

## GALE MASON: MR. SANTA PAULA ROTARY

Anyone who was a Santa Paula Rotarian in the four decades leading up to the early 1990's can tell you a Gale Mason story. It's been over 10 years since his passing, and this article, suggested by Immediate Past President Maria Bombara, will hopefully give a little enlightenment to those who did not know Gale. He has been memorialized by the conferring of the Gale Mason Award annually as each club president passes the gavel to a successor. This Paul Harris Fellow is awarded to that Rotarian who has displayed over the years the ideals of Rotary as exemplified by Gale. The first awardee was Jack Dickenson in 1996 and most recent recipient was Mike Mobley.

There was little in our club that this energetic, tireless and generous man was not involved in. Gale joined Santa Paula Rotary in 1950 after coming to town to manage the J.C. Penney store on Main Street. Later he owned and operated, with his wife June, the Campus Shop and Youngland. He had been a member of Rotary in New York City and recalled J.C. Penney as a fellow member. He was club president in 1956-57 and the club secretary for 27 years. He served as treasurer as well. He was named Rotarian-of-the-Year in 1976 and again in 1990. He was Santa Paula's Citizen-of-the-Year in 1976, having served the community in many capacities besides Rotary. He was on the board and a hands-on carpenter and painter for the Santa Paula Community Fund which helped save and restore the railroad depot in the late 1970s.

I well remember my Rotary information breakfast, when Gale intoned very seriously that the answer is always "Yes" when you are asked to do something by one of your fellow club members. Despite his age and longevity in Rotary, he was always high up on the ladders each December putting up the Christmas canes on Main Street. He was completely in his element and the hardest worker around when it came to his favorite project, Christmas baskets. Before the days of Elias Valdes' neatly pre-packaged beans and rice, Gale would dole out these commodities from large sacks. There was always a mess to clean up at the Isbell Auditorium or the Community Center after this time-consuming exercise. A distinct part of the Christmas basket program for Gale was providing dolls. He asked the ladies at a local clothing manufacturing firm to design and make outfits for about 20 dolls, which were then judged and displayed to the



public before all being donated for Christmas baskets, the real purpose of the contest in the first place.

He was known as a perfectionist and a stickler on Rotary rules and guidelines, particularly attendance. You never missed two or more meetings in a row before you received a call from Gale. He wanted to know if you made up, and you were on your way out of Rotary if you were gone any longer without a good legitimate reason. With a spring to his step, I can still see him scurrying amongst the tables at the Masonic Temple passing out 100% attendance pins several times a year (what happened to that recognition?). He himself had 46 years of perfect attendance. He planned his vacations around Rotary so he could make up without fail wherever he was (June had to wait it out somewhere while Gale attended his Rotary meeting!). Several years after Gale's passing, June, an honorary club member and a Paul Harris Fellow, moved to a residence for senior women in Alhambra to be nearer their son and his family.

Gale had a good sense of humor too. During his year as president, he once had a "nothing" bulletin, as a public service to those who never read it anyway. His advice for members who didn't read his bulletin: "Don't just throw it away. It fits perfectly in the bottom of a bird cage."

Gale generally sat at the head table close to the President, and was quick to advise the President, solicited or unsolicited, on a question of order or Rotary policy. He was an ex-officio counselor to most club presidents through the years. I distinctly remember Gale popping up during a meeting and telling Earl McPhail, our president my first year in Rotary, that he, Earl, could not do something or other that he wanted to do. It wasn't according to the Rotary rules. I don't remember the particulars but knowing Earl, he probably did it anyway.

I found him to be a real friend to new Rotarians learning their way. If you had any question about Rotary, you asked irreplaceable Gale Mason, "Mr. Santa Paula Rotary", a title well deserved. —Nils Rueckert

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### ***Believe in What You Do—Do What You Believe In***

"To strengthen our belief that only with an open mind, an open heart, open eyes, and open hands we will reach the highest quality of life, we need to be accompanied by like-minded friends in an atmosphere of good humor, serenity, and spontaneous practical day-to-day humanity. That's what I found in Rotary. That's why I am a Rotarian."

*Robert Barth President, Rotary International, 1993-94.  
Rotary Club of Aarau, Switzerland*