

CLUB HISTORY

In 1926, Vero Beach was a small Florida boom town of 2,300 people who had the vision and determination to seek their fortune here despite hordes of mosquitoes and oppressive heat. It was complete with a rickety bridge across the Indian River and twenty odd trains a day on the F.E.C. Railroad. In the optimistic atmosphere of the time, a new Rotary Club was formed. Among other things, this Club has survived the collapse of the real estate boom in Florida, a national depression and a world war.

It was in late 1925 that preliminary talks about organizing a Rotary Club took place between Fred D. Bacon, a newly-arrived insurance man, and the Community Church Pastor Dr. C. H. Pettibone. Early the next year, meetings began on an informal basis and on May 28, 1926, the announcement was made that approval had been obtained for the new club. Nearly 100 people were on hand on the evening of June 9th, 1926 for a gala dinner at the Royal Park Inn for the presentation of the charter, number 2377, by H. E. Robinson, special representative of the sponsoring West Palm Beach Rotary Club.

The original 19 Charter Members were:

- Dr. C. H. Pettibone – Minister
- Arthur Fleck – Architect
- Lawrence Newman – Builder
- Tom E. Jun – Grocer
- Don Keffer – Druggist
- Joe Cox – Office Supplies
- Al Boyer – Plumber
- John J. Schumann – Newspaper Publisher
- Todd Reynolds – Advertising
- R. A. Gassman – Variety Retailing
- Bruce Bazier – Real Estate
- T. W. Radinsky – Electrician
- John Corsa, Sr. – Citrus Grower
- C. V. Williamson – Musician
- C. E. Cobb – Farmer
- Haskel Lebos – Clothing
- F. C. Doeschner – Hotel

- E. G. Thatcher – Chamber of Commerce
- Fred O. Bacon – Insurance

The last living charter member, J. J. Schumann, passed away in October of 1989.

The members of the early Club took the attendance requirement very seriously. Tom Radinsky and Tom Jun completed 1,000 weeks of perfect attendance in 1945, and celebrated the Silver Anniversary of Rotary in Vero Beach with 25 years of unbroken attendance. Among others with outstanding attendance records were Charles Jewett (who attended for 43 years without missing a meeting), and Ralph Sedgwick (who did not miss a meeting from the time he joined the Club in 1932 until his death in 1984 ... more than 52 years of perfect attendance). In fact, Ralph had better than perfect attendance. Anticipating a trip to Jacksonville on Children's Home Society business, he made up in advance for the Friday meeting that took place following his death.

The record holder in Vero Beach is Wes Carroll, who had 52 years of perfect attendance.

In its first year, the Club recorded eight consecutive weeks of 100 percent attendance. In October 1930, the Club won second place for attendance in all of Rotary International. Attendance for January 1935 averaged over 98 percent. In 1942, Vero Beach won second prize in the attendance contest at the R. I. convention in Toronto.

The Club first met at the Royal Park Inn, a new and elegant landmark of the town at that time. In the years that followed, meetings have been held in a number of locations, the second being the Community Church. The luncheon tab at that time was 50 cents, and the women of the church prepared and served the meals. Later, high school students were given time off to come and serve the luncheon which the women prepared. In 1932, in the depths of the great depression, times were hard for the Club and its members. The Club was unable to meet its semi-annual international assessment and had to request an extension of time. The dues were also reduced to \$1.00 per quarter. In 1936, the price of the Rotary luncheon skyrocketed 20% to 60 cents. In 1980, the lunch tab was \$5.00 at the Sheraton Regency. And by 1989, the tab had reached \$9.00 at the Vero Beach Inn, formerly Sheraton Regency.

The old Community Church was a handsome Spanish-style building, but it has been replaced by a more modern sanctuary. Similarly, the Royal Park Inn, which was also the scene of meetings in the 60's, and also a very handsome building, has been replaced by the modern Royal Park Condominium.

Other meeting places have included:

- Mac's Kitchen
- Windswept Hotel (at the present location of the Holiday Inn Oceanside)
- Parkway Hotel (now Old Court Square)
- Vero Beach Women's Club

- Masonic Lodge (where Rotarian and former restaurateur Ralph Galvin supervised the meal preparation)
- Del Mar Hotel (now a parking lot west of Indian River Federal)
- Riviera Restaurant
- The Hut (which became Bahama Joe's, and then was subsequently demolished)
- Holiday Inn Oceanside
- Ocean Grill
- Vero Beach Yacht Club
- Ramada Inn
- Driftwood Hotel (Cervantes Dining Room)
- Sheraton Regency Hotel
- Holiday Inn Oceanside
- Riomar Bay Yacht Club
- Quail Valley River Club

Our Club is now meeting at the Vero Beach Yacht Club, where we have been meeting since August 2013.

Following below is an outline of some of the community service projects with which our Club has been involved since the Club was established in 1926:

- One of the Club's first official acts in 1926 was to join with other local organizations in contributing to a **relief fund for sufferers in the flooded Mississippi Valley**.
- In 1928, the Club helped with the **formation of a junior baseball league**, and the following year began many years of **active work with the Boy Scouts when Troop 50 was organized under Rotary sponsorship** and leadership.
- During the 1930's, those attending Rotary Christmas parties brought **gifts to be distributed to needy families**.
- A **vocational library for Vero Beach High School** was established by the Club in 1937.
- Two years later the **Student Loan Fund** was adopted by Vero Beach Rotary. This revolving loan fund helped numerous college students over a period of many years.
- In 1941, a continuing vocational service program was started, with many **Club members speaking at the high school to acquaint students with vocations**. Essays on vocations were prepared by students and the best essays won cash prizes for their authors. The winners were guests of the Club during luncheon meetings.
- During the Second World War, Rotarians helped with the **blood bank and war bond drives**. Up to April 30, 1943, Vero Beach Rotary had sold \$65,150 worth of war bonds, double the Club's quota.
- Sponsorship of a **vision correction program for under-privileged children** was adopted in 1947. Funds for this and other projects were provided largely by the Club's First Annual Minstrel Show. By 1949, the third annual minstrel show netted \$1,100.
- When Rotarian Prescott Gardner offered to donate half the cost of a **new Youth Center Building** if the community would raise the other half, Rotary led the way in a successful

fund campaign. The building was completed in the early 1950's.

- In 1952 and 1953, **the Wheel Club, later to become Interact, was formed** at Vero Beach High School. During these years, funds were provided for purchase of eye glasses and dental care for needy children. The vocational library at the high school was greatly expanded by the Club.
- In the early 1950's, the Club contributed \$1,000 for a cabin at the district Boy Scout camp, and the idea of **a Community Chest or United Fund had its beginnings among Rotarians.**
- In 1960, a successful project was conducted which saw Rotarians **delivering Four-Way Test plaques to businesses** throughout Vero Beach. The meaning of the test was explained to businessmen, and their cooperation in using the test in conducting their business was requested.
- Work was begun in the early 1960's on a project to **raise funds for a community swimming pool**, the monies later being used for the YMCA pool facilities.
- In 1961, the **Pleasant Ridge school for exceptional children received a face-lift** including painting and repairs to the exterior by Rotarians.
- The **Scholarship Foundation of Indian River County was started by our Club.** Dan Richardson and other members of the Vero Beach Rotary Club gave birth to the concept of a locally-funded scholarship organization in 1964. Seeing a need for a dedicated effort, we partnered with Dollars for Scholars, a fledgling foundation headquartered in New England and affiliated with Scholarship America. The national organization offered a guiding umbrella, but let local leaders set their own direction and keep the dollars they raised to benefit their own local scholars. Through hard work, dedication and, most importantly, a very generous community, the local organization grew into one of the largest Dollars for Scholars' chapters in the country, supporting over 50 students each year. However, in 2013, Scholarship America imposed new centralized systems and process requirements for all Dollars for Scholars' chapters. Concluding that these changes would adversely impact the core mission of supporting local students with local dollars, Dollars for Scholars disaffiliated from the national organization and changed its name to Scholarship Foundation of Indian River County. Our Club continues to support this program today, providing many thousands of dollars for the college education of our youth in Indian River County.
- In 1967, our Club became actively involved with the **RSVP program of Rotary International** by sending our first student to Europe. Other young people have, in ensuing years, received a year's study abroad while staying with a Rotary family. In turn, foreign students have been hosted in Vero Beach by families of Rotarians.
- The **Vero Beach Mutual Concert Association** and the **Citizens Scholarship Association** were projects established by the Rotary Club of Vero Beach in the late 60's, also providing active service to the community.
- During this timeframe, our Club also provided generous **support to the Girl Scouts**, such as covering maintenance, utilities and insurance expenses for their Little Hut.
- Other projects of the '60's and '70's included sending four cartons of **school books to Africa**, providing **financial aid to a hospital in Bangladesh**, **operating a welfare fund** in cooperation with the county welfare department, and **donating books to the county library** by Rotarians on their birthdays.

- The first **Rotary Home Show** was held in 1970 and was the Club's primary fundraising project until 1980.
- Rotary of Vero Beach **designed and funded a picnic shelter at South Beach** in 1971, and in 1973 gave nearly \$2,000 for the purchase of the **"jaws of life" device for the fire department for rescuing persons** trapped in wrecked automobiles. It was the largest single contribution ever made to the fire department.
- On September 26, 1972, our Club sponsored **the formation of the Rotary Club of Vero Beach West**. The Charter members of the new Club were comprised of members of our Club. The Charter of the new Club was presented at a gala banquet at the Holiday Inn West. Rotary West became very active in service to the community. In 1989, the **West Club sponsored the formation of the Rotary Club of Vero Beach Sunrise**. The West Club subsequently became the Treasure Coast Club, and then eventually dissolved after the members elected to become members in clubs that it had sponsored or in other existing IRC Rotary Clubs. Also, in 1987, the **Rotary Club of Vero Beach sponsored the Rotary Club of Sebastian**.
- Our Club **started a Rotary Homestay Program in 1975**. The successful and long-lasting program is ongoing today, and we celebrated its **49th anniversary in January 2024**. The first Homestay was initiated primarily due to the proximity of Rotary's International Assembly, which was then held in Boca Raton. Every year since 1975, local Rotarians from all five IRC clubs invite District Governors-Elect from other countries to stop in Vero Beach on their way to the international convention now held in San Diego. Between ten to twenty visiting DGE's and their partners stay as guests in local Rotarians' homes, and visit our local attractions while enjoying the friendship and hospitality typical of Rotarians everywhere. Resulting friendships have lasted a lifetime.
- Other projects in the 1970's included providing funds and supervision for **construction of a baseball field for the youth of Gifford**, and the **purchase of a lighted sign for listing coming events at the Vero Beach Community Center**.
- In 1976, the Club sent **relief funds to those who suffered devastating losses from an earthquake in Guatemala**.
- In 1977, the Club commenced its first **Musical Extravaganza fundraiser at the Riverside Theatre**.
- 1979-80, Rotary International's 75th Anniversary was a busy year for the Club. The Club sponsored a **nursing scholarship at Indian River Community College** and **donated eight paddle fans to Middle Seven School** which helped in days of energy crisis. In addition, the Club contributed **uniforms for the High School Band** and **supported one student to go to Washington, D.C.**, for the 10th Congressional Intern Program. Aside from these local projects, the Club **donated \$1,485 to the Rotary International 3-H Program** (3-H stands for "Health, Hunger and Humanity").
- The Club increased its assistance to the community in 1980-81 with donations including a sophisticated **\$2,500 Kinetron exercise machine purchased for the Sunshine Physical Therapy Center**. This year, several "ladies days" were held and background music at the beginning of meetings was implemented at that time.
- A **Student of the Month program** was started in 1981-82, recognizing outstanding students from Vero Beach High School and St. Edward's Upper School. The Club

nominated its first candidate, Donna Milonavich, as a successful candidate for a Rotary Foundation scholarship. She studied the flute in England.

- Two projects were started in 1984-85: the **food concession at the annual Vero Beach Art Club show** and **monthly recognition of outstanding school teachers**. Other events that year included a **river front cleanup** and a Club auction of donated items.
- Establishment of a scholarship fund and celebration of the Club's 60th anniversary highlighted 1985-86. That year the **system was started for prepaying meals** on a quarterly basis, eliminating congestion at the check-in table and providing the Club with an increased revenue source.
- A **soup kitchen in Gifford** was started under Rotary leadership in 1987-88, a project which attracted much community support. A **golf tournament** became the Club's major fundraising project that year.
- **Contributions** were made annually in the '80's **to the Irwin Waite Penny Fund** and to youth facilities such as the **Florida Sheriff's Association Boys Ranch and Girls Villa**. The Club also remained in close contact with the Interact Club and provides it with partial financial support.
- For many years since this time period, the Club has participated in and rendered **support to the Special Olympics**, a track and field meet for the handicapped. **Donations were made to Rotary's Club Florida** and for **building cabins and other facilities for the Reaching Out to Cancer Kids (ROCK Camp) Program**.
- **Our Club welcomed its first women members in March 1989**. Realtor Linda Hayes, Accountant Linda Parrish and Travel Advisor Trish Scattergood were inducted together in a ceremony attended by District Governor Phil Gaarder. Their respective sponsors were Club President Bruce McIntyre, Club Treasurer Reese Brackins and Past Club President Keith Wright-Osment.
- In 1994-95, Past District Governor Wil Coudriet and his member/wife Sylvia were instrumental in organizing community fundraising projects for youth – which, in 1997, lead to the first annual **Rotary Salute to Youth in the Arts**. This program nurtured and showcased the unique talents of community youth via a day-long celebration at Riverside Theatre and Park. Between 2001-2004, the one-day celebration was held at the Indian River Mall, and between 2005-2009 the Salute To Youth had a stage at the Hibiscus Festival in downtown Vero Beach. Although attendance was free, our Club successfully sold programs for fundraising.
- On February 23, 2005, the five Rotary Clubs of Indian River County joined together to break ground on a fountain on the northeast corner of 14th Avenue and 21st Street in Downtown Vero Beach. The **Centennial Fountain was built to commemorate Rotary International's 100th anniversary** and revive the original Rotary fountain built on the same site in early 1931. The first Fountain was a public drinking fountain made of coquina rock, erected by the Rotary Club of Vero Beach as a tribute to Charles H. Pettibone, Doctor of Divinity and retired Congregational Minister from Denver, Colorado. Dr. Pettibone was instrumental in the organization of both the Community Church and the first Rotary club in Vero Beach, serving as the first minister of the Community Church in 1924 and as the first president of the Rotary Club of Vero Beach, chartered on June 9, 1926. He remained a member of the Club until his passing in May 1929. A dedication of the original fountain,

faced with a plaque honoring Dr. Pettibone, took place on March 20, 1931. The Fountain served faithfully for over thirty years. It was demolished in July 1962 due to the deterioration of the coquina rock and disuse. In its place, a new plaque reading “C.H. Pettibone, D.D.” was placed on a small stone marker. This original plaque is a permanent part of the Centennial Fountain on the east side of the water basin.

- In 2006 and 2007, our Club was the sponsor of **two Habitat for Humanity homes**. Our Club’s Foundation provided the funding for the houses, and many hours were volunteered over several months by a dozen of our members to build these two homes.
- In 2013, our Club combined efforts with other Rotary Clubs in our community to erect strategically located signs that promote water quality in the lagoon in and around Vero Beach. The program is called the **Rotary Initiative for Submerged Seagrass Awareness (RISSA)**. Hundreds and hundreds of oyster shells were affixed to mats, which were placed in the lagoon near the Moorings in Vero Beach. As live oysters spawn, the eggs attach to the oyster shells and create more oysters. And, with each new oyster filtering as many as 50 gallons of water daily, the project proved to be quite successful – both in improving the water clarity and quality, and in educating the public.
- Commencing in 2015 and in cooperation with the Rotary Club of Vero Beach Sunrise, our Club started to help fund a project for several years – which provided **dental services to the those in need in the Dominican Republic** (and some of our members have travelled there to provide assistance).
- Our Club hosted the **Twisted Tail Ribfest**, raising at least \$100,000 of funds to benefit our local community between 2016-2018. Popular professional “Ribbers” erected enormous marketing backdrop structures to attract upwards of 10,000+ people to the venue each year (which was first held at the Indian River County Fairgrounds, and then at Riverside Park for the last two years). This time-intensive 3-day event was abandoned after 3 years due to the lack of volunteers and given the majority of our Club’s members requesting to focus on environmental initiatives at that time.
- The results of a member survey in 2018 supported the idea of the Club focusing on environmental initiatives and spreading the word about our Club. Two committees were formed, one being the **Engagement Committee** which created **TEAMS** among members to better help with Club initiatives. The second committee was the **Marketing Committee**, which: (a) created the Club’s first professional brochure, (b) designed Rotary Meeting Directional Signs, (c) enhanced the Club’s website, (d) created new membership applications, and (e) established a permanent address, phone number and email address for the Club.
- In 2018, we partnered with the United Way of IRC to erect three **“Little Free Library” stations** around Vero Beach to provide a source of free reading for people of all ages.
- **Generous donations** were raised in 2018-19: (i) to raise awareness of mental health in the community by co-sponsoring a film program, (ii) for victims of Hurricane Florence, (iii) to an IRSC student who lost her home in a fire, (iv) by member volunteers via the Rotary Has Heart food drive initiative for indigent veteran families, and (v) to families in Bolivia in need of financial assistance for their children requiring cleft lip/palate surgeries (tapping into the District and Rotary International Grant Programs).

- In 2019, our Club became the **founding partner of the Rotary Partnership with Hope Resale Boutique** where 100% of all thrift store proceeds were distributed by all Indian River Rotary Clubs in their local communities.
- In 2019 our Club became one of the **original partners of the Clean Water Coalition of IRC**, working on initiatives with non-profit agencies to help improve water quality and restore the shoreline in our community.
- Also in early 2019, our Club **partnered with Publix and the Indian River County Schools** to supply every school in the county with dedicated plastic bag receptacles. And, in conjunction with IRC Recycling, our Club supplied large receptacles to the business community of Vero Beach – encouraging and **facilitating the recycling of plastic film/wrap by businesses**.
- In 2020-21, the Club attended meetings via Zoom due to COVID, and constitution learning booklets were distributed to 5th Graders throughout IRC.
- In 2020-2022, a Reverse Raffle Fundraiser was implemented, which successfully raised funds for several 501(c)3 non-profits in our community. Members bought or sold tickets, and the ticket numbers were called out until only 5 uncalled ticket numbers remained. The final 5 ticket holders could either split the net proceeds in the pot (after donations and expenses), or vote to continue having the numbers called for one winner.

During the last 20 years, the Club has organized many fundraising activities, which in turn has allowed our Club to continue contributing to many different local charities as beneficiaries of our events. Some of these fundraisers have included The Nautical Flea Market (2010-2014), the Hollywood Gala (2015), the Twisted Tail Ribfest (2016-2018), a Reverse Raffle (2020-2022), and the Rotary Kids Triathlon (2023 to present).

TODAY

Our Club (*Vero's 1st Club*) continues to be very active with many different projects that benefit our community, including the following examples:

- The **Vero Beach Rotary Charities Foundation was formed** in 1992 as our Club's 501(c)3 organization. VBRCF began with \$12,500 in assets, and has continued to benefit and serve non-profit organizations in our community every year since its formation. A Club tradition is to have Club members donate funds on birthdays and anniversaries, and many of our Rotarians continue to generously comply. Today, our Foundation has over \$300,000 in assets and has made grants to 50+ local charitable organizations totaling at least \$350,000. Oversight of Foundation funds is provided by a Board of Trustees, all of whom are members of and elected by our Club.
- Each year since 2000, our Club has **sponsored at least two high school students in the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards**. RYLA offers the students an offsite intensive experience to develop their leadership skills while having fun and making connections.
- A **vocational program with Indian River State College (IRSC)** was established in 2017, which is a mentorship program for select, high achieving students. It connects them to business leaders in our Club and community to help them advance their careers. We provide

scholarships to IRSC for their Student Expo, and assist them with their **Speed Networking Program**. Rotarians from our Club also give “talks” to the students in select classes.

- We help organize **Rotary Oktoberfest – an annual fundraising event** organized and attended by all Rotary Clubs in Indian River County. The purpose of the event is to raise funds for Polio Plus, thereby contributing to the efforts of Rotary International to completely eradicate polio around the world, among other diseases. Since 2009, the IRC Rotary Clubs have **raised almost \$100,000 for polio eradication**.
- Since 2020, our Club has continued to provide turkey and/or fixings annually at Thanksgiving and **gift baskets for indigent senior citizens** at Christmas (averaging 40 seniors each year at either Meals on Wheels or Pelican Gardens) – as well as **gift cards for children** who would not otherwise receive gifts at Christmas.
- Our Club continues to **support the initiatives of the Clean Water Coalition** of Florida (CCC), with the latest one in 2022-23 when we teamed with CCC, the City of Vero Beach and Sunrise Rotary Club to plant four species of salt marsh plants along the 2,000 linear-foot shoreline in a shallow drainage canal connected to the Indian River Lagoon at the north end of Riverside Park in Vero Beach. The purpose was to revegetate the canal with a salt marsh perimeter, offering filtration of stormwater runoff as well as **water quality and overall ecosystem improvement**. Signage and an educational board were designed and erected to educate the public.
- Since 2023, our Club has donated its time and financial support to **Wreaths Across America**, distributing wreaths on the gravesites of veterans in IRC.
- Our Club’s inaugural **Rotary Kids Triathlon** was held at the Victor Hart Sr. Community Enhancement Complex/Gifford Aquatic Center on Dec. 2, 2023. This exciting community event sold out to 200 children between the ages of 6-13, who participated in a fun, safe multi-sport Swim-Bike-Run event (with varying distances depending on age). **No child is turned away for any reason, be it cost, skill level, disability or lack of equipment**.

All of the projects mentioned in this report constitute many years of dedication and service by our Club Rotarians. The Rotary Club of Vero Beach is truly an integral part of the community.