

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 Schneekloth, 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 Schneekloth. (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

25 persons have been certified by classification and paid their dues.

The Cedar Rapids-Sunrise Rotary club was chartered in 1990 at Collins Plaza Hotel with 32 members. Today the club has more than 50 members and meets at Elmcrest Country Club.

The Cedar Rapids-Daybreak Rotary Club was chartered in 1995 with 38 members.

Today, they have more than 100 members and also meet at Elmcrest Country Club. A member of Daybreak, Ken Kolek, will be District Governor in 2006-2007.

The Ely-Gateway Rotary Club was founded in 2001. It is designated a "new model club" with only the obligations of paying international dues and supporting the objectives of Rotary. It does not meet weekly and is not bound to rules of classification and attendance.

Cedar Rapids-West Rotary is extremely proud to have launched these new clubs and introduced the traditions and values of Rotary to so many new members.

Interact Club

The newest and possibly the most far-reaching accomplishment is the beginning of an Interact Club at Washington High School in Cedar Rapids. The club was formed in September, 2004, and officially chartered in November with 62 members under the leadership of President Matthew Jarvey. Two members of Cedar Rapids-West Rotary, Laura Vint and Chris Kubicek, formed the club, assisted by Bill Jacobson, Don Melichar, Larry Johnson, Mary Schneekloth and Jaye Kennedy.

In a short time the Interact Club has accomplished amazing things. Members recite the Four-Way Pledge at the beginning of every meeting to help them focus on the goals of Rotary. Their Service Committee is committed to performing one service a month. In October, they assisted Four Oaks, Inc. with their PumpkinFest by picking acres of pumpkins. In November, they sponsored a food drive for Foundation II.

The Social Committee sponsored an information event that brought in forty parents to learn more about Rotary. The Public Relations Committee has set up a display case in the entrance of the high school to promote Rotary and service opportunities. They have established a web site, plan to issue bi-monthly newsletters and are developing a Power Point presentation on the club.

The Internal Communications Committee sends out e-mails and reminders to club members and is developing a parents' e-mail directory. The Membership Committee launched a

successful membership drive and brought in twenty new members. They are committed to supporting two Washington High School students who are currently in Belgium and Germany as Rotary Exchange students, as well as the Rotary Exchange student from Mexico currently attending WHS.

And the Logistics Committee recently identified 120 non-profit 501c3 corporations in the WHS attendance boundaries, and sent letters to them announcing the Interact Club and inviting them to share volunteer needs with the group. All of this in only four short months!



Chris Kubicek introduces Interact Pres. Matt Jarvey to club members.

CONTRIBUTIONS: *Wayne Josifek, Writer*
Jerry Springston, Writer
Don Melichar, Writer
Laura Vint, Writer
LeJeune Chadima, Photos

Youth Exchange Program

Bill Jacobson remembers the desire of Cedar Rapids-West Rotary members from the very beginning to build awareness of the international connections of the organization. Their commitment to participation in the International Youth Exchange Program attests to that desire.

The International Youth Committee

Cedar Rapids-West Rotary's International Youth Committee, chaired by Tom Wilkinson, is involved with both outbound and inbound exchange students and also with the World Affairs Seminar through the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater. The World Affairs Seminar is a program to introduce high school students to world affairs. It is offered each year in June, lasts about six days and consists of lectures, discussion sessions, recreational and social activities. Our club generally sends two students, selected by the faculty, from Prairie, Jefferson or Kennedy high schools.

Inbound students come to our club through our district coordinator. Generally a club from a foreign country initiates a request to send a student to another country. Our District 5970 is given a list of student names and the district coordinator places the students in different clubs throughout the district. Our club has a standing request with the district for inbound exchange students, but we are not always given the opportunity to select one. The club always has the right to reject a student.

Outbound students are selected in our district on the basis of merit. A committee, consisting of representatives of each of the local clubs first reviews the applications made by local students. The committee selects students on the basis of a predetermined set of qualities that the committee feels are necessary for the student to have in order to be a successful candidate. If a student is selected, his or her name is forwarded to a committee that reviews the applications and interviews them at the district level. Students who meet the criteria for selections at the district level are approved and classified as outbound students. We usually don't have many applying to become outbound students, but this year six students applied.

John Negro and his family have experienced the program from both aspects. More than ten years ago, they picked up their first student, a young girl from Paraguay, from the airport and "fell in love with her! To this day, we are still in contact with her and her family and her new husband and baby."

In 1998, John's daughter, Beth, became an outbound Rotary exchange student to Argentina. Beth writes, "I had no idea what I was about to embark upon. My world was turned upside down within the course of a few days. One moment I was sitting at the dinner table with my family in Iowa and the next I was in another country, listening to another language I did not understand and looking at people I had never seen before. I will never forget those first few days and the new sights, tastes, and smells that I experienced...It has been over six years since my beloved experience and every day that passes by, I remember at least one thing from that year."

The International Youth Committee has compiled extremely interesting information about many of the inbound and outbound students that our club has sponsored, including names and year of exchange, their country, the school they attended while here, the names of host families, comments about the student by host families, comments by the students themselves and family photos. The students are listed here, and the more complete information is available in an addendum to this book.

If you have been thinking of hosting a student, the comments from the students and their host families will surely inspire you to do so right away!

Inbound Students:

Alexandre Pecoits Hosts: George Justice Family, Tom Wilkinson Family	1987-88	Parana, Brazil
Katarina "Katka" Kubovcakova Hosts: Gary Pribyl Family, Peter Teahen Family	1991-92	Bratislava, Slovakia
Anna Fredmar Hosts: Ellis Smith Family, Darla Petersen Family	1995-96	Sweden
Oliver Profant Hosts: Don Sturgeon Family, Bryan Stolba Family	1996-97	Bratislava, Slovakia
Ana Belen Scigolini Hosts: Chuck Bruggeman Family	1997-98	Buenos Aires, Argentina
Alessandra Dias Scalao Hosts: Theresa Anderson Family, Crystal Usher Family	1998-99	Sao Paulo, Brazil
Martijn M. DeHaan Hosts: Kevin Miller Family, Denny McGivern Family	1999-00	Emmen, The Netherlands
Katrin Plundke Hosts: Bill Dusing Family, Rick Jansen Family	2002-03	Brandenburg, Germany
Linda Sommer Hosts: Theresa Anderson Family, Tony Schubert Family	2003-04	Lauscha, Germany
Andrea Zegarra Hosts: Crystal Usher Family	2004-05	Arequipa, Peru

Outbound Students:

Beth Negro	1998-99	Argentina
Jenny Douglas	1998-99	Germany
Ryne Quelle	2004	Germany

Weekly Meetings

The Four Homes of Rotary West

When Cedar Rapids-West Rotary was chartered with 22 members in 1980, it was with the idea that the club would be represented by members who lived or worked on the west side of the Cedar River. Former club president and district governor Don Melichar reports that while most of the early members were new to Rotary, several of them had broken away from the Cedar Rapids "Downtown" Club, and believed they would generate fresh enthusiasm for Rotary participation if a new club was launched on the west side.

Bill Jacobson was one of those charter members. He looks back at the early meetings, presided over by first president Tom Ecker and held at Westdale Mall's *York Steak House*. "The restaurant had recently opened, and offered just enough room for our members," he recalls. "We had difficulty accommodating any visitors." George Branstetter adds, "We had a little meeting room off to the side, and we filled that up rather quickly. We just became too big for the room we had, and soon had to move."

With every move through the years came a committee formed to examine the options. Says George, "We still wanted to hold our meetings on the west side—it wasn't a mandate, but a suggestion." The membership soon found a new home not far away at the *Sheraton Hotel* (now called the *Clarion Hotel*). While the location offered a similar west-side orientation for the group, the members soon noted that there were pluses and minuses to the new arrangement.

Mike Klappholz recalls being moved from room to room each week based upon other events at the hotel. "I do remember meeting in the bar for a few meetings," he says. Ellis Smith adds, "Some of the rooms were not conducive to slide shows, and the temperature was hard to control in the summer." After several years, the club had substantially increased its membership but was ready for a change.

The *Five Seasons Hotel*—under its various monikers such as *Stouffers*, *Wyndham* and *Crowne Plaza*—was the longest-standing venue to date for the Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club. The decision to move back across the river was controversial—mainly because it meant dropping the objective to remain a "west side" club. But overall there were positive feelings among the members

"That decision really paid off," notes Bill Jacobson. "The thing that happened was that we became the *"Wednesday Rotary Club"* rather than the *"West Side" club*—it added a

whole different dimension in the Rotary pool. We had grown to more than 120 members by the time we left there."

Darla Petersen, who served as president from 1995 to 1996, says some of her fondest Rotary memories are of our days at the *Crowne Plaza*. "Gary Pribyl brought me in (during his presidency) in 1989. We went to the very first meeting and the officers were up on a platform—there were six or seven spots. Gary had me come up there and sit on the end. I remember thinking, "Whoa! They're probably looking up at me and wondering, 'Who the heck is that person? I'll bet they think I'm the speaker.'" Darla adds that the next meeting, when she was inducted, she "got to sit out with the group—such a relief!"

Mike Klappholz says he recalls that the food was "OK" at the hotel—"but we used to joke that we'd get the leftovers from other events and their Sunday brunch." Most memorable, note both Mike and Darla, were the attentive hotel employees who took care of the club's needs. "The best part of the location was the very friendly staff who checked us in and served us," recalls Mike. "I know when we moved, how sad it was to say goodbye to those who had served us for years." Darla adds that the hotel was spacious enough to accommodate any type of program, and was particularly nice for performances. "We had a group of children from the Suzuki class at the Symphony, and our Christmas performances...it was nice to have lots of room to move around."

Overall the membership was pleased with the downtown hotel accommodations through the years. Unfortunately, in the year 2000, new hotel management sounded the death knell for two of the three service organizations that called *Crowne Plaza* "home." Kathy Toborg was serving as president that year.

"We knew we were in trouble when the hotel began cutting back services, food offerings and attention to our audiovisual needs," she recalls. "Then the new manager called a meeting with our officers to announce that our rates would be raised to a level that would negatively impact our membership. A plan was outlined that would even penalize members who came to the meeting but chose not to eat. We were devastated, because all this meant either a huge financial assessment or we were going to have to move away from a place that had worked well for us for a very long time."

The board sought out other possible meeting venues, and weighed the pros and cons of each. They surveyed the membership and spelled out the alternatives—including the

option of substantially raising the meal assessment for members. In the end, the vast majority of the club supported a cost-effective move to the *Czech & Slovak National Museum & Library*—back to our roots, on the west side of town.

The irony, recalls Kathy, was that on the very day of the move to the new site, "our heavy-handed hotel manager lost his job with the chain...I could hardly deal with that little piece of information!"

Overall the club has been very pleased with its present venue. Complaints are few, and camaraderie is high. Dostal Catering has been such a hit as a food provider that members often joke that the meeting room is overflowing with guests and visitors who desire the "best Rotary meal in town." Says Florian Goedken, who joined Rotary West in its first year of existence, served as Secretary for ten years and has been a part of all of the club's meeting places: "I like where we are right now. We have great meals and a room that is *full*—it looks so much better than a big room that's only half full."

But even now, the winds of change are beginning to stir again for Rotary West.

Says Bill Jacobson: "We're still growing, and have made inroads and are creating a club character that is different from other clubs, with a different demeanor." However, he adds, "We'll soon outgrow the Czech Museum. I see the Scottish Rite Temple as another possibility...I believe that will be our next place."

What goes around comes around, it seems. And so Cedar Rapids-West Rotary may indeed, in its next incarnation, cross the Cedar River once again.

CONTRIBUTOR: *Kathy Toborg, Writer*



Several times each year Rotary West members are treated to special events, which often includes a meeting at the Science Station, viewing the latest IMAX movie.



No matter where Rotary West members meet, the display of the Rotary banner, the 4-Way Test and of flags collected from Rotary guests or by Rotary West members through visiting other clubs are always a part of the meeting ritual.

Events

The Social Committee for Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club has organized many events to give members opportunities to know each other and their families in social settings.

Such events have included reduced price loge seats at the Cedar Rapids Symphony Holiday Pops concert preceded by a reception at Dave Baker's home, a summer picnic and a great evening at a Kernels game, performances at CSPS Theatre, and many others.

These times together in a social setting contribute greatly to the comraderie among the members. It's no wonder Rotarians from other clubs often chose Cedar Rapids-West Rotary for their makeup attendance, saying "This is the friendliest club we know...you all have so much fun!"



Annette Brightwell and her family enjoyed the Cedar Rapids-West Rotary night at the Kernels Game in July, 2004.

Service Above Self

No matter how much fun Cedar Rapids-West Rotary members have with each other both in and outside their meetings, they know the club exists mainly for service to others.

This club has had a sterling record of service projects in its 25 years of existence. Here are only a few of those projects.

Kirkwood Scholarships

Since 1983, Cedar Rapids-West Rotary has been giving scholarships to students who will be attending Kirkwood Community College. At times these were non-traditional students, such as single mothers with small children. Most recently, two students are selected by each high school in the Cedar Rapids-Marion area to be the recipients. Their teachers introduce them and give a brief biography of each. Funds for these scholarships come from the annual Gourmet Pancake Breakfast.

Giving to Charities

Funds from the Gourmet Pancake Breakfast also are gifted to local charities and presented to representatives at a late May meeting. Charities submit letters of request, indicating what the money will be used for and the amount requested. A committee selects around 12 charities annually to receive the Rotary donations which most recently have been about \$400 for each charity.



Dick Manson from the Brain Injury Assn. of East Central Iowa receives a check from Craig Anderson, chair of the Scholarships and Donations Committee.

Washington Elementary in Marion over a nine-year period of time. The equipment was purchased through a \$15,000 allocation to each school and raised by each club member giving \$25 to the project.

As each playground was completed, there was a noon-hour celebration at the school with a special speaker, some of whom were Chad Hennings from the Dallas Cowboys, Cary Bender from the Buffalo Bills, Jess Settles, Sam Alford and Steve Alford from the University of Iowa.

The five Rotary clubs received a lot of personal joy and recognition from this project and were featured in *The Rotarian*. A high point was a visit from the International President of Rotary to laud our success and encourage us to continue. Paul Phelan was the driving force behind the project.



"Service Above Self" awards are made monthly by Chief of Police Klappholz and Fire Chief Havlik for those in their departments who have provided outstanding service to the community.

Rotary Washer-Dryer Project

The floods of 1993 in eastern Iowa will long be remembered. Some victims were flooded as many as three times. Cedar Rapids-West Rotary member Gary Pribyl received a call from Jerry Springston, then District Governor, telling him that a group of Canadian Rotary clubs were raising money for Iowa flood victims and wanted to bring the money to us personally to help out.

Gearing Up for Kids

Joining with all the other Cedar Rapids-Marion Rotary clubs, members purchased and installed new playground equipment at Taylor, Polk, Harrison, Grant Wood, Kenwood, Johnson, Monroe and Wilson elementary schools in Cedar Rapids and

Gary immediately began to investigate the best uses of the funds. After checking with other local agencies and organizations, he learned there was one need that would not be met by any of the federal or local funds: washers and dryers would not be replaced. So Gary asked for the names of low income citizens, citizens with disabilities, or senior citizens who had lost their washers and dryers in the flood, and developed a list of 70-80 recipients.

He also went to Amana Refrigeration and Iltens and they agreed to provide and install new units as well as dispose of ruined ones for about \$600 per family. The plan was now in place.

When our Canadian friends arrived, they quickly went to work renovating basements damaged by the floods for the families on the list. Each family received a new washer and dryer. District 5970 and other organizations added funds to the \$4,000 brought by the Canadians, making approximately \$30,000 available for this project. Cedar Rapids-West Rotarian Mary Jen Bear gave a check for \$10,280 from the sale of P. Buckley Moss prints at Peppertree Studios. Each print sold for \$80; \$20 from the studio and \$20 from the artist went to the washer-dryer project.

When the project ended, 96 households in Cedar Rapids had been helped. The Canadians gave a report to their club in Neepawa, Canada, describing their welcome in Cedar Rapids and the emotions of their experiences as families thanked them with tears of joy.

Rotary Beds Project

When Gary Pribyl realized there were reserve funds left from the Washer-Dryer Project, he met with the Grant Wood chapter of the American Red Cross and learned of a need to supply beds to disaster victims. He obtained permission from the District 5970 Board of Directors to divert the funds for this use, and fifty families in the Northern Rotary District received new bed frames and mattresses as a result.

Rotary Orphanage Project

In 1999, Gary Pribyl and his wife Linda had the opportunity to travel to Kazakhstan, which had newly gained its freedom from the Soviet Union. One of the places they visited was Orphanage #8. The director prepared a "needs list" in Russian, which they had translated. The list included clothing, shoes, school and medical supplies as well as a used bus for transportation. All 304 names of the children were on it.

After the list was prioritized and converted to US dollars, Gary arranged for Cedar Rapids-West Rotary and District 5970 to receive a matching grant from Rotary International for the full amount needed, \$35,638. Linda and Gary met with the only Rotary Club in Kazakhstan, establishing the club as the disperser of the funds. Purchases were made and all the needs were met. All in three weeks time! Gary says "It really made us proud to be connected with Rotary!"



Gary and Linda Pribyl found it hard to say goodbye to the 304 children at Orphanage #8 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Through the efforts of our club, District 5970 and a matching grant from Rotary International, supplies, food and a bus were provided for the orphanage.



Jerry Springston joined other Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club members in regularly clearing trash from Iowa roadways.

CONTRIBUTOR: Gary Pribyl,
Writer and Photos

Tribute

Rotary International is and Cedar Rapids-West Rotarians are people who believe and practice, "Service Above Self." This anniversary book captures the club's efforts to live the Rotary motto, "People Profit Most Who Serve the Rest" during its first twenty-five years.

The charter members who founded Rotary West in 1980 had a vision for a Rotary Club on the west side of Cedar Rapids. That vision was to bring Rotary to citizens who had not yet experienced its magic formula for Rotary success that improves the quality of life for humans throughout the world.

That formula includes the successful incorporation of four avenues of service. The first is *community service*. A Rotary Club can have a profound impact on the quality of life in a community. Next is *club service*. It fulfills a human need for fellowship and sharing common purposes. Then we practice *vocational service*. It focuses on understanding the contributions made to others by an individual's vocation. Finally, there is *international service*. It promotes world-wide understanding. We have illustrated some of these service efforts in this book. They highlight the critical attributes of service exemplified during the first twenty-five years of the Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club.

Every Rotary Club goes through a developmental process. The club's early leaders accepted the challenge of taking the club to higher levels of service. New members, different meeting places and the impact of different leaders helped Cedar Rapids-West become an effective Rotary Club. We are what we have been.

The club extends Rotary principles through the impact of its activities. There is always a task, project, or community problem needing attention. We have addressed many of these during the first twenty-five years, and will identify more in the future. Serving others is what Rotarians do.

The best way to predict the future is to create it. We look forward from a firm foundation of service. The next twenty-five years will be created by the decisions of present and future club leaders. They can effectively meet that challenge by remembering the rich history of Cedar Rapids-West Rotary. This book was written to capture that history for present and future generations.

In a world that often reflects hate, Rotarians demonstrate love. In a world short on the fulfillment of promises, Rotarians give service without any selfish motive or gain. In a world of observable differences, Rotarians practice a sense of unity. Surrounded by takers, Rotarians give of themselves

with an intention of making things better. Improving the quality of the lives of others is Rotary's primary goal.

Becoming a Rotarian is ultimately a state of mind. We come to serve because of who and what we are. We serve with our hearts, our heads and our hands. Our theology is simple and observable. We do unto others, as we want them to do unto us.

A Rotarian comes to understand his or her place in the world. We are different, yet similar. The Dalai Lama observed, "It is within that we resemble each other." The goal of Cedar Rapids-West Rotary has been to connect its members to each other through the common bond of service. Through that bond we develop fellowship through a common purpose. It works well for all concerned.

Cedar Rapids-West Rotary operates on a firm foundation. We look forward to the future. There will be more opportunities for the club's Rotarians to place service above self. As Rotarians, we know who we are by understanding what we do. We make a difference.

CONTRIBUTOR: *William C. Jacobson*
Charter Member

Biographies of Past Presidents

1980-2005



1980

Tom Ecker is credited with being the founding president of the Cedar Rapids-West Rotary Club and probably is most responsible for setting a tone of "fun and frolic" for the club. At the time, he was also the president of the Downtown Rotary Club. Tom came to Cedar Rapids in 1967 from Stockholm, Sweden, where he was one of Sweden's three Olympic track and field coaches. Formerly a designer for Nissen Corporation and an administrator with the Cedar Rapids School District, Tom is now a world traveler, has written 18 books and is the famous Tom Underwood, creator of the Wuzzles in *The Gazette*.



1980-81

Harry Whitehead worked in the insurance business for 53 years, completing that time with Millhiser-Smith. As the club's first president, he was committed to seeing it thrive, and was one of the original members of the Cedar Rapids-West Rotary bowling team. The Rotary motto that year was "Take Time to Serve." He also was a well-known storyteller and really enjoyed a good laugh. He loved playing golf and often represented the club at District 5970 golf outings. Harry died in 2002.

