

The Rotary Club of Key West Historical Milestones

1916: Club founded by Jefferson B. Browne. Meetings were held in a store on Duval Street. The Rotary Club of Key West was the first in District 6990, third in the State of Florida behind Jacksonville and Tampa. The Rotary Club of Havana was founded the same year. Both Clubs were sponsored by the Club of Jacksonville.

1917: Instrumental in establishing the Key West Chapter of the American Red Cross.

1919: Eighteenth amendment to the US Constitution outlaws the manufacture, sale, or transportation of alcoholic beverages. Key West becomes a “rum-running” center due to its proximity to Cuba.

1921: Rotary President J.Y. Porter “raised the mischief” when he discovers that Rotary name being used without permission for a minstrel show to benefit Boy Scout Troop #2. The show was performed entirely by Rotarians.

1922: Club embarks on a project to clear an area for the future “Bayview Park.” Rotarians outfitted in overalls and blue chambray shirts spent two hot afternoon chopping down heavy underground and grass. Employees of the Key West Electric Company then headed by Rotarian Bascom Grooms volunteered to help.

1925: Club endorses a plan to ban the shooting and trapping of birds and protection of Key Deer.

1928: Developer Malcom Meacham presents a plan to the Club for Pan American Airways to begin regular service from Meacham Field (now Key West International Airport) to Havana Cuba.

1930: Songs for the Rotary Club, Key West, Florida published which featured the “Rotary Song” with a notation on the bottom of page 4: “You can’t sing if you have a grouch.”

1932: Rotarian Edward Strunk urges fellow Rotarians to support the establishment of the Everglades National Park. The Club voted unanimously to have the members write the Florida Legislature urging their support of the bill.

1934: During the Great Depression Edward Strunk becomes Club President with only 19 members and adds 10 new members that year.

1935: Treasurer Bill Bates said he had a bone to pick with the Ladies Guild who served lunch because they charged .60 cents instead of .50 for each person.

1936: The Rotary Club focused on rebuilding the overseas railroad that was destroyed by the Great Labor Day Hurricane of 1935. Club delegation travels to Cuba to enlist government assistance for rebuilding efforts.

After a report by Director Bascom Grooms on the hurricane damage to the railroad, Edward Strunk convinced the Board to endorse the idea of converting the railroad bridges to handle vehicular traffic.

1937: Sebastián Cabrera Jr. & Charles Smith travel to the 1938 Rotary International Convention in San Francisco, CA.

The Club sponsored Boy Scout Troop 52.

The state music director under the WPA writes Club President seeking support for bringing the federally – subsidized Florida Symphony Orchestra to Key West.

1947: Following WWII, the Club spearheaded a movement for Monroe County to purchase from the War Assets Administration the area now known as Higgs Beach for \$28,000. Charley Toppino & Sons agreed to enlarge the beach area with sand. In return the county sold him the rock at .30 cents per yard.

1947: The Club launched a new program to send a rising senior at Key West High School to Girls State in Tallahassee. Merili Hilton, later wife to Rotarian and Mayor Sonny McCoy was the Club's first recipient to receive that honor.

1948: The Citizen reported that the Club had a "ladies' night" at the La Concha Hotel. Norma Dopp, wife of Rotarian Robert Dopp (President 1949-1950), was the President of Rotary Ann.

1949: Rotarian Edward Treavor was the 1st District Governor from Key West.

1951: Key West Red Cross Chapter appeals to Rotarians for blood donations to help those serving in Korea. Monroe County Cerebral Palsy request Rotarian's support in opening a clinic in Key West hoping to raise \$3,000.

1954: Paul J. Sher becomes President of the Club. He is congratulated on the front page of the Key West Citizen. The Club meets at the LaConcha Hotel.

1957: Edward B. Knight becomes a member of the Club on July 1st. Mr. Knight remained an active philanthropist of the Club until his death at age 99. The White Street Pier's name was changed to the Edward B. Knight Pier in honor of Mr. Knight.

1961: Sponsored the Rotary Club of Marathon.

1966: The Club celebrates 50 years at a "Gala" event in the Trade Winds Supper Club in the Holiday Inn.

1967: While returning Vietnam Veterans were "overlooked" by many Americans, the Rotary Club invited four wounded US Marines to the Club luncheon to honor their service.

1971: The Club donated \$344 to start the "Parade of Palms" along North Roosevelt Blvd. The Club paid for 20 of the 192 palms.

Emil "Tuffy" Roberts was inducted into the Club and became the Raffle Coordinator for the Club. Every week Tuffy picked the numbers to cries from the audience: "Dig Deep Tuffy, Keep it in the Family."

Members of the Key West High School Interact Club attended the Club meeting held at the Country Club. Interact Club reports that they sent baskets to our soldiers in Vietnam and had embarked on several projects to help the needy.

1972: Edward Toppino was inducted into the Club. At 99, Mr. Toppino remains active in the Club and is a well-respected philanthropist and businessman. He is also a member of the Rotary Club's Hall of Fame.

1976: A new Key West tradition has begun with Rotary sponsoring the Fourth of July fireworks.

1977: Dr. Robert Carraway volunteers and establishes a relationship with Hopital Albert Schweitzer in Haiti. To this day the Club sponsors a Reverse Raffle with proceeds to benefit HAS.

1981: When Club members heard that they Key West Cemetery was overgrown with weeds and need sprucing, they worked on four weekends to shape up the cemetery.

1986: The Club established an active Interact Club at Key West High School and held a District Conference at the Casa Marina. The projected budget was \$68,415.

1988: Sponsored the Sunrise Rotary Club Key West. The Club established the Key West Rotary Foundation.

1991: The Club celebrates 75th years at the Holiday Inn Beachside. The Club funded a scholarship for \$6,000 for a Key West High School Senior. Currently, the Club sponsors a \$25,000 scholarship for a graduating senior.

1993: The first woman member of the Club, Elizabeth Freeman who remains a Club member to this day. Subsequent years brought in Judge Sandra Taylor and Virginia Panico.

The Club sponsors the Key West Welcome Sign at the triangle leading into Key West.

2002: Karen Thurman was elected the 1st female President of the Club.

Rotarian Jack Martin is the 2nd District Governor from Key West.

2004: Rotarian Robert Walker establishes a dental voucher program so that elementary school children can visit a dentist at no cost to them. Since then, the dental program has partnered with AHEC and has served over 6,000 local students.

2005: President George Galvan, Club Members Tom Nitti, Alton Weekley, Diane Gibson, Pat Labrada travels to the Centennial Rotary International Convention in Chicago, IL.

2007: The Club membership increases to 120 members. The Club is growing at a healthy rate and the meetings move to the new Beachside Resort to accommodate the growth. Club projects focus on changing the needs of the Key West Community. The Club spearheaded a project for Seniors with a magnetic sleeve for their refrigerators or cars to list emergency contact information.

2009: Rotarian Rachel X. Oropeza traveled to India with 44 Rotarians from around the world to participate in an NID – National Immunization Day for Polio.

2010: Under President Bascom Grooms, the Club was awarded a \$47,000 grant from Rotary International to establish Nutritional Support Centers at Hopital Albert Schweitzer in Haiti after the devastating earthquake. Rotarian Rachel X. Oropeza traveled to Haiti to assist with a non-medial project at HAS to create maps and organize their storage areas.

Under President Rudy Molinet, the Club started a program with 4th graders at Sigsbee Elementary School where they implemented the Four Way Test in service projects. The students were inducted into the Club as “Junior Rotarians.”

Rotarians Michael Browning & Dr. Robin Lockwood traveled to Hopital Albert Schweitzer in Haiti to help implement water wells on the grounds of HAS.

2014: Rotarian Rachel X. Oropeza travels to Venezuela with Rotarians from Key Biscayne on the “Mosquitero” Project to deliver mosquito nets to help reduce malaria in the local villages.

2016: The Club celebrates “100” Years of Rotary with Rachel X. Oropeza as the “100th” President. On April 1, 2016, a “Gala” reception was held honoring 10 ‘Legends of Rotary’ – “Moe” Mosher, John G. Parks, Jr. Paul J. Sher, Alton Weekly, Greg O’Berry, Robert Walker, Dr. Robert Carraway, Edward Toppino, Jefferson B. Browne. Edward B. Knight is the first Rotarian inducted into the “Rotary Club of Key West Hall of Fame.”

Rotarian Rachel X. Oropeza travels to Iquitos, Peru, and the Amazon on the “Mosquitero” project to deliver mosquito nets to help reduce malaria in local villages.

2017: President David Van Loon and the Club hosts a “101 Gala” to honor the “Legends of Rotary” - Peter Batty, Sr., Pat Labrada, Dr. Robin Lockwood, Scott Oropeza, Virginia Panico. “Moe” Mosher, John G. Parks, Jr., and Edward Toppino are selected as the “Rotary Club of Key West Hall of Fame” recipients. Chaz Jimenez is honored as Coach of the Year.

Rotarians Myra Jane (Baucom) Knapp and Rachel X. Oropeza travel to the Rotary International Convention in Atlanta, GA.

Rotarian Rachel X. Oropeza travels a second time to Iquitos, Peru, and the Amazon on the “Mosquitero” project to deliver mosquito nets to help reduce malaria in local villages.

Hurricane Irma devastates the Lower Keys. The Club was awarded a \$25,000 grant from the Community Foundation to assist local needs in the community. The Club also received an additional \$25,000 from the Rotary District Foundation to assist the community needs as well.

2018: The Club sponsored the first and only picnic on the grounds of the Casa Marina as part of the July 4th Celebrations. Under President Jill Cranney-Black, the Club helped raise over \$67,000 at that event.

The Rotary District 6990 Conference is held in Key West, FL.

2017: The Rotary Club hosts its 1st Casino Night to benefit Take Stock in Children.

2019: The Club hosts its 1st Cornhole tournament.

2020: the world faces the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Clubs host virtual meetings.

2022: Rotarians Lauren Martin, Christie Martin, Holly Elomina, and Amber Acevedo host the 1st Annual Kickball Tournament with the Rotary Club of Key West and Sunset Rotary.

Rotary Members assist with food deliveries weekly for Cooking with Love.

Rotarians host Bingo Night at the local senior center.

Rotary participated in the City of Key West 200 Year Celebration and placed articles and information in the time capsule.

2023: Rotarian Alton Weekley attended the Rotary International Convention in Melbourne, Australia. He was also honored as the District 6990 Humanitarian of the Year. He currently serves as the Assistant Governor for District 6990.

Major Events/Fundraisers for the Club –

Scholarship of \$25,000 to a graduating senior from KWHS.

Yearly Golf Tournament to sponsor the Dental Fund.

Fourth of July Fireworks since 1976.

International Project – HAS in Haiti since the 1970's.

Casino Night

Cornhole Tournament

Kickball Tournament

106 Past Presidents

2 – Past District Governors –Edwin Treavor & Jack Martin

6 – Past Assistant Governors – Alton Weekly (twice) Karen Thurman, Elizabeth MacLaughlin, Rachel X. Oropeza, Brian L. Barroso, Bill Setzer.

This document originated by Wright Langley.

Updated by Rachel X. Oropeza in August 2023.