



90th Anniversary photo (2015) – left to right: Judy Brown-Wescott, Teresa Tillson, Vicky Langer, Wendy Sivanich, Laurie Williams, Vicki Dilley, Jane Fenton, Elizabeth Child, Jayne Hager Dee, Karen Allawala, Jean Wakely, Michelle Lasswell, Jan Stevens, Hannah Puczko

BY BETH FORKNER MOE

Women in Northfield Rotary Club

**Making a
Difference in the
Community and
Around the World**

When attorney Paul Harris and several business colleagues gathered in Chicago in 1905, their goals were to share ideas, build relationships and work to solve community problems. They called their fledging organization Rotary, since they rotated locations for each meeting. They probably had no idea that 112 years later more than 1.2 million people internationally – in more than 35,000 clubs – would gather on a regular basis with one goal in mind: to better the world. Its motto is simple, yet powerful: “Service Above Self.”

Several years later, then-Rotary President Arch Klumpf proposed setting up a foundation/endowment with the goal of “doing good in the world.” The first gift, from the Rotary Club of Kansas City, MO, was \$26.50. Since that time, the Foundation has spent more than \$3-billion on life-changing programs around the world, most notably on polio prevention. Through its efforts (in partnership with other organizations), polio has almost been eradicated.

This year, the Foundation marks its Centen-

nial, a cause for celebration and gratitude from individuals, organizations and global communities. Jean Wakely, Northfield Rotary Club’s incoming president, is delighted to serve during the Centennial year and delighted to be able to be of service in a club that was not always open to women.

For its first seven decades, Rotary (like other service clubs) was for men only. Women were first admitted as members in 1987, which signaled the beginning of a new era and a new burst of energy. Today, more than 20% of Rotarians are women; in some clubs – including Northfield – that number is much higher. Northfield’s Rotary Club boasts more than 40% female membership in a club of 138 people.

Northfield’s female Rotarians are a force to be reckoned with. They are active, committed and involved. The club has had five female presidents in the past 17 years, including this year’s president Michelle Lasswell. Wakely will be number six.

Lasswell has been a Rotarian for six years, joining her husband as a member. “I like the local and international angle. We make a difference all over the world,” she said. “I know so many people because of Rotary, and developed special relationships with people. The meetings are fun, and we have great people.”

Incoming president Wakely joined Rotary after her daughter came back after an exchange year in Poland. “(Rotary) took such good care of our daughter,” she said. “I liked the group so much, I

visited their meetings several times, and ended up joining.” Currently the membership chair, she is looking forward to her year as president and will represent the club at the 100th international conference in Atlanta this June.

Northfield’s Rotary Club is notable in several respects; it is the second-largest club in its district, smaller only than South St. Paul, but ahead of Rochester. Additionally, it has had the most foreign exchange students (both those leaving Northfield for a year and those coming in from other countries) than any Rotary club in the world.

Jan Stevens, Northfield’s first female Rotarian (she joined in 1994), has played a huge part in the success of the club’s Youth Exchange Program. The program is why she first became involved in Rotary and why she is still passionate about the club. Her then-17-year-old son didn’t want to go to college right away, she said, but she told him he had to have a plan. At that time, they didn’t know about Youth Exchange, so she and her family got involved in another exchange program.

They later learned about Rotary’s Youth Exchange, and she joined the club. “I fell into it,” she said. “I love it and still love it.” This year, Northfield is hosting six students, and 11 local students are living in other countries. There have been as many as 22 students involved during any given year. The club is so well-known for its love of the exchange program that they’ve become the “default” club to host if other clubs are not able to find families to host incoming students, Stevens said.

“We get outstanding kids,” she said. “We feel fortunate that we’re there.”

All three of her children have been exchange students and have gone on to be very successful adults who are passionate about international affairs.

“I can’t tell you enough about what Rotary does for kids,” Stevens said. “It allows them to meet people, learn various languages and gain the ability to meet anyone, anywhere.”

Vicki Dilley, who joined the club in 2007, has also been a significant part of the program. Among other roles she has taken on, she teaches the ins and outs of Youth Exchange to other clubs and districts.

Another program that the Northfield club is renowned for is the

Jesse James Bike Tour, which helps raise money for the Mill Towns Trail. Peggy Prowe, who also joined in 1994, is one of the main advocates, cheerleaders and organizers of this ride which boasts more than 1,000 riders annually.

Prowe used to think Rotary was simply a businessman’s club. “That’s not true,” she said. “People from non-profits, the school district, the hospital and the city are also involved. For me, it’s a valuable way to get to talk with people about (the trail) and pedestrian safety. The ride is an activity that helps the club have a sense of community.”

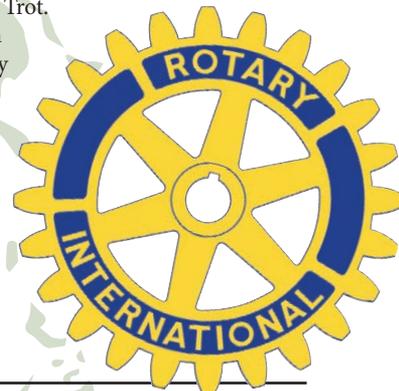
When she first joined, Prowe served six years as program chair, making sure there was a speaker every week. “I like knowing everyone, and the payoff is having interesting conversation every Thursday noon,” she said.

The “Service Above Self” motto is not just words to Rotarians and their clubs. In Northfield alone, the list of projects undertaken for the good of the community is long. Projects are often undertaken in conjunction with other clubs. Current international projects are Polio Plus and a clean water project in Guatemala. Local projects include donation of books to children, Musical Park in Way Park, Thursday’s Table, Meals on Wheels, Skate Board Park, Mentorship at The Key (Union of Youth), High School Ethics Program, Pavilion and benches at the new Soccer Fields, YMCA, Northfield Library and Booker Mobile donations, and the Mills Town Trail.

Funding for all these projects comes from the Jesse James Bike Tour and the Thanksgiving morning Turkey Trot.

“There is such a power of women in this international organization,” Wakely said. “We’ve changed over the years from a businessman’s club to a group searching for strong leadership in the community. We’re continuing to show the area that Rotary is a growing, thriving and working leadership organization.”

Beth Forkner Moe is the editor of Southern Minn. Girlfriends magazine.



ROTARY INFO

(Source: Rotary.org)

The motto of Rotary International:

“Service Above Self”

Guiding principles

These principles have been developed over the years to provide Rotarians with a strong, common purpose and direction. They serve as a foundation for our relationships with each other and the action we take in the world.

Object of Rotary

The Object of Rotary is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise and, in particular, to encourage and foster:

FIRST: The development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service;

SECOND: High ethical standards in business and professions; the recognition of the worthiness of all useful occupations; and the dignifying of each Rotarian’s occupation as an opportunity to serve society;

THIRD: The application of the ideal of service in each Rotarian’s personal, business, and community life;

FOURTH: The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a

world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service.

The Four-Way Test

The Four-Way Test is a nonpartisan and nonsectarian ethical guide for Rotarians to use for their personal and professional relationships. The test has been translated into more than 100 languages, and Rotarians recite it at club meetings:

Of the things we think, say or do:

- Is it the TRUTH?
- Is it FAIR to all concerned?
- Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
- Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

Avenues of Service

We channel our commitment to service at home and abroad through five Avenues of Service, which are the foundation of club activity.

Club Service focuses on making clubs strong. A thriving club is anchored by strong relationships and an active membership development plan.

Vocational Service calls on every Rotarian to work with integrity and contribute their expertise to the problems and needs of society. Learn more in An Introduction to Vocational Service and the Code of Conduct.

Community Service encourages every Rotarian to find ways to improve the quality of life for people

in their communities and to serve the public interest. Learn more in Communities in Action: A Guide to Effective Projects and this Community Service presentation (PPT).

International Service exemplifies our global reach in promoting peace and understanding. We support this service avenue by sponsoring or volunteering on international projects, seeking partners abroad, and more.

Youth Service recognizes the importance of empowering youth and young professionals through leadership development programs such as Rotaract, Interact, Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, and Rotary Youth Exchange.

More information:

Northfield Rotary Club:

Meets Thursdays, noon-1:15 p.m. at United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall
Non-member lunch is \$10. Those considering membership may attend three free lunches to check out the club.
www.northfieldrotary.org
FB: northfieldrotary

For information about Rotary International:

www.rotary.org

For information about other clubs in Southern Minnesota:

www.rotary5960.org