



## **Women In Rotary**

### **National Membership Seminar March 2017**

Throughout the course of nearly seven decades of Rotary's history has run the thread of the debate of women as members, yet the first constitution of the Chicago Club #1 adopted in January, 1906 makes no reference to gender, referring only to "persons"

From as early as 1911 an all women club existed in Minneapolis and between 1911 and 1917 an all women Rotary club existed in Duluth, Minnesota alongside the men's club. They met on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of each month while the Men only club met on the 1<sup>st</sup> and last Thursday. The RI board refused to recognize them.

1921 At the Convention in Edinburgh, Scotland produced the Standard Club Constitution in which Article 2, Section III stated "A Rotary Club shall be comprised of men"

May 1921 The wife of the Chicago Club President Alwilda F Harvey convened a luncheon meeting of 59 women calling themselves "Women In Rotary" The board rejected the name so it was changed it to "The Women of the Rotary Club of Chicago"

May 1923 In England the Manchester Club proposed "the Formation of a Ladies Rotary Club". This proposal was lost but instead the first Inner Wheel Club was formed.

1950 At the Detroit Convention, the Ahmedabad Club of India proposed that the word "male" be dropped from Article III of the Standard Club Constitution. This was soundly defeated.

Between 1964 and 1977 a number of unsuccessful attempts were made to provide for the admission of women.

However the die was finally cast by a club in a small California town. On the occasion of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Duarte club admitted 2 women to membership on the 1<sup>st</sup> June. One more woman followed shortly after. In March 1978 the RI board terminated the Duarte's Charter. Duarte renamed itself the "Ex Rotary Club of Duarte" and in June, filed a suit in the California Superior Court against the RI board decision. This was not heard until 1983 when the Judge ruled against Duarte, which in 1986 Duarte appealed that decision to the California Court of Appeal and the previous judgement was reversed. The RI board appealed that decision to the Supreme Court which refused to hear the case and then the RI board then appealed to the United States Supreme Court 1986.

1984-86 A Provisional Seattle Club deleted references to "male" or "Men" and the Charter Application was rejected. January 1987 the Seattle club filed an amicus brief in support of the Duarte Club.



30<sup>th</sup> March 1987 the US Supreme Court handed down a 7-0 unanimous decision affirming the California Court of appeal decision, ruling that Duarte could not discriminate against members because of gender. Duarte had the final say in the matter when on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1987, Dr Sylvia Whitlock was inducted as the first woman Club President in the history of Rotary.

January 1989 the Council of Legislation voted to change the Constitution and Bylaws to permit the admission of women into Rotary . July 1995 Mimi Altman became the first woman District Governor of District 6440