Assault Centre. The club quickly began to establish

EARLY ACHIEVEMENTS

In 1986, we participated in the formation of the Bingo Barn, which in our early days was our main source of revenue. We later augmented bingo with participation in government-regulated casinos. On Arvid Leinan's watch, in 1990 we were awarded the opportunity to take on a casino. As it happened, that casino generated what was then the biggest payout in city history – \$72,000. Our revenues that year totalled \$112,000 – a budget similar to the ones we enjoy today.

In those days, if you took on a casino you took the winnings or you took the losses. If a charity lost money from a casino and didn't have loss insurance, the consequences could be dire. As a result, the system later changed. Today, gambling money is pooled and distributed to participating charities at the end of the quarter in which they operated a casino. This eliminates the risk of loss.

Gaming income has served our club well for many years, but now may be on the decline. Several factors are at play. For one, smoking in bingo halls and casinos was eliminated in 2008. This drove many people away from bingo in particular – indeed, during the two years following this move, several halls failed, and so did some casinos. Another development was growing competition between bingo and casinos – with bingo the bigger loser. The advent of new technology and an evolving Internet have also affected gaming income: many people now prefer to sit at their computers and gamble. The interminable debate about the ethics of gambling, even when the proceeds go to good causes, has been another issue. Also, of course, the financial collapse of 2008 helped bust what had been an extended boom.

These developments notwithstanding, the Bingo Barn is still in service and remains an important source of revenue. We usually benefit from a casino every 18 months or so, and that income is a critical part of our revenue stream. In recent years, our gaming revenue averaged more than \$100,000 per year, about \$25,000 of which came from bingo.

Exchanges

In 1988 we first participated in Rotary International's Student Youth Exchange Program – and our first outgoing student was remarkable in every sense. Karen Connelly, at the time an aspiring writer, went to Thailand where Rotarian families hosted her in the small northern town of Denchai. She published *To Touch a Dragon*, which recounted her experiences as an exchange student, in 1992. The book won a Governor General's award and launched her on a highly successful career as a writer. By 2010 she had published nine volumes of non-fiction, fiction and poetry, and had been internationally acclaimed –

nominated for the Kiriya Prize for books about the Pacific Rim and South Asia, and for Britain's Orange Broadband Prize for New Writers.

Our club has provided opportunities for 22 young Canadians to spend a year in other countries. In addition, Centennial has had the honour of reciprocating by hosting a like number of young people from other countries. In 2010, our outbound student is Julia Gummo, who is being hosted by Rotary families in Istanbul. Our inbound student is Chang Chia-Ying ("Yin-yin") from Taichang, Taiwan. Young people on this program learn new ways of living, a great deal about themselves and often a new language too. They are ambassadors for their own countries.

A number of the exchange students we sponsored have gone into Foreign Service – for Canada in the case of outbound students, and for their own countries in the case of students coming to Calgary. The reason this is so common is that there are often three requirements for those seeking placement in Foreign Service: a university degree, the ability to speak a foreign language, and the experience of living in a foreign country. The Student Exchange program frequently contributes to the last two.

Rotary often benefits from these student exchanges as participants reach full adulthood. Two of our present members – Laura Patko and Carrie Aiken Bereti – enjoyed the exchange experience as young women.

In 1990 the club began to participate in the Rotary Foundation's oldest program, the Ambassadorial Scholar Program. These scholarships brought graduate students to our learning institutions to pursue further studies. Many of Rotary's ambassadorial scholars have become leaders in their nations. Founded in 1947, this program has enabled nearly 38,000 men and women from about a hundred nations to study abroad.

Our club has also contributed to World Peace Fellowships, which fund either master's degree or professional development certificate study at the Rotary Centres for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution at seven universities worldwide.

Kathleen Radford

The story of women in Rotary is one which shows a great organization taking a long time to make necessary change. However, it also shows an organization in which grass-roots leaders fought for the unstoppable cause of gender equality, and ultimately won.

Today's clubs are better because they have given up men-only membership rules, but the change did not come easily. Rotary charters excluded female members for most of the organization's history. However, in the mid-1970s, the Rotary Club of Duarte (California) allowed three women to join, and Rotary International undertook to cancel the club's charter. This led to a series of court challenges, and culminated in a 1987 ruling by the US Supreme Court mandating a change in the bylaws to allow for the induction of women. While the court decision took place in America, the new bylaws applied throughout the Rotary world.

In 1989 our club welcomed City employee Kathleen Radford, who was almost certainly Alberta's first



The historic Chamber of Commerce building has been our home since the beginning; meetings are held on Wednesday at 7am.

female Rotarian. A few women in Calgary had previously been nominated as honorary members at other clubs – a form of tokenism, the women's movement of the time would likely have proclaimed. By contrast, Radford was a full Rotarian who took her club responsibilities seriously. She was a member for nine years, during which time she spent several years as bingo chair and two as secretary.

One year Radford was chosen our Rotarian of the Year. Three other women have also enjoyed that distinction: Lyla Szabo, Joyce Morrison and Ursula da Rugna. Of these, da Rugna was the first woman to serve as president.

MATURITY

By the 1990s we were no longer a new club experiencing growing pains. We were established, effective and actively contributing to district leadership. Rotary has always been an important source of leadership training. Serving on a committee or taking another leadership role enables members to exercise their leadership skills and develop them. Those who take on the presidency or become District Governor make major commitments of their time and talent – not for one year, but also during the years leading up to that seminal honour.

Other frequent contributors to Rotary ideals are our spouses and partners. They make direct and indirect contributions to the club, and they often make sacrifices, too. Their support can take the form of participation in fund-raisers and socials, for example, and hosting exchange students and other participants in Rotary programs. Our partners – in particular the spouses of club presidents – are a vital network of assistance, love and friendship.

LEADERSHIP

Rotarian of the Year	President	District Governor	Year
		Gardie Shaw	1984/85
	Dennis Bathory*	Clayton Reeves	1985/86
	Rod Turnbull*	Doug Martin	1986/87
	Rod Chernos*	Frank Totino	1987/88
Jerry van der Linden	Harvey Wiebe*	Al Williams	1988/89
John White	Wayne Brock*	Albert Miller	1989/90
Roger Borque	Arvid Leinan*	Al MacLean	1990/91
Roger Borque	George Street	Ken Haverland	1991/92
Kathleen Radford	John Watson*	Lawrie Fisher	1992/93
Reed Markle	John White	William Grant	1993/94
Jim Davis	Bill Fowlis	Dale Merchant	1994/95
Mike Smith	Reed Markle*	Dar Alfrey	1995/96
Lyla Szabo	Lorne Plantje*	Glen Baillie	1996/97
Al Hardstaff	Al Muller	Dan Graham	1997/98
Larry Ryder	Mike Smith	Chuck Masur**	1998/99
Ursula da Rugna	Jerry van der Linden*	Ted Valentine	1999/00
John Canniff	Jon Fisher	Monty Audenart	2000/01
Joyce Morrison	Don Bell	Bill Gillott	2001/02
Mark Doucet	Ursula da Rugna	Sandy Mackay	2002/03
Roger Hough	Bill Dickson	Mike Smith**	2003/04
Jeff Dworken	Roger Hough	Sandy Mackay	2004/05
Pierre Hoebers	John Canniff	Steve Rickard	2005/06
Don Bell	Brian Gibson	Raju Paul	2006/07
Mike Dickson	Mel Foht	Bernie Carnere	2007/08
Jon Fisher	Dave Brinsmead	Mark Starratt	2008/09
N/A	Pierre Hoebers	Steve Allan	2009/10
N/A	Miriam Mitchell-Banks	Al Bergsma	2010/11

*Charter member **RCCC Member

Are there rewards for these endeavours? To be of service is a reward in itself, and so is the opportunity to lead. There are other benefits too, and they can extend into the nuclear family.

“The pleasure and honour of being provided a trip to the Rotary International Convention in Melbourne Australia in 1993” is a reward John White particularly remembers. “I was just transitioning from the teaching profession into my present career and our club was able to send the incoming president and spouse to the convention in that year. Charlotte and I were very fortunate in being able to also include our children, who were 17 and 13 at the time. It was the first time either of them had travelled off the continent and they were given a major educational and life experience. I have never felt truly able to thank my Rotary friends for that opportunity.”

Watershed

If a single period represented a leadership watershed for our club, it was the latter 1990s. That exciting period began when a delegation to Rotary, which included Mayor Al Duerr, successfully pitched the idea of holding the Rotary International Convention in Calgary.

The 1996 convention was a huge success, with every club in the city contributing to the triumph of one of the largest Rotary conventions ever: nearly 25,000 delegates from 126 countries. Exactly 100 conventions have taken place thus far. Of that large number, few have had as many delegates as did the Calgary event.

In response, Rotary membership in Calgary boomed. As Lorne Plantje handed over the helm to incoming president Al Muller, club membership totalled 74 members – the largest in our history. As Muller's term ended, Dr. Chuck Masur became the Governor of District 5360, and several members of his executive came from our club. Centennial organized the 1999 district convention in Canmore with the help of the local Rotary club.

With Mike Smith serving as club president and Chuck Masur as District Governor, we sponsored the Rotary Club of Calgary Heritage Park, which received its charter in 1999. With the creation of this new club, the Rotary cycle of birth and growth began anew: Seven of our members transferred to the new organization. That and other factors caused our membership to diminish – a problem being experienced by most service organizations in our times. Now numbering in the 40s, our membership ranks have not recovered to the levels they reached after Rotary's International Convention came to town.

As the organizing committee for the Canmore conference attest, conference planning and execution can be a major undertaking. When Mike Smith served as District Governor, the district conference was held in Lethbridge. Seven members from our club served on a committee chaired by Miriam Mitchell-Banks, and the Lethbridge clubs provided seven other members. Meetings usually took place halfway between the two cities at the Lancaster Air Museum in the town of Nanton.

Gopher Drops

We have already recounted the club's reliance on gaming funds for revenue. In recent years, fund-raising events apart from bingo and casinos have represented less than 16% of direct revenue – some \$20,000 per year.

What else have we done to raise money? Many donations come from meeting operations – “happy bucks,” fines from the sergeant-at-arms and so on. Others come from generous (and frequently anonymous) gifts from members. Then there are the serious fund-raising events. These have included a gala wild game dinner-auction, renting seats at the Stampede Parade and the seasonal Santa Calls event, wherein our most avuncular members call young children to discuss their Christmas prospects. Another annual classic, the Santa Ball, takes place each year at the Willow Park Golf and Country Club.

A few fund-raising ideas have been truly spectacular, not least of which were the Saskatchewan Gopher Drops. For those who want to emulate these events, they involved selling small gophers (sewn by a team of spouses) with the promise of a shot at a prize. On an appointed day, the gophers are dropped out of a hot-air balloon along with three bulls-eyes. Of course, zoologically speaking the gophers are actually avatars of Richardson's Ground Squirrels rather than of true gophers. Details notwithstanding, the owner of the avatar landing closest to a bull's eye takes home a cash prize. The club collected about \$6,000 in total from its two gopher drop events.

Of course, many club projects do not rely entirely on club revenue. Especially in the area of international service, the club takes advantage of funding from Rotary International, from the district, and from



In memory of Elizabeth Elson, who died in a boating accident and was a breast cancer survivor, the club commissioned this triptych, on permanent display in the Breast Health Clinic waiting room at the Women's Health Centre. Elizabeth's husband, David, was a club member.
From left: Vic Cable, David Elson, Mike Smith, Ashleigh Bartlett (artist), Brian Gibson.

partnerships with the government of Alberta – first through the Wild Rose Foundation; more recently through the Community Initiatives Program, the foundation's successor.

THE WAY WE ARE

Our club invests in all four of Rotary's avenues of service: Community Service, Vocational Service, International Service and Club Service. Our focus in these areas helps us combat hunger, improve health and sanitation, provide education and job training, eradicate disease and generally make our communities better places to live.

Club service helps keep our club strong, dynamic and engaged. The most important club service functions are the speakers program and publishing a weekly newsletter. Since Don Bell created our emailed bulletin five years ago, it has played a key role in keeping members informed and bringing us together.

The Centennial Eyeopener is a takeoff on a newspaper once published by Bob Edwards – a nomadic and irascible Scot with a wicked sense of humour. By coincidence, Edwards lived in Winnipeg as that city formed Canada's first Rotary club in 1910. He returned permanently to Calgary the following year. His funny and irreverent newspaper, *The Calgary Eye Opener*, served as a civic gadfly. Ours serves as a record of club activities and of excellent presentations from a diverse group of speakers.

In the area of community service, we have partnered with other Rotary clubs and organizations to fund large projects. In 1986 we joined other clubs in the development of Fort Calgary Park. Beginning eight years later, our club was a leader in the development of the Inglewood Wildlands Park, which transformed the site of a dismantled refinery into a nature preserve of which to be proud. In 1998, all the Calgary clubs showed their support for Rotary Challenger Park. We were also among the Rotary clubs supporting Kerby Rotary House, a refuge for abused seniors.

In 2000, we made what was then our single largest contribution – \$50,000 to the Community Kitchen Program of Calgary. The funds were used for the purchase of a mobile kitchen to support an important nutrition program. We have supported projects for the hungry since our first year, when we made a small donation to the Calgary Food Bank.

Dying to be Thin

An extraordinarily successful but unsung project involved working with a group of parents who wanted to do something about bulimia and anorexia – eating disorders that are especially common among teenage girls and young women.

As Mike Smith recalled, "In 1996, Don Bell proposed that Centennial take up the issue of anorexia. Don, my wife Kathy and I visited with some of the key people in this field, and soon recognized that we were trying to penetrate a veil of silence. The children affected did not want to talk to anyone, least of all their parents. Mostly the parents either did not know or were too scared to acknowledge what was happening. Worst of all, little was available for the victims until they reached a crisis verging on death and were admitted to hospital, only to be discharged from the emergency ward with no care until the sequence

repeated itself.” Coincidentally, about this time there were many media revelations about the disease. Smith continued his story. “We asked to meet the then-fledgling Anti-Anorexia/Anti-Bulimia League of Calgary, made up of six women somehow affected by this disease. They could not believe their good fortune – that a Rotary club was prepared to back them with seed money and place one of our members, Cathy Jones Cook, on their committee.”

Centennial supported the group in other ways – for example, by co-sponsoring Quest Theatre performances of a play titled “Dying to be Thin,” which confronts eating disorder issues. “The league was on its way,” said Bell. “A couple of years later the Calgary Health Region opened an anti-bulimia clinic with a first-year budget of \$3 million. Not a bad outcome from \$6,000 in seed money.”

Time and Talent

As the eating disorders case illustrates, our contributions always include volunteer time and labour. We organize events and do detailed paperwork as we undertake projects, but sometimes our efforts are more direct. For example, on one occasion we repaired and repainted the porches of a safe house for teenagers. On others, we planted trees and prairie shrubs at the 34-hectare Inglewood Wildlands Park to help restore it to its original state.

In 2009 we joined other clubs in Calgary as volunteers at the World Skills Competition, hosted in Calgary for the first time. Nearly 850 competitors and thousands of delegates from around the world descended on the city for one magical week in September.

We have sponsored scholarships and bursaries and made other contributions in the area of educational and vocational service. We have helped organize Interact and Rotaract clubs for high school and university students. We have also supported literacy programs at The Calgary Learning Centre, which provides services for people of all ages with learning problems which affect their social, emotional and intellectual development.

We have been unusually successful in international service. We are significant contributors to Polio Plus, Rotary International’s effort to eradicate polio from the planet. We have funded projects throughout Asia, in sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America. We helped out Europe during the Balkan tragedies of the late 1990s through a contribution to the Bosnia-Croatia Relief Fund. In 2010/11, we will make a \$44,000 contribution to an important educational project in Cambodia, and a \$50,000 contribution to build a hospital for women and children in northern India. In both cases we are partnering with the Rotary Club of Calgary and Alberta’s Community Initiatives Program.

Sometimes smaller efforts tell the greater tale. In 2008 we made an effective response to the dreadful cyclone which devastated vast tracts of the Irrawaddy Delta, killing many thousands. While the wicked and dysfunctional government of Burma dithered over terms by which it would accept international aid, we collected \$4,000 and arranged for a Buddhist monk to take our money from Thailand to a trusted charity in Rangoon.

The Fellowship of the Thing

Rotary is an organization that first and foremost values “Service above Self.” So doing, it fosters close ties, warm friendships and deep respect. Although membership involves deep commitment and long volunteer hours, the fellowship of the thing keeps bringing us back.

Over the years the Rotary Club of Calgary Centennial has held countless social events. Committee meetings frequently take place in the homes of members, and they always involve more than business. Rotary couples – members and their spouses or partners – often become close friends.

With Jon Fisher famously at the helm, social events have included mystery bus tours of Calgary and area, surprise dinners in members' homes (the hosts didn't know who was coming) and the annual Christmas Ball fund-raiser. There have also been pub nights, pot luck dinners at Roger Hough's Anglican Church, curling and golf. We have hosted Rotarians, exchange students, academics and technical experts from around the world.

We have even hosted friends from Saskatchewan. The aforementioned gopher drops were part of a "Saskatchewan Communities Reunion" for Calgary residents who originated in that easterly province and had the good sense to move west.



Emlyn Jessop (right) and friend – one of the more primitive members of the club – monkey around at a hospital as they visit an ailing Rotarian colleague.

Social events have sometimes been over the top. For example, Ursula da Rugna reports an episode in which Don Bell decided to have a dress rehearsal of the musical entertainment for Jerry van der Linden's president's ball. By dress rehearsal, of course, he meant in drag. Along with Emlyn Jessop and John White, off they went to Value Village to purchase new garments.

"The men tried on dresses in the middle of the floor," reported da Rugna. "They didn't need a change room. Laughter shook the store, and customers as well as staff came over to look. Some just shook their heads but others joined in, helping us select all those wonderful dresses, accessories and wigs. Tears of laughter were flowing!" On this episode, the final word goes to Don Bell's wife, Angela: "Don resembled the Queen Mother. John, however, was the pretty one."

Back to the Future

When charter member Jerry van der Linden recounted the club's history in 2009, he closed his commentary with words that bear remembering. "We are still a vibrant, dynamic group with many promising new Rotarians. We have a history to be proud of, but more importantly, we are positioned to make our future even better." Having given his account of our story, he said "Don't just tell me what we've done. Tell me what we're going to do." In an ideal world, that would be the stance of all our historians.

As if in response to van der Linden's comments, nine months later the club embarked upon strategic planning in a big way. Not to be unveiled until after the 25th anniversary celebrations, the plan outlines where we're going and how we'll get there.

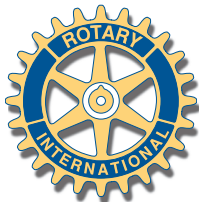
A motivational speaker once reminded me that you can't build a doghouse without a plan. President Pierre Hoebers recently put the matter less vividly, but more thoughtfully. "This plan," he said, "will help us write our next chapter."

Written by Peter McKenzie-Brown

Thanks to:

- Jerry van der Linden and Mike Smith.
- All other club members, past and present.
- Lorne Plantje and Signature Press.

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