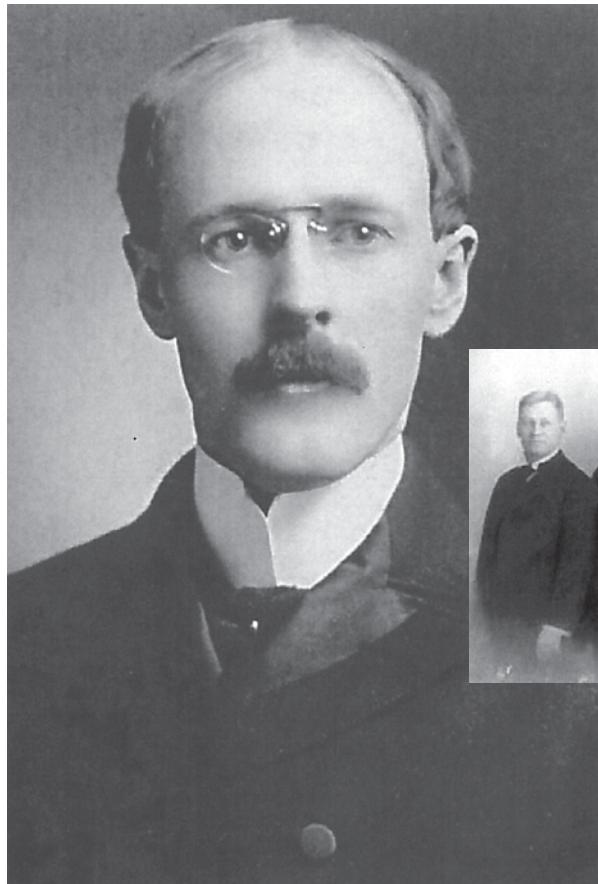


# Rotary Club of Turlock



*The First 50 Years*  
1926 - 1976



*Harris is pictured with the three original members of Rotary, Gustavus Loeht, mining engineer, Sylvester Schiele, coal miner, and Hiram Shorey, tailor.*

*Paul Harris was practicing law in Chicago, Illinois, when he started the Rotary Club.*

The original Rotary club, which is today known as Rotary International, became the nation's first service club when it was started in 1905 by Paul Harris and three other businessmen in Chicago, Illinois. Designed to bring various businesses and professions of the community together, the name "Rotary" was derived from the practice of rotating meetings from one member's place of business to another.

A wagon wheel was adopted as the Rotary emblem.



1905



1906



1906

In 1908 a second club organized in San Francisco, and Rotary gained momentum with clubs locating in Oakland, Seattle, Los Angeles, and New York City in 1909.

The first Rotary convention was held at San Francisco in 1910, where Paul Harris was elected president of the "National Association of Rotary Clubs."

Winnipeg, Canada was admitted to Rotary, and by the following year there were 16 clubs with some 1,500 members.



1910

The mottos "Service Above Self" and "He Profits Most, Who Serves Best" were adopted, and by 1912 Rotary had crossed the oceans to England, Ireland and Northern Ireland, leading to a name change that became "International Association of Rotary Clubs."



1912

In the United States, Rotary's first major contribution of \$25,000 was directed to Indiana and Ohio for flood relief, while overseas eight clubs in Great Britain and Ireland engaged in various kinds of relief work, an example being the housing they provided for Belgian refugees during World War I. As the war progressed to include America, 27,000 Rotary members from 247 clubs joined forces in an all-out effort to raise relief funds.

After the war Rotary grew by leaps and bounds with hundreds more clubs reaching across the globe to such places as Uruguay, the Philippines, Argentina, India, and Panama. By 1921 there were 758 clubs with 56,800 members, and that number ballooned to 1,026 clubs with 81,000 members in 1923.

The early 1920s also marked the period when the name became "Rotary International," and when a revised emblem—a cogwheel with six spokes, 24 cogs, and a kenway—was adopted as the official emblem. It remains the same today.



By 1925, the number of Rotary clubs had spiked to 1,796, producing a membership counted at 107,700.

Enter Turlock, California, where 23 business and professional men met at Kline's Kandy Kitchen on East Main Street on January 7, 1926, to form Turlock Rotary Club over lunch.

R. F. "Frank" Wells of the West Side Lumber Company was elected president, A. J. "Art" Eddy, real estate broker, was elected secretary, and six others were elected directors.

The first two service clubs in Turlock were formed within weeks of each other, and with each claiming the honor of being the first service club in Turlock, we'll let the reader decide:

- After the January 7 organizational meeting, Turlock Rotary Club No. 2245 was chartered March 25, 1926.
- Turlock Exchange Club was organized December 9, 1925 and chartered April 10, 1926.

(In 1975, founding president Frank Wells refuted Rotary's January 7 start date. By his account it started three months earlier, translating into his term as president lasting 15 months.)



Lew Boies (right), second president of Turlock Rotary Club, is pictured with friend Rex Ish during World War I. In 1918, Ish lost his life in France, and the local American Legion is named for him.



Arthur J. Eddy was the local club's first secretary.

Part of the answer can be found in the spirit of healthy competition that existed between the two clubs for decades, and it can be reasoned that the "winner" was the community of Turlock.

Initially, competition between Rotarians and Exchangeites revolved around an annual golf tournament held at the new Turlock Golf Club, each vying for the prized Ruby Cup. (Antone Ruby was a local pianist and organist of note, who entertained Turlockers throughout the 1920s and '30s.)

Although "President Frank Wells of the Rotary Club fittingly upheld the honor of his office by blanking Earl Neel, president of the Exchange, in their match..." the Rotarians lost. They did, however, redeem themselves in future years.

Arthur Eddy publicized the good works of Rotary in his 1927 *Turlock Tribune* article, "TURLOCK ROTARY CLUB IMPORTANT FACTOR IN CITY LIFE." In it he detailed the Rotary International Convention in Ostend, Belgium, where some 6,000 delegates from 41 countries were present to hear the opening address of King Albert of Belgium.

Eddy expounded on the good works of Rotary and that "in a quiet manner some committee of this organization is always ferreting out causes that are worthy of being sponsored. The crippled or defective children are given attention by the Welfare Committee and other committees are active; such committees as the Inter-City Relations Committee and the Boys' Work Committee. ...The prevailing spirit of a Rotarian should ever be, "I profit the most because I serve the best."

During druggist Lew Boies' term as president in 1927-28, Rotary International expanded into seven more countries, growing the number of clubs to 2,631 and membership to 129,000.

For "Ladies' Night" in December of 1927, the seventy in attendance were treated to an enjoyable evening, which included a turkey dinner, music, stunts, and community singing. President Boies directed his welcome address to the "Rotary Anns," represented by Mrs. J. L. Collins.

By 1929, Rotarians were meeting at American Legion Hall on Center Street, and those in charge of programs introduced such guest speakers Judge Dan Kilroy, popularly known as one of Turlock best story tellers; Captain Joseph Argilla, leader of the Turlock National Guard; Herbert Florcken, Modesto Junior College instructor and Stanislaus County historian, and Stanley Johnson, Turlock High

School student in the Class of 1932, whose "eloquent" address was entitled, "What Rotary Looks Like To An Outsider." Johnson, whose subject was the Sixth Object of Rotary, "The advancement of understanding, goodwill and international peace through a world fellowship of business and professional men united in the ideal of service," pointed out that the only important country in the world without a Rotary Club was Soviet Russia.

Still a successful fundraiser into the 1930s, the Rotary vs. Exchange golf tournament saw the Ruby cup passed from one club to the other year after year. Rotary also supported Turlock sports, and in 1936 head coach Joe Debely received a permanent trophy presented by Turlock Rotary Club, on which was inscribed annually in the years to come the names of Turlock's most valuable football players.

Along the way Hotel Carolyn became the site of Rotary meetings, and at the April 11, 1940 meeting Glenn Drake, local mortuary owner, was elected president.

At the meeting it was announced that Dr. Tully Knowles, president of the College of Pacific in Stockton, would be presenting an analysis of the European situation at an upcoming dinner meeting. Wives were invited, and members of the Exchange Club and their wives joined them.

In June 1941, when "Ladies' Night" was held at the home of dentist Dr. C. P. French, Hank Weiss, Union Oil plant manager, was installed as the 16<sup>th</sup> president.

Master of ceremonies was Rev. H. H. Allen, and with Dr. and Mrs. French's swimming pool as the "back drop," June Jane Ripley performed a Hawaiian dance; a water ballet was performed by Betty Triplett, Adelia Fernandes, Betty Young, Hermoine Lee, and Nila Lundgren; an aquatic comedy sketch was performed by Richard McCue and Eldon Lee; two songs were rendered by Rotarian quartet Frank Strasser, Elmer Larson, Reinhold Schmidt, and Rube Hallner, and numbers were played by Eddie Bettencourt and his five-piece band.



Above, Head Coach Joe Debely (right) of the Turlock High School football team receives the permanent trophy offered by Duncan Caldwell of Turlock Rotary Club, while Principal Charles Perrot looks on. Right, Captain of the team was Emerson Ables, pictured here with Principal Perrot.

And as Marve Critser and Russ Peterson prepared to dunk outgoing President Drake, all three Rotarians ended up in the water.

As for the endeavors of the club, Drake reported on the sponsorship of a Sea Scout ship and the formation of the Rotary Quartet.



Dr. C. P. French (left) welcomes Hank Weiss as incoming Rotary president, while outgoing president Glenn Drake looks on.



In July of 1943, during the "dark days" of World War II, Dave Hall hauled out his accordion for a group singing session. Pictured, left to right, are Will Ferguson, Frank Strasser, Jack Mitchell, Henry Weiss, Manny Soderstrom, Marv Critser, Dr. Peters, and Ben Hauck.

In 1945, true to humorous form, Rotarians issued challenges to the Exchange and Lions clubs over the sale of Series E war bonds, with "roaring" Exchangeites and Lions branding the Rotarians "a bunch of second raters who think they can grab off the laurels this time, but just wait till we beat 'em."

Chairman Walter Lane of the Rotarians' bond committee weighed in: "...all these Exchange boys can think about is brag about their golf. After this war fund drive is over we'll challenge them to play some real golf, too."

Chairman Charles L. Smith of the Exchange's bond committee retorted: "That bunch of Rotarians think they're pretty good, just because they have a large membership. But it is like the past—the Exchange club is the one which built the playgrounds in Turlock's city parks; the Exchange club has led in all civic enterprises, and we're not going to give up that honor now. The Rotarians won't earn the rating of a major club here until they can beat the Exchange club in



Local Rotarians who competed in a membership drive in 1945 were divided into three groups—the Reds, the Whites, and the Blues. Pictured, left to right, are the losers preparing to fete the winners: Charles Netherton, Marv Critser, Bill Garlough, Russ Peterson, Chef Hank Weiss, Arden Hall, Chairman Francis Fiorini, John Granahan, and Dan Sarhad.

something. Why the Rotarians can't even win a game of golf, so if they should by some fluke come out ahead in this war bond contest we'd have to make a courtesy bow to them. But there ain't a chance."

A "burned up" Lane responded: "The Exchange delights in bragging about good golf playing, but I am very much pleased to learn that the government has taken away wheel chairs and placed them in hospitals, because the Exchangeites were the only ones who needed them otherwise."

When all was said and done, the Exchange Club came in first, the Lions Club second, and the Rotary Club third.

Rotary International membership increased in the post-war years and 1950 started out with 7,113 clubs and 341,716 members.



*Back in 1951 during the presidency of P. L. Peterson, Turlock Rotary Club scored a "first" as well as an "only." Member Francis Fiorini was ailing and unable to attend the meeting, so the meeting was shifted to his Delhi area ranch home. Among those pictured who were still alive and well and attending Rotary lunches in 1976 were: Lowell Jessen, LeRoy Lee, Harold Lindblom, Elmer Larson, Reuben Hallner, Vernon Thornburg, Joe Debely, Ed Leduc, Quaile Norton, Tom Birchall, and Ken Monteith.*

In 1953-54, Turlock's membership remained at approximately 55, which was close to the seating capacity of the dining room of Hotel Carolyn. And although larger quarters were needed, members always voted against it. Most enjoyed walking to the meeting.

(When new members were given the opportunity to be paired with veteran members during Tina Gong's presidency in 2011-12, the author had the opportunity to be paired with veteran Rotarian Kirk Sperry. Over coffee at Latif's one afternoon, where conversation

covered a variety of topics, Kirk "lit up" as he reminisced about simpler times, including the days when walking down Main Street in the direction of Hotel Carolyn meant "picking up" fellow Rotarians along the way.)

When Rotary International celebrated its golden anniversary in 1955, information gleaned from the *Turlock Journal* showed the Turlock club with 66 members and Quaile Norton as president. LeRoy Lee was secretary, Jim Bainbridge, program chairman, and directors were Les Atherton, Abner Crowell, Dave Gustafson, and Jack Rickenbacher.

Some of the contributions being made in 1955 included the formation and sponsorship of a Sea Scout troop, the annual sponsorship of the Turlock High School football banquet, aid in the sponsorship of Turlock High School's Junior Statesmen, and contributions to the Red Cross, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, March of Dimes, Faith Home for Boys, as well as club participation in Rotary International's Foundation Fellowship, a cash scholarship for a foreign student at Modesto Junior College, sponsorship of boys' softball teams and Little League baseball teams, and contributions to PTA milk funds for needy children.

When Carl Hillberg was president in 1961-62, perfect attendance was emphasized strongly. Carl was well known for fines of 50 cents and missed meeting fines of \$2.50.

Dr. Everett Johnson was president in 1963-64, and during his term the meetings were moved from Hotel Carolyn to Divine Gardens.

Kirk Sperry served as president in 1964-65. During his term the number of Rotary International Clubs had increased to 11,808 with a combined membership of 554,500.

During Don "Cantaloupe" Smith's term in 1970-71, Turlock Rotary replaced one of the two trees in front of Turlock High School, rededicating the tree as a memorial to World War I veterans Rex Ish, Herman Eklund, and George Rodman.



Pictured in 1957 were Turlock Rotary Club committee members, left to right, Marv Critser, chairman, Quaile Norton and Les Atherton, working toward completion of the new "Welcome To Turlock" signs located at the north and south ends of the city on Highway 99. They were also hanging insignias of other clubs, including the Soroptimists, Exchangeites, and Lions.

Carl Muller was president when the Turlock club—94 members strong—celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1976. Special recognition was given the club by Rotarians Lowell Jessen, Stan Wilson, and Jim Lyons in the form of a 20-page special section dedicated to Rotary Club of Turlock. First President Frank Wells, then 92, was present for the festivities.

Five members who were present for the Golden Anniversary celebration forty years ago went on to become president of Rotary Club of Turlock in the years still to follow members today, they are:

Tom Watling	1977-78
LaMonte Thornburg	1980-81
Jim Shade	1981-82
Don Strand	1982-83
Bob Triebisch	1988-89



Frank Wells, 92, Turlock Rotary Club's first president, was honored by the club in April of 1975. As guest speaker at Divine Gardens, Wells "said the club actually started in 1925, and he served as president for three months before 1926, the founding date as presently recorded." Also pictured are Sheila Boydston, Chamber Roundup Queen of 1974, and Ed Leduc, chairman of the club's history committee.



Pictured are past presidents who were still active when Turlock Rotary Club celebrated its Golden Anniversary in 1976. Front row, left to right: E. J. "Manny" Soderstrom 1946-47, Hank Weiss 1941-42, Manny Serpa 1958-59, George Kreuder 1955-56, Warren Hollingsworth 1960-61, Ken Monteith 1949-50; back row, left to right: Ted Thompson 1962-63, Kirk Sperry 1964-65, Ivan Stinson 1974-75, Don Smith 1963-64, Dave Stenzel 1973-74, Bill Ahlem 1968-69, Oren Geiger 1966-67, Elmer Larson 1953-54, Tom Birchall 1952-53, Carl Hillberg 1961-62. Others not pictured, but still active members: Ed Leduc 1943-44, Rube Hallner 1944-45, Carl Peterson 1945-46, Quaile Norton 1954-55, Joe Debely 1959-60, Everett Johnson 1963-64, LeRoy Lee 1967-68, Joe Ulrich 1971-72, Dick Weaver 1972-73.



Turlock Rotarians, who also served as veterans of the U. S. military, gathered for this group photo taken in 1976.

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*Turlock Tribune archives*

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