

A Brief History

The Rotary Club of Berkeley began in February, 1916. The club was sponsored by Oakland #3 with the urging and support of the District Governor H. J. Brunnier, a member of San Francisco #2. Twenty-one local merchants and professional men became charter members. The Club had more than 50 members by the end of that first year.

Promoting business interests was the initial goal of Berkeley Rotary. Soon, community interests, service to assist individuals and local groups and promoting the ideals of Rotary International became the reasons to become a Rotarian.

One of the first projects was to influence prompt and effective action to "clean up" the movies for the children. Thus Saturday afternoon "matinees for kids" began in Berkeley and was quickly adopted by other cities across the United States.

Other projects of the Rotary Club of Berkeley have included:

- Collection of 8,000 pairs of shoes for children in war-torn countries following World War I.
- Collection of books, on several occasions, sent to Africa, South America and to Israel.
- Published 50,000 copies of a "Guide Book for Parents & Youth." These were distributed throughout the Berkeley School System in 1962.
- Established Berkeley-Sakai, Japan, affiliation in 1966 which became an annual student exchange for many years. Adult "goodwill" visits between the cities were also coordinated by the affiliation.
- Recognized that communication to the members and to the community is important. Newsletter "**Revolutions**" has been published since 1916. Members the weekly newsletter by email. **The Rotarian**, published monthly by Rotary International (R.I.) is sent to all Berkeley Rotarians.
- Organized the Service Club Council in Berkeley in 1926 to coordinate efforts of all clubs in the city, to exchange ideas and avoid duplication of efforts by the various organizations.
- Service Club Council established the "Benjamin Ide Wheeler Award" in 1928 to name "Berkeley's Most Useful Citizen." Given biannually, this award is now presented by the Berkeley Community Fund.
- Raised funds to build the **Berkeley Art and Garden Center** in observance of the Club's 50th Anniversary in 1965.
- Established an **International Peace Grove** in Tilden Park in 1955 to mark the 50th Anniversary of R.I. A tree is dedicated each year to the individual, world-wide, and deemed to have contributed outstanding effort towards World Peace.
- Berkeley Rotary also donated funds to plant 500 redwood trees opposite the merry-go-round in Tilden Park.

- Since 1938, Berkeley Rotary has sponsored the East Bay-Reno Train Trip. Rotarians from all East Bay Clubs meet with Reno Rotary Club in the largest Inner-City meeting in the world, following the spectacular train trip through the Sierra.
- New Rotary Clubs in neighboring cities of Richmond, Albany, El Cerrito and Lafayette have been sponsored by the Rotary Club of Berkeley.
- The Berkeley Rotary Endowment was established in 1981, to assist the Club in providing monetary support for a wide variety of community needs.
- Provided funds to film, "**Secretariat**", explaining the operation of R.I. headquarters in Evanston, IL. This film was distributed world-wide.
- During the 1987-88 Rotary year, Berkeley Rotarians pledged over US \$85,000 towards "Polio-Plus." Polio Plus is an effort by Rotary International to eradicate polio and other childhood diseases from the world. R.I. raised nearly US \$300 million world-wide to assist in this effort.
- Participate annually in the Group Study Exchange, a vocational exchange between countries. This is sponsored by the R.I. Foundation. Hosting of the foreign visitors involves local Rotary Club members giving these guests an overview of their vocations and points of interest in their communities.
- The Scholarship Program of R.I. is the largest and best known of its type. Berkeley Rotary is a leader in District 5160 in the recommendation of scholars and seeing them approved for the scholarship by the District.
- The Rotary Club of Berkeley provided leadership in organizing and funding the YMCA Building Fund Drive in 1991-92. During this the 75th Anniversary of the Club more than US \$400,000 was pledged by Rotarians as the "kick-off" for the community effort.
- Participation in two "matching grants" projects with the R.I. Foundation. The first project, in 1993, provided an X-ray machine and operating microscope to Hospital de Familia in Guatemala. The second project, in 1995, provided a heart-lung bypass machine for the Adult Hospital #1 in St. Petersburg, Russia. This bypass machine assisted the "Heart to Heart" doctors in their open-heart surgeries.
- A project in 1995-96, helped raise funds for an addition to the facilities of the Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley.
- 1997-1998 - Supported the New Columbus School in Berkeley by adding books to their library and seeking volunteers for the Literacy program.
- 2001 - Donated \$90,000 to the construction of the Berkeley Public Library.
- Annually since 2001 -the club donates \$20,000 in scholarship funds to help low-income Berkeley High School students attend college.
- Annually since 2001 -the club spends \$8,000 to purchase and donate a full-color, beautifully illustrated dictionary to every third grader in Berkeley Public Schools.
- 2003 - 2005 - Donated over \$100,000 and over 200 volunteer hours to refurbish Berkeley's Shorebird Park.
- 2002 - 2005 - Donated over \$40,000 and 3000 volunteer hours towards the construction of a community center, library and computer lab in the village of Chacala, Mexico.

- 2002 - 2005 - Secured the donation of \$50,000 in computer equipment and furniture for the Computer Center at Frances Albrier Park in South Berkeley.
- 2005 - 2006 – Established a Katrina Relief Fund to provide relief to displaced Katrina victims who sought refuge in Berkeley. Raised an additional \$24,000 and members and friends of Rotary traveled to New Orleans to help the Rotary Club of New Orleans rebuild Warren Easton High School.
- 2006 – 2007 – Return to New Orleans to rebuild Warren Easton High School, Sponsored Bone Marrow Registration, Delivered dictionaries to every third-grader in Berkeley, funded and packed holiday baskets.

For more than 80 years, these and many other projects have been successfully completed in the Berkeley community. Rotarians have worked with students, encouraging academic excellence and assisting vocational progress. Committees have helped senior citizens, the disabled and contributed to assist people of all ages. Individually, members serve on many boards and commissions of local organizations. Rotarians have assisted victims of floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and fires, in the United States and world-wide.