

History of the Rotary Club of San Marino

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Seventeen San Marino business and professional men met at Pierre's Restaurant, across Huntington Drive from City Hall, to organize a Rotary Club serving the community. The first meeting was on February 3, 1939, 34 years after Chicago lawyer Paul Harris started the service club concept. On April 12 that year, the San Marino Rotary Club received its official charter as club number 5010, with the Alhambra Rotarians sponsoring the new group.

The local Rotary grew slowly, particularly during World War II. Club members organized scrap metal and household grease collections and entertained soldiers at local army hospitals. The Thursday luncheon meetings continued at Pierre's until that popular dinner house closed. Rotarians then gathered at Woody and Eddy's restaurant at the eastern border, with membership holding in the mid-30's for thirty years. The club took on annual projects such as Easter sunrise services and egg hunts in Lacy Park, Christmas decorations at streetcar stations, and toy drives for underprivileged children. In 1949, members joined to help the press and to support the Fiscus family when little Kathy Fiscus fell into an abandoned well, bringing the first remote television news coverage. During the Korean War, Rotary families filled scores of boxes with foods and warm clothing for our GIs.

Thirty years after its founding, with a group still numbering in the thirties, San Marino Rotary moved to a larger meeting place at the San Marino Woman's Clubhouse. At the same time, the Rotarians took on additional projects, both through their international organization and in the community. Membership doubled, then nearly doubled again, with new members attracted to the idea of serving others through the International Foundation and the local San Marino Rotary Charities. Each year, every member donates funds, then gives time, to support both nonprofit causes. When the international rules changed to permit female Rotarians, the local club was quick to include outstanding women as members, joining other San Marino school and city officials, business owners and professionals, in the Thursday meetings.

With stronger membership, local Rotarians took on bigger projects, from the town's glorious 4th of July parade to resettling refugees from wars, providing public safety materials and instruction in Guatemala, sponsoring postgraduate students in overseas studies as Ambassadorial Scholars, and raising thousands of dollars each year to combat polio and other childhood diseases. When something needs to be done around San Marino, it's often Rotarians who do it—serving at the high school's Grad Night, joining local commissions and boards, gathering aid for destitute families, bringing supplies to Skid Row projects, or sponsoring junior high and high school leadership and teacher-support programs. San Marino Rotary has published a thick history of its worthy projects, but members know they begin anew each year in serving others at home and around the world.