

Rotary Club of Overland Park: 65 Years of Service Above Self

Since 1960, the Rotary Club of Overland Park has awarded more than \$2 million in scholarships and grants, funded international medical missions, supported veterans, and built traditions that continue to bring the community together. The club is guided by Rotary's enduring motto: **"Service Above Self."**

"Our priorities remain the same as they were when we were founded—helping children, veterans, and those less fortunate," said Bill Flohrs, the club's current president.

Among the club's most visible traditions is its annual Crawfish Festival, held each year in early May. Launched 25 years ago, the event has become the organization's signature fundraiser, generating more than \$25,000 annually for local charities.

"Rotary operates with a higher level of efficiency and accountability than many charitable organizations, with approximately 95% of funds going directly to charitable causes," said Flohrs. "The festival has earned its outstanding reputation through our strong partnership with the community, as well as the efficiency and fun we bring to the experience."

Supporting education remains a cornerstone of the club's mission.

"Our support of academic scholarships for students attending college, as well as our commitment to disadvantaged youth locally, regionally, and internationally, remains central to what we do," said Laurie McCormick, a past president of the club.

Rotary International was founded in 1905 in Chicago by attorney Paul Harris and three business associates. Today, the organization includes approximately 1.2 million members worldwide. Women have been members of the Overland Park club since 1983, and the club has been led by several female presidents throughout its history.

Over the years, the Rotary Club of Overland Park has provided funding and volunteer support to hundreds of local organizations. Beneficiaries have included Harvesters, Heart to Heart International, CASA, Do Good for Erin, Heartland Therapeutic Riding, and KidsTLC, among many others.

Members have also participated in Rotary International's decades-long effort to eradicate polio through funding and vaccination campaigns.

"When Rotary first became involved in this project in the mid-1980s, there were cases of polio in about 100 countries," said Bill Morton, the club's PolioPlus Chair. "Today, cases remain in only a handful of countries."

Rotary International and its partners in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative estimate that, since the initiative began in 1988, polio cases worldwide have declined by more than 99.9%.

“Rotary members have partnered with other clubs across Kansas and secured matching grants through Rotary International to fund medical mission trips to Guatemala for several years,” said Cindy Green, a longtime member and past president of the club. “These rewarding trips allow participants to see firsthand the impact Rotary is having on lives in other countries.”

The club’s OPCares program, led by Mike Meyer, provides rapid assistance to communities affected by natural disasters. The program delivers food and personal hygiene products, provides backpacks to children in underserved areas, and distributes recreational equipment to youth throughout the Kansas City region.

“When you get a call from a veteran you’ve known for decades, a fellow Rotarian who needs help, or hear about a need in the Kansas City area, we don’t ask why,” Meyer said. “We simply start looking for ways to make it happen.”

The Rotary Club of Overland Park also continues to expand its investment in local education.

“With the increasing cost of higher education, we have worked to increase both the number and value of scholarships awarded to students in the Blue Valley and Shawnee Mission school districts,” said Molly Camis, president of the Community Uplift Foundation. The foundation was established to expand the club’s impact through scholarships for students and grants to local nonprofit organizations.

Today, the Rotary Club of Overland Park has more than 105 members and continues to grow. Members remain committed to Rotary’s Four-Way Test:

Is it the truth?

Is it fair to all concerned?

Will it build goodwill and better friendships?

Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

“We at Rotary believe we are making a difference,” said Flohrs. “‘Service Above Self’ reminds us that our mission is to help those in need, regardless of our own interests. Overland Park is filled with people who want to serve their community, make a difference, and connect with like-minded individuals. Rotary provides an opportunity to do all three.”