



Rotary 2013-2023

The Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum opened on September 28, 2013. This 40-acre site features 3.7 miles of trails, a newly planted oak savannah, native tree and plant species and “imaginature” stations for children to play, explore and discover. The Rotary Club of Milwaukee also raised \$250,000 from members to seed the Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum Preservation Fund currently valued at almost \$1 million to ensure maintenance of the arboretum for future generations.



The arch to the entrance of the Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum was designed by Rotarian Mario Costantini

Tom and Genie Smith donated \$100,000 to create the first endowed scholarship in honor of Tom’s parents, Gordy (1976-77 club president) and Betty Smith. By 2023, the endowment reached \$ 1 million, boasting 14 named funds. Since the inception of the program in 2009, the program has celebrated 37 graduates. Two thirds of students graduated in 4.5 years, which is six times the national average for first-generation college students.

The Rotary Club of Milwaukee undertook its first major water project in Guatemala in partnership with Engineers Without Borders. Over the next decade, the club facilitated 5 pedestrian bridge projects, 10 water projects, 3 school expansions and a medical mission in Guatemala. Total commitment of Rotary dollars (from all sources) exceeded \$1 million.

The Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum received the Brewers Community Foundation Public Space Award from Cecelia Gore, Executive Director of the Brewers Community Foundation. The award recognizes a public space that helps build the community.

The Rotary Club of Milwaukee played a key role in the transformation of Clarence and Cleopatra Johnson Park from a neglected area into an urban green space that enriches the lives of residents and community groups in the historic Lindsay Heights neighborhood.

The initiative also restored the Brown Street Academy schoolyard across the street from the park and established a Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom, which gives students hands-on learning opportunities.

At the 2015 MANDI Awards, the club was awarded the BMO Harris Bank Cornerstone Award. The award recognizes an organization for their commitment and effectiveness over time.

The Rotary Club of Milwaukee sponsored the first HKE MKE at the Milwaukee Rotary Centennial Arboretum, now in its eighth year. The 2.5-mile family-friendly hike on Urban Ecology Center’s beautiful nature trails raises funds for urban nature.

Rotary Club of Milwaukee joined other community leaders to develop MKE Urban Stables providing a unique opportunity to achieve three goals at once: a much needed home for the Milwaukee Police Department Mounted Patrol, a center for trauma-informed equine-assisted therapy in the City of Milwaukee and a platform for police/community relations using horses as a citywide draw.



Rotarians feeding horses at a meeting held at the MKE Urban Stables, which opened in 2021

The Rotary Board affirmed a commitment to deepening the club’s understanding of the impact of structural racism in the community. Action steps included inviting more community voices to the podium, cultivating the diversity of the club and the board of directors and encouraging and engaging members through books and films.

On March 17, 2020, the club canceled its regular lunch meeting due to the onset of the COVID pandemic. Meetings resumed by Zoom on March 23. The program featured Rotarian Dr. Bob Gleeson, who provided COVID guidance. In-person meetings resumed temporarily in the fall of 2020 and returned permanently in May 2021. The generosity and support of the members ensured that the club balanced its budget through the pandemic.

Recognizing the club's commitment to the advancement of literacy and lifelong learning, the club received the prestigious Benjamin Franklin Award presented by the Milwaukee Public Library.

Major Rotary Events and Speakers

- In June 2014, Marc Lasry, one of the new owners of the Milwaukee Bucks, shared his vision for building a basketball powerhouse.
- In 2015, the club hosted the Rotary Large Club Conference at the Pfister Hotel, convening representatives of the 60 largest Rotary Club in America. Keynote speakers included Ploughshares CEO Joe Cirincione, who discussed the Policy and Politics of the Iran Nuclear Deal, and retired Baxter International CEO Harry Kramer, who gave a presentation on Values Based Leadership.
- Former Congressmen Tom Petri and David Obey addressed the opportunities for "Advocacy without Partnership" and shared views on the current political environment.
- NPR political reporter Scott Detrow spoke to the club.
- In June 2018, 300 members and guests gathered in Memorial Hall to hear guest speaker Israeli Ambassador Ron Dermer.
- In the fall of 2022, the four major candidates for statewide office spoke to Rotarians: Gov. Tony Evers, businessman Tim Michels, Senator Ron Johnson and Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes.

Milwaukee and the World 2013-2023

The shooting death of Black teenager Michael Brown by Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson ignited protests. After a grand jury ruled not to indict Wilson, Ferguson was hit by further unrest.

After a major Ebola outbreak in parts of West Africa, the dreaded and often fatal disease arrived in the U.S. Though there were just a handful of cases, misunderstanding created widespread fear.

The March disappearance of a Malaysian airliner became an intriguing mystery when not a trace of the plane could be found and there were few clues as to why it vanished.

Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th president of the United States and Mike Pence was sworn in as the 48th vice president. Nearly 3 million people attended the Women's March in Washington, D.C. in opposition to the inauguration of Donald Trump, making it the single largest protest in U.S. history.

The #MeToo Movement, an awareness movement around the issue of sexual harassment and sexual abuse of women in the workplace, went global. The movement was sparked by news reports of sexual abuse by American film producer Harvey Weinstein.

Space Force was established and became the sixth U.S. military branch.

The world shut down as it grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic.



The streets of New York City nearly empty during the COVID lockdown in March of 2020

Created by Bill Durkin, edited by Mary Bolich

Bill Durkin, President of Durkin & Associates, was a member of the Rotary Club of Milwaukee from 2000 through his passing in the spring of 2021. Bill, who was instrumental in the development of MKE Urban Stables, was actively engaged in the Club's Centennial Anniversary celebration in 2013. An avid student of history, Bill created this history of the Club set in the context of key events occurring in the City, the State and the World. The writeup of the latest decade was prepared by Mary McCormick.

Mary Bolich, a Principal with Red Rabbit Creative, joined Rotary in 2019. Mary has an extensive background in creative writing, journalism and editing working for organizations such as Kohler, Kohl's and the U.S. Navy. She is the volunteer coordinator of the Rotary Club of Milwaukee's People of Action profile series.