

History of the OXFORD ROTARY CLUB

In the early fall of 1937, a group of Oxford business and professional men and members of the Oxford Business Men's Club were guests of the Romeo Rotary Club at a meeting held in the Colonial House. Ed Jacobs, a member of the sponsoring Romeo Club and who was special representative of District Governor Roy Shaw, aided by George Bohnsack of the Highland Park Club, Steve Meads and H.B. Johnson, Sr. signed up enough members to initiate the start of the Oxford Rotary Club. On November 3, 1937, an organizational meeting was held in the basement of the Oxford Bank – now the home of the N.E. Oakland Co. Historical Society – and the following officers were elected to serve for the balance of the Rotary year: Dr. G.E. (Steve) Meads, President; Ray Allen, Vice President; Frank Olive, Treasurer; Ed Hagerman, Secretary; Harold Gark, George Tunstead and Joe Achten, Directors. H.B. Johnson, Sr. completed the secretary's term when it was vacated by the original secretary.

The club held its Charter Night on January 20, 1938. The affair took place in the auditorium of the old high school located at the north end of the village and was attended by 350 Rotarians from surrounding area clubs. Prior to this date, the charter for the Oxford Club was approved on December 17, 1937, by Rotary International. One of the high-lights of the program was music by the famous Oxford High School Band under the direction of charter member, Ken Bovee.

Oxford Rotary had and still has the distinction of being the only Rotary Club to sponsor another club before receiving its own charter. Through the efforts of Steve Meads, H.B. Johnson, Sr., George Bohnsack, Ken Bovee and Herb Rahm, the Orion Club was formed and received its charter dated January 25, 1938.

Less than a year later Oxford sponsored the Milford Club with Steve Meads acting as District Governor Ray G. Pumb's special representative.

Oxford Rotary's primary project in the early years was aiding and assisting the handicapped children. Money to support the program was raised by a number of activities. Among them were stage performances such as: "The Shooting of Dan McGrew", "Rotary Rookies" and minstrel shows. The first two were written and directed by Earl Mayville, a local H.S. English instructor. These performances were usually held on two successive evenings and played to packed houses.

In the 1940's, Rotary – Farmers Night was sponsored at the suggestion of member Bob Mackey. Later the farmers reciprocated and hosted Rotary.

The Junior Rotarian Project originated in the second year of the club. Two senior class boys were invited to attend meetings for one month. In the course of a year, every boy had an opportunity to meet for a month with Rotarians. The selection, now, is made by a committee and can be either boys or girls and they are limited to one meeting.

Members in the early years of the club enjoyed an active participation in sports with trips to hockey, football, horse racing events and softball games with Orion Rotary and Oxford Lions. Social activities included ladies' night picnics and

teacher receptions. The picnics are still included in the yearly program.

Annual meetings were held with the local Lions Club. Each club alternated as host and the night's entertainment usually included card games.

The club has initiated or has been actively involved in a number of youth activities: college loan and scholarship funds, band and chorus scholarships; donations to "little league", soccer teams, scouts; a program to honor academic achievement for H.S. students; donations to Camp Oakland, and sponsoring boy's state students. Cash grants have been given to the village and township for park improvements. One successful venture was the "greening" of the village. Rotarians planted trees and shrubs throughout the village and the club, in 1976, received a "Keeping Michigan Beautiful" citation from the State of Michigan. Not to be omitted were donations to the "Vet's" building for sandblasting and a new flag.

With the decreasing number of area farmers and the increasing number of seniors, Rotary annually sponsors a Christmas party for the area senior citizens. The event is exceptionally well-attended and enthusiastically received by those attending. In keeping with change, the club, in 1981, inaugurated a "Business and Industrial Day", with a luncheon welcoming the industrial leaders of the area. This has been a continuing program and is also well attended and received.

Funds have been allocated for other purposes and projects. In cooperation with the school district, a special grant was made available for retraining under-employed and unemployed persons. Money has been sent to Rotary International for the "Polio-plus" program in addition to the funds for Foundation program and donations to R.I. for a new school for aborigines of Australia.

The most recent and ambitious program was the allocating of "seed money" to the village to encourage downtown development. The original committee, "Focus Oxford" included several Rotarians. The outcome of the committee's efforts was the formation of the present active D.D.A. in Oxford.

Meeting places for Rotary have been few but varied. These included the Colonial House, the two Garden restaurants, the Congregational Church and the Veteran's building. Meals at the Veteran's building were first prepared by Mrs. Nash and Mrs. Carlson. Later Jim Bushman catered the meals. In the last decade, Oxford Hills has become the home of Oxford Rotary.

Funds are necessary to originate and sustain the various projects. Rotarians have been actors, have sold fruit cakes and Christmas trees, fined themselves at meetings, tried auction and travel series and sponsored calf scrambles. Currently the "biggie" is the cash (formerly, the cruise) raffle.

In the program of the 25th anniversary of Oxford Rotary, the following statement was made: "There are many other activities that the club has devised and carried out during the past twenty-five years and, no doubt, there will be many more in the years to come with the hopes that Oxford and the surrounding area will be a more pleasant place to live."

This statement is still apropos as Oxford Rotary heads for its 60th birthday. History provided by: Duane Anderson, Roger Oberg, George Hesketh