

District 6990

A History of Service, a Legacy of Leadership

As part of Rotary International, District 6990's history begins as far back as 1910 when the Rotary Club of Jacksonville joined with two other Clubs from the ten southern states and formed the Southern Division. That changed in 1915, when as a result of Rotary's rapid growth, Florida, Georgia and Alabama separated to become one District – District Five. By 1918, seventeen Florida-based clubs joined Jacksonville and then District Five was renamed to District Eight and the Rotary Club of Havana Cuba, charted in 1916 and the Rotary Club of Puerto Rico were added.

With the US' entry into World War I, Rotarians followed the lead of Rotarians in Canada and the British Isles and joined with all Americans in the war effort. Fifteen clubs were now situated in Florida and their membership provided typical, yet unique service in supporting the Liberty Loan and bond drive efforts, promoting civilian military training, mobilizing school boys to work the farms, and creating campaigns for food, clothing, tobacco and magazines for the Army training camps.

With the end of World War I, Rotary expanded around the world as well as in North America. By 1921, Florida boasted of 47 clubs and it took two ocean liners to ferry U.S. Rotarians to Edinburgh, Scotland -- the first International Conference outside of North America.

1922 was a milestone year which saw the renaming of the organization from *The International Association of Rotary Clubs* to *Rotary International*. At the same time, Havana and Puerto Rico Clubs became part of District 25. District Eight was reduced geographically, to most of Florida and all of Georgia and renamed District 39. Jefferson County, Florida's westernmost panhandle county and home of the Rotary club of Tallahassee joined with Alabama to form District 26.

1925 was the beginning of the Florida land boom and ten new Florida clubs joined the world of Rotary and at the 1928 Convention, Georgia separated to become District 69, while Florida remained District 39 with 52 clubs and a total District membership of 1,956 Rotarians.

By 1930, the effects of The Great Depression began taking its toll with stock markets crashing, factories closing and unemployment everywhere. Many organizations lost heavily in membership, yet by comparison, Rotary held strong. The International Convention was held in London, England, and it was announced that 27 clubs were terminated with a loss of 2,000 Rotarians. Yet, Florida saw no loss of clubs. In fact, it was during this period that the Florida's Panhandle left the Alabama District and joined District 39 and the rest of Florida. Miami served for the first time, as the host for the District Conference in 1932.

1933 was a milestone year for Rotary as it suffered its second year of membership loss; although held to a minimum by the establishment of 107 new clubs. 1933 also saw the adoption of Herbert Taylor's 4-Way Test as Rotary's creed and the inauguration of *Revista Rotario* the Spanish language version of Rotary's magazine. District Administrator then was Earle Thatcher of Vero Beach, who, from 1935 thru 1941, served on RI's Youth Services Committee.

In 1937, Germany's 42 Rotary Clubs were disbanded under orders from the Nazi regime which prompted the redistricting of Rotary. While Florida's boundary remained

the same, District 39 was renamed District 167. By 1938, 45 clubs were disbanded in Austria and Italy followed by the loss of another 33 clubs over the next five years as more and more countries came under the control of the German Axis. In total, Germany's conquest of Europe brought about the loss of 16,700 Rotarians from 484 Clubs.

Rotary earned many kudos during the war years. The US War Production Board presented Rotary with a citation in recognition of meritorious salvage work by Clubs in the US. Rotary Clubs in Finland took up projects for the benefit of boys and girls orphaned by the war. Rotarians gave much in time and leadership to war work – bond sales, USO, entertaining soldiers and many relief activities. Through all of this, 169 new clubs were formed in 1944.

District 167 Governor for the 1944 – 1945 year was Walter Matherly, who was the Dean of the University of Florida's School of Business Administration. Recognizing that no new clubs were formed in Florida since 1941, Matherly established a project that surveyed the state for potential growth. As a result, by 1945, 507 new members were added along with five new clubs bringing the District membership to an even 4,000 among 72 clubs.

1947 was another milestone year in Rotary's history. Founder Paul Harris passed away. It was also the last year District 167 served the entire state of Florida as the District had grown to 75 Clubs and 4,442 Rotarians – the third largest District in Rotary. As a result, Florida was divided into three districts designated as 167-A, embracing 34 counties which encompassed 24 Clubs from the panhandle across northern Florida to Jacksonville and the Atlantic Coast and eventually became District 242.

District 167-B encompassed 14 counties 25 clubs and included the southern tip of the Florida peninsula from the Keys to Naples and up the western area around Lake Okeechobee and the east coast as far north as Titusville. Eventually, 167-B was designated District 243.

District 167-C served 26 clubs in 20 counties from the west coast of Florida, from north of Naples to north of the Tampa, St. Petersburg area through much of central Florida including the Orlando area eventually becoming District 244.

Southern Florida – District 243 – had grown to 28 clubs and 1,711 Rotarians by 1951. Two years later, the District had grown to 31 clubs, home to 1,904 Rotarians.

In 1957 Rotary embarked on a new system of numbering and the District 243 became District 699. By 1969, District 699 served 50 Clubs and 3,146 Rotarians.

In January of 1970, Grand Bahama Island became a part of District 699 as the result of an RI Presidential Decision. The District's growth was so enviable that by 1991, District 699 served 4,012 Rotarians in 68 Clubs. As 1992 rolled in, RI modernized and went to four digits per district changing District 699 to 6990. At the same time RI split the District and clubs in Palm Beach County and the western shores of Lake Okeechobee became part of another District.

District 6990 is proud of its heritage and as part of the largest international service organization in the world, Rotarians specialize in providing humanitarian services to our neighborhoods, our youth, our members' vocations and to the world we live in. Located in a tropical paradise, District 6990 is home to more than 2400 Rotarians belonging to 51 Clubs, and it is one of the most unique Districts in the Rotary world. What makes District 6990 so unique? District 6990 is nestled in the only

subtropical climate zone in the US and it is one of the few International Districts based in the continental US. Currently, the District draws its membership from three southeast Florida counties and beautiful Grand Bahama Island.

Monroe County, Florida is a 220 mile long string of 822 little islands known as The Florida Keys. It boasts of Key West -- the southernmost city in the US -- and Key Largo, made famous by the Humphrey Bogart movie of the same name. Moving north from The Keys brings you into the 926 square miles of Miami-Dade County, known worldwide as a vacation paradise and home of the Everglades National Park with its renowned nature trails. Continuing northward brings you into the 423 square miles of Broward County and its 23 miles of coastal shoreline and white sandy beaches. Moving east, over the water brings you Grand Bahama Island, westernmost and one of the largest of the 700 islands that make up the British Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

District 6990 invites you to be a part of its uniqueness. Come help the world become a better place to live while enjoying the sun, the sand, the sea and Rotary's warm hospitality,