

Twenty-Five Years with Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club

May 14, 1980 – May 14, 2005



“The Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club operates on a firm foundation. As Rotarians, we know who we are by understanding what we do. We make a difference.”

— *William C. Jacobson,*
Charter Member

Introduction

On Saturday evening, May 14, 2005, members of Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club will gather at the Touch of Class Banquet and Convention Center to celebrate the club's Silver Anniversary.

Under the capable leadership of Wayne Josifek as general chairman, the 25th Anniversary Committee coordinated activities celebrating this great occasion. The committee first met in July, 2003, and determined there were two components for this celebration: the creation of an historic record of the club's first 25 years and a special evening to celebrate the club's accomplishments. Kathy Kaiser assumed leadership of the historic record committee, and Rhonda McCombs led the celebration event committee.

This book is the culmination of the work of the historic record committee. Many people contributed photos, reminiscences, and written material for this book. Though we were somewhat concerned at the beginning about the small amount of historical material available, by fall the information and photos began to pour in from the members. Ultimately, we had much more than we could use, but we are extremely grateful to all who provided such rich resources for our record. Whenever possible, we have credited those who made contributions.

Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club has a notable record of "service above self." It is a club that is known for community leadership, for devoted members, for international outreach, and for having a good time. As Tom Ecker, our first president, put it, from the very beginning, "the meetings were always fun with humor an integral part of the format."

We hope that this book captures and honors the spirit of the Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club as well as chronicling its activities. And we fervently hope that all who read it will enjoy and remember!

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Twenty-Five Years with Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club

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Rotary Roots

Chartering of the Club

In 1980, the birth of a new Rotary club in Cedar Rapids was an idea whose time had come. The idea originated from an ad hoc committee made up of three members of the Cedar Rapids Rotary Club, who were charged with determining ways to limit the growth of the downtown club. In 1977, the Cedar Rapids Rotary Club had nearly 300 members and there was concern that the club was becoming too large. On May 26, 1977, Leo Nussbaum, chairman of the ad hoc committee, submitted a report to Cedar Rapids Rotary Club president, Tom Ecker, stating that they had considered several options including the establishment of a new Rotary club in southwest Cedar Rapids. It was noted that the economic growth of the west side of the city was stimulated by the development of Westdale Mall and other businesses in the area.

On September 2, 1979, Jack Laugen, president of the Cedar Rapids Rotary Club, and his Board of Directors passed a unanimous resolution "to pursue the project of sponsoring a Cedar Rapids Rotary club that would meet in the Westdale Mall."

It was decided that members of the new club would include a few downtown Rotarians who would transfer their membership, as well as new members who would be proposed by the downtown club. The goal was to recruit members on the west side of the city.

Early on the morning of February 1, 1980, a group of men met at York Steak House in the Westdale Mall for the first provisional meeting of what was soon to become the Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club. Dale Sawyer, special representative and organizer from the downtown Rotary Club, called the meeting to order at 30 seconds after midnight. This unusual time was selected so that the new club would be the first club to organize in Rotary's 75th Anniversary Year, which began on February 1. At midnight that evening, the temperature was one degree below zero, and several yawns were noticed among the assembled Rotarians and their guests.

Twenty-three dedicated Rotarians attended that initial meeting, including the following officers from the Cedar Rapids Rotary Club: President Jack Laugen, President-elect Dale Sawyer, and Secretary Clyde Lindsley.

A constitution and bylaws, almost identical to those of the Cedar Rapids Rotary Club, were adopted and the new club voted to meet on Wednesdays at York Steak House in Westdale Mall. Gathering time was set for 11:45 a.m., with the meeting and program to run from 12:15-1:00 p.m.

Elected to the Cedar Rapids-West Board of Directors that evening were Tom Ecker, Harry Whitehead, Craig McCormick, Bob Meskimen, Randy Larson, and Bill Jacobson.

The first board meeting was held at 11 a.m. on February 6, 1980. At this meeting, it was decided that board members would serve three-year terms, and that the club would elect two board members each year. An election of officers was held, and two nominations were received for the club's official name. They were Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club and Cedar Rapids Too Rotary Club. Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club was the name chosen.

On March 26, 1980, the new Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club was officially chartered by Rotary International. To celebrate the occasion, a "Charter Night" was held in the ballroom of the Stouffer's Five Seasons Hotel on May 14, 1980. Members of both Rotary clubs and their spouses attended, along with District Governor Bill Edwards who initiated the 50th club into District 5970. After dinner, the 22 charter members of the new club were inducted into Rotary and the Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club was officially born.

Charter Members and Officers

Officers

At the initial board meeting on February 6, 1980, the following officers were elected:

Thomas R. Ecker	President
Harry J. Whitehead	President-Elect/International Service Committee Chair
Robert C. Meskimen	Vice President/Club Service Committee Chair
Randy D. Larson	Secretary/Treasurer
Craig G. McCormick	Club Activities Committee Chair
William C. Jacobson	Vocational/Community Service Committee Chair

Other Charter Members

Michael E. Ament	Raymond H. Blakeman
Craig M. Byers	Mohamed R. El-Dieb
John B. Foens	Robert J. Holley
George Justice	Charles R. Kirby
Gerald T. Knox	Matthias L. Kriz
LaMarr E. Lucas	Donald J. Melichar
Donald L. Peters	Richard F. Salat
Michael D. Stallman	Richard H. Waggoner



Cedar Rapids-West Rotary's first president, Tom Ecker, receives the club's charter certificate from District Governor Bill Edwards. Also present were Cedar Rapids Downtown Rotary President Jack Laugen and President-elect Dale Sawyer.

Connections with Rotary International

Cedar Rapids-West Rotary had several initial challenges and because resources were limited, the early officers supported many of the club's activities out of their own pockets. Yet the club leadership has been committed to its alignment with Rotary International from the very beginning, and has taken many steps over the years to emphasize the importance of the international connection to the members. Some of those steps included the active exchange and display of banners from clubs in other countries, as well as the flags that are displayed on the president's table every week.

Since 1980 Cedar Rapids-West has participated in the international student exchange program, has supported the campaign to eradicate polio worldwide, and has provided funds for wheel chairs for persons with disabilities in third-world countries. By supporting these and other Rotary International humanitarian efforts, club members have been able to reach out in the spirit of international friendship and offer "Service Above Self."

Each year the club has been committed to sending the incoming president to the International Rotary Convention. Upon their return, these individuals have shared with club members the fascinating stories of their experiences. Don Melichar found the 1991 Rotary International Convention in Mexico City "to be very interesting and informative aside from the civil unrest that was going on in the country at the time."



Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Pres. Kathy Toborg with Rotary International Pres. Frank Devlyn and Pres.-Elect Christine Harstad, at the 2001 Rotary International Convention in San Antonio.

In sharing her experiences at the 2000 International Convention in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Kathy Toborg reported, "We loved every moment of our Argentinean experience—the great workshops, informative plenary sessions, interesting guest speakers, the Paul Harris Fellow Luncheon, the exhibition of club and district projects and, perhaps most of all, our tango lessons! All in all, it was the trip of a lifetime. I also feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to attend two international conventions in the U.S.—one in Indianapolis and the other in San Antonio. They were equally inspiring and enjoyable."

CONTRIBUTORS: *Marilyn Lefebure, Writer*
Tom Ecker, Photo and Memories
Kathy Toborg, Photo and Memories

Officers and Organization

Current Board of Directors

Though most Rotary clubs are organized and function in the same way, there are options in terms of committees and projects that the organization selects for a focus.

The Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club operates with four officers and a Board of Directors that meets monthly. For 2005, the officers are President Dave Baker, First Vice-President Annette Brightwell, Second Vice-President Steve Havlik, and Treasurer Dennis McGivern.

The six Directors are the general chairpersons for the various committees and serve rotating terms. Those Directors include John Mack, Laurel Day, John Negro, Mary Schneckloth, Don Fuller and Kathy Kaiser.

All members are encouraged to join a committee and are surveyed once a year on their preferences. At the current time, the committees are as follows:

Membership Directory	New Member Orientation
Fundraising	World Fellowship
Vocational Service	International Youth
Environmental Service	Community Service
Newsletter	Program
Fun and Frolic	Music
Attendance	Inter-Club Activities
Social	Public Relations
News	Club Service
Donations/Scholarships	Membership/Classification
Computer Technology	Rotary Foundation
Sergeant-at-Arms	Interact
25th Anniversary Celebration	

Membership

In the past few years, Cedar Rapids-West Rotary membership has fluctuated between 130-140 members. Each member goes through an orientation conducted by Jerry Springston at his home. When Kathy Toborg was president, she initiated a mentor program for new members. Some would say she carried out her program to the ultimate. While personally introducing a potential new member, Ben Halupnik, she announced, "In an effort to make Ben feel welcome and comfortable in our club, I've agreed to marry him next month." The club erupted. Mike Klappholz came to the mic and said, "We'll do anything to attract new members!"

The club first admitted women in 1987, and the first woman president was Darla Peterson. Since then, in spite of some good natured and humorous barbs between Bill Jacobson and Theresa Anderson during Fun and Frolic, men and women have served equally and shared responsibilities for everything the club does, from building Habitat houses and playground equipment to being president and organizing youth exchanges.

Darla Peterson tells the story of when she became president in 1995. She eagerly told her father, also a Rotarian, about her new office, and invited him to come visit the club. "My father looked at me in shock and said, 'President! How can this be? Women can't even join this club!'" She quickly adds that he did come to a meeting and was very proud that his daughter was in Rotary.

She also recounts what a new experience her first meeting was...the surprise of all the things that happen "behind the scenes" and the time needed to get everything included at the podium. She echoed what many of us wonder: What would we do without Denny?!

The presidents of our club through the years have each contributed greatly with their own talents and style of leadership. An appendix to this book includes photos and biographies of our 25 former presidents.



2005 Board members and officers: (back) John Mack, Don Fuller, Pres. Dave Baker, John Negro, and Secy. Denny McGivern; (front) 1st Vice-Pres. Annette Brightwell, 2nd Vice-Pres. Steve Havlik, and Mary Schneckloth. (Not present: Laurel Day and Kathy Kaiser)

CONTRIBUTORS: *Kathy Toborg, Memories*
Darla Peterson, Memories

Tales to Tell

Fun and Frolic

Cedar Rapids-West Rotary was founded on the premise of having a good time. As business and professional people gather for lunch each week, it was felt that a Rotary meeting should be light and fun for those in attendance. Ample evidence exists that laughter is good for the body, mind and soul.

Tom Ecker, our first president, used his effective sense of humor to set the tone. He didn't let anyone take things too seriously. His imprint on the club made humor a part of the club activity for the next 25 years. Each succeeding president brought his or her style to the lighter side of the meetings, but not all presidents were comfortable in this role. Thus was born the "Fun and Frolic Committee."

The first Fun and Frolic chair was John Thornton, a local dentist with a strong Southern drawl. Others stepped forward to carry on the tradition. Who among us will ever forget Kim Kudej's famous story about her Mother's Day present, which to this day we are not sure was truth or fiction!

On days when time permits, three to five minutes is set aside for jokes, humorous activities and different perspectives on situations. As Fun and Frolic time evolved, it also became a way to raise money for the club. Committee members began to fine the audience, usually no more than a dollar, for some infraction of a "Fun and Frolic Law." These laws are situational with functional rather than legal authority. Getting your name or picture in the paper is a sure way to be fined! The club has earned approximately one thousand dollars a year from these fines, which goes for service projects.

Humor can get out of hand. The Fun and Frolic Committee maintains a set of standards and expectations on the appropriateness of jokes and jabs. The emphasis is on laughing with and not at individuals in the club. Of course, when Mike Klappholz is the focus of the humor, everything is fair game!

Friendships and Social Outings: Fishing and Bowling

Many friendships are formed and a lot of "tales" are told by Cedar Rapids-West Rotarians who get together outside of club meetings. Such were the fishing trips organized by Gary Pribyl.

According to Morris Greenfield, known affectionately as Greenie, the fishing trips evolved when he and Gary Pribyl fished and attended a dinner and talk from a DNR representative set up by the Dubuque Clubs near Bellevue. The representative explained where the fish go during different times of the year, but they already had that figured out...they were hiding!



Florian Goedken proves that not all the fish are hiding!

From that experience and the fun they had, Gary came up with the idea to organize a trip to Many Point Lake in northwest Minnesota. Gary organized all the food, lodging, and boats. They had nice dock-side cabins, good boats and motors, though some of the fishermen pulled their own rigs for the trip.

According to Greenie, the fishing was great fun, but even better were the great friendships and the stories that came out of each trip! They'll never forget John Thornton falling out of his

boat and soaking all of his cold weather gear along with everything else. Larry Frahm and Greenie were fishing



Gary Pribyl was the organizer of the fishing trips.

together when Larry caught a 15 lb. fish and didn't know what it was. Greenie told him it was a King Salmon, and he wanted to go back and show the guys his great catch! The laughter is still echoing through the trees up north as he proudly held up his 15 lb. carp!

There were four fishing trips in all, and Greenie credits Gary with putting them together and making them work. That's what Rotarians are all about!

Another small group of Rotarians formed a bowling team and get together every Monday night (32 weeks a year) to compete against other service clubs. Actually, Rotary clubs in Cedar Rapids have participated in the service club league since 1958, which used to include Rotary, Kiwanis, Sertoma, Lions, Optimists, and the Civitan clubs. They used to bowl at Tropic Lanes, which no longer exists, but then moved to Lancer Lanes. Cedar Rapids-West Rotary team joined the group approximately twelve years ago.

Over the years, the Cedar Rapids-West bowling team has always included a club president or past president. The current bowling team roster includes Don Melichar, Dave Baker, Wayne Josifek, Ben Halupnik, Frank Stevens III, Crystal Usher, John Negro, Jay Melichar and Joseph Collins.

The team frequently reports its scores at club meetings. It is reported that Don Melichar first demonstrated his amazing balancing capabilities at a bowling league get-together.

CONTRIBUTORS: *Morris Greenfield,*
Memories and Photos
Crystal Usher, Writer
Gary Pribyl, Photos

Activities

Besides the club meetings and small-group social outings, Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club members have joined together to raise money and awareness for causes that are important to them.

Most notable among these has been the annual Gourmet Pancake Breakfast, held in mid-March at Jefferson High School. Proceeds from this dinner go for scholarships for Kirkwood Community College students and for various charitable groups in the community. The first Gourmet Pancake Breakfast was held in 1987. By now, the proceeds have reached more than \$12,000 annually, and nearly 1,000 people attend.

For the past six years, the Environmental Education Committee, led by Reid Zehrbach, has sponsored an

Environmental Media Contest for students throughout the community. Students at all grade levels submit posters, videos and multi-media presentations depicting environmental concerns. Club members serve as judges and the winning submissions are displayed for the club. The winners at each level are awarded a tree for planting at their school.

Since 2001, ten members of Cedar Rapids-West Rotary have consistently read to first graders at Van Buren School as "Rock and Readers" and touched the lives of over 400 children. These are "at risk" children who ask "Where is the big man in the suit?" on Rock-and-Read Day because the suit, that symbol of a professional person, is alien to the life they know. Their time with their Rotary Rock-and-Reader may be the only time any adult has read just to them. Martha Aldrich has organized this activity.



Reid Zehrbach joins the winning student at Jefferson High School in planting a tree as a reward for the Environmental Media Contest.



Rotary members also formed a bowling team for the Bowl-a-thon to benefit the Boys and Girls Club in July, 2004.



Mary Jen Bear, Carol Lensing, and Kay Graber serve pancakes and fruit while Bob McMahon and Bruce Hamous replenish the eggs at the 2000 Pancake Breakfast.



Bill Jacobson, Steve Graham and Tammy Heitt are great pancake flippers.



Darla Peterson and Gary Pribyl are supposed to be working!



Greenie gets ready to raffle off donated items to those with the lucky numbers.

Results and Accomplishments

Two District Governors

The strength of any organization is in its members, and two of Cedar Rapids-West Rotary's members certainly demonstrate that strength by becoming District Governors.

Jerry Springston was the first District Governor from our club, serving in 1992-93. The theme that year was "Real Happiness is Helping Others!" Jerry credits as highlights of his term in office the citation from Rotary International President Clifford Dochterman for our club, the founding of a new Rotary Club at Bancroft, a Group Study Exchange team sent to France, five Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholarships, and district membership reaching an all-time high of 3,300.

By the time Don Melichar served as District Governor in 2002-2003, the number of clubs had reached 56. The theme that year was "Sow the Seeds of Love" which Don and Cedar Rapids-West Rotary President Larry Johnson affirmed through pins given to various members of the club for memorable accomplishments. Don's emphasis during his term and throughout his years in Rotary was to increase giving to the Rotary Foundation and Polio Plus. During his term, the district contributed a record amount, with every club in the district contributing. He also started a new club, Cedar Rapids-Hiawatha Metro North.

Group Study Exchange

Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club has emphasized its international connections in many ways, not the least of which has been the participation in the Group Study Exchange Program. The club has both sent and received groups of young busi-



Members of the GSE team from Sao Paulo, Brazil, visit Diamond V in 2004.



Don Melichar presents a Paul Harris Fellowship to Lynn Kehm, on behalf of his son, Mike Kehm.



Rotarians often give Paul Harris Fellowships in honor of family members. Pres. Larry Johnson presented a Paul Harris Fellowship to his wife.

nesspersons from other countries, organizing home stays and visits to businesses, training opportunities and manufacturing in the community.

Three New Clubs

Rotary is too fine an experience not to be shared, and Cedar Rapids-West Rotary has shared in the ultimate way by starting three new clubs: Sunrise, Daybreak and Ely-Gateway.

Between paperwork and footwork, the process of starting a new club takes the better part of a year. It begins with soliciting other clubs in the area to share their territory with the proposed club. A survey of the community and potential member classifications is then conducted. If the survey shows justification for a new club, a meeting place, day and hour are selected, officers chosen, and weekly meetings begin. A new club cannot be chartered until a minimum of

