

HISTORY

Paul Harris

“WHATEVER ROTARY MAY MEAN TO US, TO THE WORLD IT WILL BE KNOWN BY THE RESULTS IT ACHIEVES.”

—PAUL P. HARRIS

Our 1.2 million-member organization started with the vision of one man—Paul P. Harris. The Chicago attorney formed one of the world’s first service organizations, the Rotary Club of Chicago, on 23 February 1905 as a place where professionals with diverse backgrounds could exchange ideas and form meaningful, lifelong friendships. Rotary’s name came from the group’s early practice of rotating meetings among the offices of each member.

OUR ONGOING COMMITMENT

Rotarians have not only been present for major events in history—we’ve been a part of them. From the beginning, three key traits have remained strong throughout Rotary:

We’re truly international. Only 16 years after being founded, Rotary had clubs on six continents. Today we’re working together from around the globe both digitally and in-person to solve some of our world’s most challenging problems.

We persevere in tough times. During WWII, Rotary clubs in Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, and Japan were forced to disband. Despite the risks, many continued to meet informally and following the war’s end, Rotary members joined together to rebuild their clubs and their countries.

Our commitment to service is ongoing. We began our fight against polio in 1979 with a project to immunize 6 million children in the Philippines. By 2012, only three countries remain polio-endemic—down from 125 in 1988.

NOTABLE ROTARIANS

Rotarians are your neighbors, your community leaders and some of the world's greatest history-makers:

Warren G. Harding, U.S. president

Jean Sibelius, Finnish composer

Dr. Charles H. Mayo, co-founder of Mayo Clinic

Guglielmo Marconi, Italian inventor of the wireless radio and Nobel laureate

Thomas Mann, German novelist and Nobel laureate

Friedrich Bergius, German chemist and Nobel laureate

Admiral Richard E. Byrd, American explorer

Jan Masaryk, foreign minister of Czechoslovakia

H.E. Soleiman Frangieh, president of Lebanon

Dianne Feinstein, U.S. senator

Manny Pacquiao, Filipino world-champion boxer and congressman

Richard Lugar, U.S. senator

Frank Borman, American astronaut

Edgar A. Guest, American poet and journalist

Sir Harry Lauder, Scottish entertainer

Franz Lehár, Austrian composer

Lennart Nilsson, Swedish photographer

James Cash Penney, founder of JC Penney Co.

Carlos Romulo, UN General Assembly president

Sigmund Sternberg, English businessman and philanthropist

Ready to make history with us? Get involved.

Visit My Rotary to learn more about our history