

BRIEF HISTORY
SOUTH PORTLAND/CAPE ELIZABETH
ROTARY CLUB

The strength of this Club has always been its people -- their interest, their diversity, their talents, and their dedication.

The Club was "conceived" by Bill Kilroy in 1954. Bill was then president of the Rumford club. His brother, Dick, still a member of our Club, helped. The club was actually formed in late 1961 and Dick Kilroy became its first president, with Bill Kilroy as VP and Dick Jordan as Treasurer. The second year the president was Warren Simpson.

(Five of those original 21 are still members, 33 years later: Dan Gacetta, Dick Jordan, Dick Kilroy, Warren Simpson, Dick Yerxa.)

May Rowe, wife of past-president Allen Rowe, did the drawings of "Two Lights" for our bulletin.

On December 27, 1961, the first meeting was held with 21 members. Cost of a meal: \$1.50; annual dues \$25.

Profit from our first Christmas tree sale that year was \$422 -- in 1994 it was closer to \$24,000.

In the first couple years we donated shoes to needy children, donated half our first year tree profits to the SP Library fund, and put a roof on dugouts at Family Field. We even tried to sell fruit cakes in 1963: as the history says, "We sold them, we raffled them off at meetings, we gave them to speakers, and although we thought we'd never see the end of them, we made a profit of \$450."

Our first "ladies night" was held during our second year and has been a regular event from then on -- although we now, of course, have a "Spouses' Night" instead.

By 1967, membership had risen to 50 and we've found that to be a very workable number ever since.

In 1967, the Club even contracted Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians for a dance at the Portland Expo and then made it an "annual" for a couple years. In 1974, we tried the Sammy Kaye orchestra.

By 1974, by the way, tree profits had grown to \$1500 and meals had gone up to \$3.25. When we reached 1984, tree profit was \$10,000, dues were up to \$100 and meals to \$4.50.

In 1984, Dan Gacetta was fined a dollar for appearing on international television with Olympic gold medal marathoner Joan Benoit. Joanie, by the way, is an honorary member of our club.

In 1985 Andy Mezoian wrote a book about Armenians in Portland; the same year Mason Philip Smith published "Confederates Downeast."

In 1987, Doug Stewart drove a 1973 Ford at Oxford Plains Speedway; he lasted only 10 laps but raised \$1900 for our PolioPlus campaign and we got his photo in THE ROTARIAN.

This Club has always been on the top of the Rotary heap. We've had at least four District Governors that I can recall -- Hal Fralich, Sam Giftos, Bill Kourakos, and Dan Mooers. Many of our members have served at the District level. Dan Mooers is now a Director of Rotary International. So you can see that we continue to make our mark in the Rotary world.

And this club has been a district wide and nationwide leader in donations to the Rotary Foundation.

The number and variety of activities and fund raisers this Club has participated in would knock your socks off.

- Painting Portland Head Light Keepers Quarters,
- refurbishing Bug Light in So. Portland,
- building bleachers for Family Field,
- constructing a nature walk,
- competing with other clubs and radio stations in softball,
- having lobster feasts at Fort Williams,
- selling fried dough at Deering Oaks,
- having theater nights, entertaining senior citizens at our annual Christmas Party,
- sponsoring Cub Scout Packs,
- contributing to drug abuse prevention programs,
- ... and the list goes on and on.

This is an active and caring club. What makes me proudest, however, is not who we are but what we do to help others -- both locally and worldwide.