



History of Rotary International



*The first four Rotarians (from left):
Gustavus Loehr, Silvester Schiele,
Hiram Shorey, and Paul P. Harris,
circa 1905-12.*

Paul P. Harris, an attorney, wanted to create a professional group with the same friendly spirit he felt in the small towns of his youth. On 23 February 1905, Harris, Gustavus Loehr, Silvester Schiele, and Hiram Shorey gathered at Loehr's office in Room 711 of the Unity Building in downtown Chicago. This was the first Rotary club meeting. They decided to call the new club "Rotary" after the practice of rotating meeting locations.

Within five years clubs had formed across the country, from San Francisco to New York.

In August 1910, Rotarians held their first convention in Chicago. The 16 clubs that existed at that time united to form the National Association of Rotary Clubs.

In 1912, the name changed to International Association of Rotary Clubs to reflect the addition of clubs in other countries. The name Rotary International was adopted in 1922.

By July 1925, Rotary had grown to more than 2,000 clubs and an estimated 108,000 members on six continents.

As Rotary grew, members pooled their resources and used their talents to serve their communities. The organization's dedication to this ideal is best expressed in its motto: Service Above Self.

— <https://www.rotary.org/myrotary/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/history>

History of the Rotary Club of Washington, D.C. [excerpted]

The Rotary Club of Washington, D.C., was officially organized on July 11, 1912, with 16 members. The Club was the 46th Rotary Club to join the International Association of Rotary Clubs, later renamed Rotary International (RI).

During World War I, the young D.C. Rotary Club became a strong and viable organization and assumed important roles. Its members met the call to service by organizing Liberty Loan drives, helping in Red Cross work, and staging relief campaigns to benefit suffering civilian populations in war zones.

By 1922, the Club had acquired a bus and used it daily to render service to invalids, shut-ins, and underprivileged persons in the community. This led to the idea of creating the Rotary Foundation of Washington, D.C., incorporated in the District of Columbia on July 26, 1922, as a non-profit corporation "*to engage in such benevolent and charitable enterprises as the Rotary Club might undertake.*" To this day the Foundation provides funds for many projects and programs undertaken by the Club, including our ongoing support of the Salvation Army Grate Patrol.

Within the first 25 years of its existence, the D.C. Rotary Club undertook a number of activities in RI's Avenues of Service. The Georgetown Boys Club was established, which has grown over the years into a huge network of Boys and Girls Clubs in the metropolitan area which still receive annual contributions from the Rotary Foundation of Washington, D.C.

Assistance to the men and women of the Armed Services hospitalized at Walter Reed Army Medical Center began in the 1940s. Initially, D.C. Rotarians organized entertainment to boost the morale of men and women wounded in WWII. After the war, the Club began to sponsor bingo at the facility. The program continues to this day, now at the Walter Reed National Military Hospital in Bethesda, MD.

In 1985, RI set Rotary to the task of eradicating polio from the world. The D.C. Rotary Club has done its share over the years, raising money in a myriad of ways and encouraging members to make personal contributions. In 1991 President George H. W. Bush directed the National Park Service to undertake a Federal tree-planting program, which included the parks in Washington, D.C. This was the beginning of the D.C. Rotary Club's "Trees for the Capital" program, which continues to this day. *[These are just a few examples of the diverse array of local and global community service projects undertaken by the Club.]*

The D.C. Rotary Club can look back with pride on over a century of service to the community and the world. Again and again, through wars, natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and intractable human needs, the club has raised money, undertaken projects, and provided countless hours in an effort to improve the human condition and sustainable development. It has fostered the bonds of friendship and fellowship throughout its history. We look forward to continuing to live our motto "Service above Self."