

Celebrating 100 years of Rotary

Service above self to Springfield and the World

Rotary of Springfield was established 100 years ago on June 1, 1919. It was the same year as the founding of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce. From that historic time, there are now six clubs in Springfield. The changes during the past 25 years have been momentous. Here are highlights:



In human terms, a century is a long time, more than three full generations of Rotary in Springfield. Rotary International is even older and today extends its impact throughout the world by the efforts of some 1.2 million Rotarians in 35,000 clubs.

Perhaps the best-known service club in Springfield, Rotary has continued its mission “to provide service to others, promote integrity and advance world understanding, goodwill and peace through a fellowship of business, professional and community leaders.” Put succinctly, the purpose of the Rotary Foundation when established was to “do good in the world.” And in Springfield, Rotary has done much good.

The impulse to be of service to others, to “give back,” and to build strong communities has been a signal characteristic of Rotarians over the years. These have certainly been the driving motivations of the individuals who came together in Springfield a century ago to establish our community’s first and oldest Rotary Club which celebrates its centennial in 2019.

Through the years, the Rotary Club of Springfield (sometimes today referred to as the “downtown club”) has provided a luncheon forum for business and community leaders and a platform for service making Springfield a better community. Early projects ranged from underwriting Boy Scouting in Springfield to later campaigns eradicating polio worldwide. Through its 100 years, the Rotary Club of Springfield has made a tremendous impact on this community and

beyond. As we observe its centennial, the club should celebrate its long record of service, its evolution during more recent years and its exciting energy and the prospect of serving our community in the years ahead.

There have been histories of the Rotary Club written for its 50th and 75th birthdays and there is no intention to duplicate them here, except to observe that the history of Springfield and the Ozarks was often a direct result of our membership’s passion for exceeding the expectations of others. The can-do spirit of Springfield is surely a dividend of the countless ideas and dozens of worthwhile projects achieved by Rotary during the past 100 years.

The record of service projects, the community and business leaders and colorful characters who have been members are well-chronicled in those earlier records. They are worth your time and will be offered in an expanded volume.

This report brings the story up to date through the past 25 years. A significant story it is, with important developments in Rotary’s evolution as a service organization. The inclusion of women into a previously all (and mostly older) male bastion, the admission of younger members, less insistence on the classification of members by occupation, and new energy for expanded service have together changed the complexion and commitment to the community of Springfield’s oldest club. Highlights of the past quarter century follow in this report.

– Dr. John Moore, president (1989-1990)



In 2019, Rotary of Springfield looks and operates quite differently than it did 100 years ago. Although diversity remains an elusive goal, the face of “downtown” Rotary has changed along with the demographics. Of 149 current members, 27 are educators; 19 work for non-profit organizations; 16 are bankers; eight are attorneys; and eight are medical doctors. A significant number are retirees; several are clergy; and the numbers in various professions and private business is about equal.

And although badges are scanned electronically for attendance, the time-honored equalizing tradition of “first names only” remains intact, and should be used.

Today five more clubs have joined the tradition of “Service above Self.” Lacking a century-long tradition along the way, some have jokingly described the oldest club as “the club of old men and their fathers.” That reference to the average age of the cream of Springfield’s maturing crop of elders in business, education, the clergy and other pursuits. Traditions would not be what they are if they were not knit into the fabric of where we came from. Now, of course, statistics suggest that what goes around comes around.

To set the record straight on our 100th anniversary, President Dwayne Fulk

(2018-2019), researched several of these assumptions. Here’s what he found:

- Consistent with our reputation, 20 percent (29) of our members are R85 (senior active in a previous time, a designation that combines the age and years as a member into a sum total. If it adds up to at least 85, regular attendance in waived); but we don’t have the most or the highest percentage in town (Southeast has 48, which is 21 percent).

- More than 50 percent of our members are over the age of 50, but that is the case with every other club in town except Rotaract, On December as well (Other clubs include Southeast, Sunrise, North, Metro and Rotaract).

- We have a higher number (and percentage, tied with Metro if you round theirs off) of women members than every other club in town.

- We have a higher number (and percentage, tied with Metro if you round theirs off) of new members (those with less than one year of service) than every other club in town.

Other changes also seem noteworthy. By any measure, Rotary is no longer a group of leading men in business, one only from each profession, helping one another in the marketplace, and giving back to the

community, and eventually the world through Rotary International.

Now we are a diverse group of all ages, up to a point at least. It is fair, however, to describe our members as outstanding leaders in whatever position they may hold, and many are moving up the career ladder. Yet it remains a goal that cannot be left unsaid: Many of us wish that Springfield's historic club could be the undisputed leader in bringing diversity to center stage. It is not only time, it is past time.

Perhaps the most telling tale of Rotary's history is that there was a time as recently as the 1950s when an African American speaker at what was then the Kentwood Arms Hotel (now Kentwood Hall, a dormitory on the campus of Missouri State University), would not seat the man in the Crystal because of his race. Feeling the embarrassment of the moment, the Rotatry president chose to dine with the speaker in the kitchen.

The original owner Woodruff sold the building to Earl Moulder in 1939. In 1968 Moulder sold it to C. Arch Bay who kept the hotel until he sold it to John Q. Hammons in 1983. In 1984, Hammons sold the Kentwood Arms to what was then Southwest Missouri State University. Moulder was a member of Springfield City Council, but he was also a racist who refused to integrate the hotel.

It took a campaign visit to Springfield by Vice President Richard Nixon in September 1960 for the Kentwood Arms to end segregation, as well as Heer's Department Store. Nixon's campaign had several African American staffers who were not about to be subjected to segregation. Their visit to Branson had the same impact.

In 1968, Moulder sold the Kentwood to C. Arch Bay, who sold it to John Q. Hammons in 1983. A year late, Hammons sold the hotel to what was then Southwest Missouri State University (now Missouri State University).

Today, Springfield Mayor Ken McClure is a longtime member of downtown Rotary. Three local college presidents are also members of



Working hard at Show-Me Rotary training in Jefferson City, with Distruct Governor-elect Paul Reinert, District Governor Susan Harralson, Rotary President Kathleen O'Dell(2017-2018) & Will Cologne of Springfield Sunrise Rotary.

this club, as is the superintendent of schools, and their predecessors.

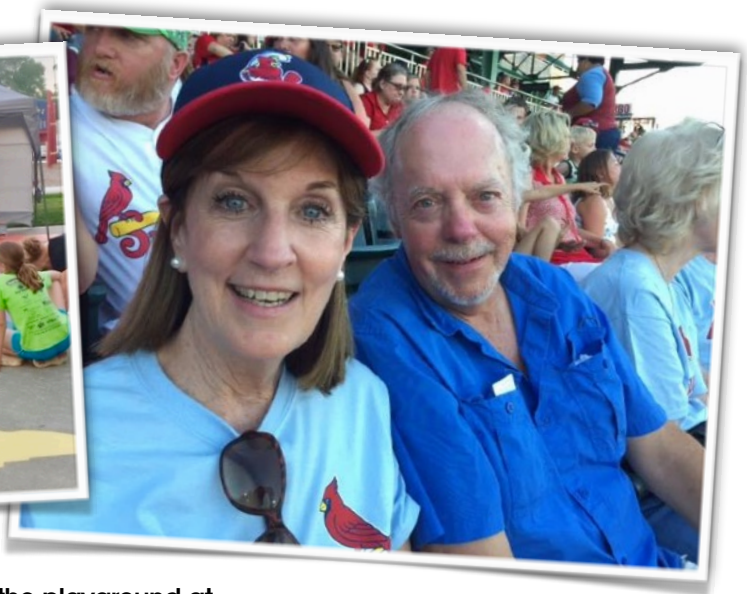
These days, leadership is measured not just by success, but by what each of us gives back. More than ever, this is what Rotary of Springfield, District 6080, Rotary International and the Rotary Foundation, are about.

Mike White, one of our most active members since joining in 2003, recalls when he was turned down for membership in the 1970s because his classification was occupied (Mike was vice-president of sales for Hutchens Industries, manufacturer of truck suspension systems). He exemplified the qualities of Rotary then and now.

These days the classifications and qualifications are vastly different.

The role of women in Rotary precedes the span of the past quarter century by only a very few years. In a unanimous decision announced on May 5, 1987, the United States Supreme Court, by a 7-0 vote, cast doubt on claims by many private organizations, including Rotary, that they had a constitutional right to exclude women from membership.

When the United States Supreme Court mandated change, it did Rotary and great



Above left, Rotarians repaint a U.S. map on the playground at Weaver Elementary School. At right, Kathleen and Jim O'Dell attend a Springfield Cardinals Game during Rotary Night at Hammons Field in 2018. She was one of the first three women inducted into downtown Rotary on Dec. 1, 1988. In 2017-2018, she served as president. Now their daughter, Kathryn, is now a member of Metro Rotary.

favor. Yet it took 18 months for Rotary of Springfield to admit its first female members.

On December 1, 1988, Kathleen O'Dell was one of the first three women admitted to membership (along with Joyce Dana and Helen White, both since resigned). In fact, there have been a couple of other "firsts" in her life, having been the first infant born on January 1, 1952. She was also the first Rotary president to be chosen homecoming queen at the University of Missouri (1976). Sometimes trivia like this just can't be ignored.

On June 28, 2017, Kathleen was installed as the eighth woman president of downtown Rotary. On July 1, 2019 (????), president-elect Tamera Jahnke will become the ninth woman to hold the office.

During Kathleen's year as president, "we heeded the results of a membership survey that year and undertook a membership drive so successful that we inducted 19 new members to the club and the drive process was adopted by District 6080. We also created a membership structure that lowered the cost for incoming members under age 40, and made it possible for

people to pay fees, dues, etc. with credit card."

The club was also awarded a District Simplified Grant to help launch a Kids Mobile Clothing Closet to service four schools added to the Care To Learn Project.

"It became a year-long volunteer opportunity for our members," she wrote. "We launched the campaign to raise money for a Mobile Dental Unit for Jordan Valley Community Health Center, our gift to celebrate our club's 100th anniversary."

Rotarians donated \$110,000 for the dental unit, aimed at the number one issue affecting the health and wellbeing of young people in the Ozarks. Although the fund-raising effort continues through the other Rotary Clubs, the truck is already on the road serving young people.

In 2018-2019, Susan Denise Haralson of Ozark (Springfield Sunrise Rotary Club) is serving as governor of District 6080. Indeed, for the first time in Missouri's Rotary history, all four Rotary district governors statewide in Missouri (Districts 6040, 6060, 6080 and 6110) are women.



With a smothering defense and cat-like reflexes, downtown Rotarians in various shades of yellow eschewed names and numbers of their uniforms for the good of team unity.

In 2019-2020, past president Paul Reinert (2009-2010) of downtown Rotary, will be Governor of District 6080. Paul's written observations about the next quarter century, offer this challenge:

"I think the Downtown Rotary is strong and vibrant. Our club is comprised of many community leaders and truly has the ability to make a difference in our community and in the lives of many. I hope in the next 25 years, we don't lose sight of the strength to do good that we have. Our club is very well respected in District 6080, and I would hope some of our members would aspire to share their gifts on a broader scale throughout the district and Rotary International. The surge in membership that we experienced last year beginning with the March Madness competition has really been extraordinary and has created an energized membership. I would hope we remain the great group of fun people going forward."

In 1999, the same year that our club first sponsored the Rock'n Ribs BBQ Festival, Annie Busch became the first woman to hold the office of president. She remembers one of her predecessors, half-seriously, asking, "Now you won't do anything to embarrass us, will you?"

For the record, he may have embarrassed himself with the question, but Annie presided over the creation of the signature fund-raising event of the six Rotary Clubs in Springfield 20 years ago.

Her other strong recollection is the creation of the Curt Strube Ethics in Business Award, named in honor of the late president who battled cancer even as he served as president, 1994-1995.

Curt was the long-serving director of the Breech School of Business at Drury College (now Drury University). The award was bestowed only twice, the first time in 1999, to Jack Stack, president and CEO of Springfield Remanufacturing Corp. (later SRC Holdings Inc). The second recipient was Jim Hagale, CEO of Hagale Industries in Ozark, and more recently CEO of Bass Pro Shops. Soon after, the award was merged with the Springfield Chamber of Commerce's Curt Strube Small Business Award.

Rotary basketball has supported Special Olympics since 1998

One of the long-established traditions is the Rotary Basketball Tournament staged each year to benefit Special Olympics.

In 1988, the first year of the event four area Rotary clubs were featured, each paying a \$100 entry fee. Spectators were then invited to donate as the price of admission. This first tournament resulted a \$500 gift to Special Olympics, and some great fellowship between clubs.

The following year the tournament expanded from four to six teams, which raised nearly \$11,000 for Special Olympics. Several veteran team members included Dr. Mike Clarke, Eric Atkinson, Dean Ertel, Casey Pyle, Ken Schultz, *(among others which we hope can be recalled and listed)*. In recent years, Alan Kunkel of Rotary North has added to the average height of the team, but the elusive goal of recruiting a 7-foot downtown Rotarian with NBA credentials remains only a fantasy. The 30th annual

Rotary Basketball Tournament in March 2018 raised \$13,210 for Special Olympics.

How softball motivated Rotarians to step up our game off the field

What Rotarians of a certain age not may remember about Annie Linnemeyer Busch's career on the field of play may have been reduced to a box score on the amateur sports scene. But before she was president (1999-2000), Annie chaired the new "Fun and Frolic Committee," a group of high-energy young Rotarians committed to motivating the membership to experience all sorts of zany events outside the scope of weekly meetings. First, at third base, and then in right field, Annie took her duties as seriously as a rookie looking for a last spot in the lineup of the Springfield Cardinals. Annie yielded to no one on the field of play, although screeching line drives were not her strong suit.

In a single game season cut mercifully short by various career-threatening injuries, unanticipated maladies and other off-field excuses, she was named "Most Valiant Player (and most valuable, too)." The proclamation reads as follows:

Let it be known that on September 2, 1992, Annie Linnemeyer (now aka Annie Busch) boldly stepped where no woman (and as it turns out, few Rotarians) had gone before, into a Rotary softball game. It matters not whether the game was won or lost. What matter is that history was made."

Some might have been content if the score of this historic game were lost forever. Alas, for the record, Springfield's time-honored Rotary Club held the upstart Southeast Rotary to a



Several current and former Rotarians took the field at Fassnight Park for memorable softball games against Southeast Rotarians, including this game in 1997. At left, Annie Linnemeyer Busch's MVP Citation.

paltry nine runs.

Unfortunately, they held us to no runs.

Box scores have never been the primary measure of the original historic Rotary Club of Springfield.

For true fans of the game, the event will be forever lightly etched in the annals of softball diplomacy, sportsmanship and the Four-Way Test. Terry Cernach was the coach; Gene Wallace was president. If only Jim Lumpe had been a member (his father, the late great Jerry Lumpe having been a legend in the big leagues).

As one of several character-building Rotary softball games at Fassnight Park over the years, these games embraced fellowship and friendly competition among the clubs. These games also served as a topic of conversation for those of us who believe we could all do more together than any of us could do on our own.

And so it is no small matter that Annie Busch has earned a reputation on several fronts that made her outstanding in her field. She became director of the Springfield-Greene

County Library District in 1989, having previously served since 1985 as director of the Kickapoo Branch Library. Almost immediately, she elevated our public libraries to a place on the national stage, helped secure local and state funding, made each branch a destination unto itself, and made it a mainstay of the quality of life that helps define Springfield.

When the Internet emerged as the greatest communication tool in the history of civilization, the library district created “Orion,” the first online e-mail system of its kind in Springfield, linked to the information highway as part of MoreNet, a statewide initiative that in many ways showed the potential of the Internet.

At first Orion was located in a tiny windowless cubbyhole of an office in the historic Carnegie Main Library Branch. As the Internet redefined the 90s (think kilobytes, megabytes, gigabytes, terabytes) Annie Busch and her library team created The Library Center on South Campbell in what had been Payless Cashways (a defunct lumber yard and home center). Soon after came The Library Station on North Kansas Expressway. Both facilities offer amenities, coffee and even lunch. Our public libraries became more than a repository for books; they were cultural town halls, infotainment centers, gateways to the world.

Among these traditions were chili feeds at the Jude Ranch, an excursion to the Dickerson Park Zoo, the Springfield Underground, Springfield Art Museum, the Wonders of Wildlife Museum (WOW) while the first

incarnation was still under construction, Ozarks Public Television’s studios, and more.

Under the late Barbara Innes (club secretary), *The Rotozark* transitioned from the copy machine to the Internet. Although distributed at table, the newsletter has moved through several iterations, and is now primarily distributed by e-mail. DacDB, a database-driven website, means members can communicate with one another individually, by club, and by district (assuming you have access). Isn’t it great to be alive in the 21st Century?

It is sad to note that several of our former club presidents over the past 25 years are no longer with us. Among them are Curtis Stube (1994-1995); Dennis Resz (1996-1997); Lloyd Young (2002-2003).

Some are no longer members: Ron Elkins (1995-1995); Jim Haseltine (1997-1998, who moved to Florida; Bill Abbott (2000-2001); Robin Robeson (2004-2005); Russ Marquart (2007-2008); Vickie Hicks (2012-2013); Bernard McCarthy (2013-2014, also relocated); Bill Orendorf (2013) served four months of his term before leaving Springfield). Cindy Stephens stepped up to serve out his term and then her own (2013-2015).

Although not every past-president weighed in, several have specific recollections:

For Rob Baird, it was the necessity of moving from the Kentwood to the Tower Club in Hammons Tower, a logistical challenge offering a great view of Springfield:

“It was fun to be up there on a makeshift basis. But there were challenges. The elevators were slow, and it was a 10-minute process to get in and out.”



Superintendent of Schools Bud Greve distributes dictionaries to students in the Springfield Public Schools.



Above, one of two Mobile For Pantry trucks donated the Ozarks Food Harvest to mark the 100th anniversary of Rotary International. At right is a Crime Scene Unit donated to the Springfield Police Department. Below right, a demonstration shows the ability of specially trained dogs to sniff out drugs. Rotary clubs funded three dogs plus training for they handlers.



Wally Munden followed Bill Abbott, no longer a member, and then came Lloyd Young, now deceased. Sadly, because his Good Community initiative was vitally important, though it proceeded his presidency.

Following Lloyd was Carol Williamson (2003-2004). Her recollection of our means of thanking speakers, stands out:

“It had always bothered me that week after week we gave our meeting speakers a Rotary pen or something similar, an item they probably didn't need or especially want,” Carol wrote. “That year we switched to presenting a library book (with a bookplate honoring the speaker's presentation), to a public school.

“By the end of the year, nearly every public school library had received a book. Since then, the recipients may have changed, but the goal of making a weekly contribution to a local cause has endured.”

Following Carol came Robin Robeson, just in time to help organize the Centennial Project



in cooperation with the Sunrise, North, and Rotoract clubs (Southeast having decided to do its own

project separately).

The outdoor art classroom at the Creamery Building in Jordan Valley Park was created at a cost \$42,000.

Robin was followed Dr. Bud Greve, superintendent of Springfield Public Schools (2005-2006) and more recently professor of education in charge of graduate studies at Evangel University. Bud presided over the club during the 100th anniversary of Rotary International. It was occasion for the first

combined meeting all six Rotary clubs, a tradition that continues.

Bud's observation that a major change in Rotary clubs in Springfield was that friendly competition and helpful cooperation came together to achieve objectives together that one working alone surely could not accomplish. Indeed, that observation has been proven time after time.

After Bud Greve came Guy Mace (2006-2007) and Russ Marquart (2007-2008). Russ is no longer a member, but Guy has entertained our club twice at his Route 66 Car Museum, where he maintains a large collection of more than 60 American and European automobiles.

Morey Mechlin (2008-2009), recalls her presidency as the year Rock'n Ribs wisely established a working board with bylaws and an increased membership, made necessary by the sustained growth of the event after its first decade.

"We also participated in joint programs with the other Springfield clubs when we helped host the all-city luncheon," More remembers, among them former U.S. Sen. John Danforth. The event at the Oasis Conference Center, featured the first Mobile Food Pantry on display, made possible in part by Ridewell Suspensions. Because of their participation, the Rotary Clubs funded a second truck. Both are still in operation as part of a fleet that has grown to four trucks.

Criteria for "honorary membership" were established, and an even dozen Paul Harris Fellows were inducted. Membership rebounded to 186 members.

Past-president Vickie Hicks (2012-2013), is no longer a member, but a highlight of her presidency was helping organize downtown Rotary volunteers to join the recovery effort after the devastating tornado that wiped out a third of neighboring Joplin on May 22, 2009.

Under her leadership, our club also funded the education room at Rare Breed, a center for homeless and at-risk young people, which also supplied some of their homeless youth with winter clothing and also dorm room supplies.

It was also the first time, but not the last, that a dog was awarded a Paul Harris Fellow ***(who was the first?)***

In 2018-2019, Rotarian George Heinz followed suit by recognizing his dog, who was present for the meeting. President Kathleen O'Dell presented the citation to XXXX.

As sergeant-at-arms, Rhoda Clark raised the largest amount ever for the Scholarship Fund.

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The "Save Our City" initiative again brought together the Springfield Rotary clubs to assist the Springfield Police Department in providing better protection for its citizens through the

acquisition of drug-sniffing dogs.

After an impressive demonstration in which a highly trained canine sniffed out drugs at the molecular level from a bag inside the glove compartment of a car parked in front of Kentwood Hall, three drug-sniffing dogs were purchased at a cost of \$6,500 each.

This intra-club project included training for the dogs and their handlers, handlers and outfitting special police vehicles.

Noteworthy: the dogs were trained to understand commands in German so their actions could not be understood by their quarry.



Carmelita Jeter, literally "the fastest woman in the world," visited downtown Rotarians as the new assistant track and field coach at Missouri State University. How Morey Mechlin's crown got on the coach's head may have something to do with Morey and Annie Busch having being two of the unfastest women in the world.



Final renderings show what the Dental Mobile Unit funded in part by downtown Rotary of Springfield will look like. So far, Rotarians have donated \$110,000 for the truck. Now other clubs are being invited to participate in fund-raising.

Rotary continues century of providing help for children

If downtown Rotary has followed one consistent theme over its 100-year history, it would seem to be enhancing and protecting children, giving them every chance to succeed.

So it seems altogether appropriate to address one of the most serious health issues facing our youngest children. Lack of dental hygiene is the number one health problem affecting children in the Ozarks. In 2010, fewer than 30 percent of Missouri's Medicaid children received any sort of dental services.

Jordan Valley Community Health Center's Dental Emergency Room Department is operating on a three-year grant aimed at providing alternatives to Emergency Rooms. For only \$25, patients can receive an X-ray exam, and extraction of teeth if necessary. In 18 months, ER visits are down 30 percent. A mobile unit could make an even bigger impact.

Lack of oral health care is also a serious issue for many of the 81,000 residents living in 1,165 long-term care facilities.

Tooth decay and gum disease can affect the ability to learn and do well in school. Among adults, the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research reports 164 million lost work hours annually because of dental disease.

Moreover, the logistical challenge of getting dental checkups and care is perhaps the greatest challenge for many parents, particularly in rural areas in Greene, Leclde, Webster, Stone, Taney, Christian and Douglas counties. Within the "catchment area" of those seven counties are 26 school districts and two homes for children.

For a one-year period ending in May 2007, the mobile dental teams made more than 1,500 total patient visits, operating four days a week, 10 hours each day.

The Rotary Mobile Dental Unit serves another purpose as an educational tool at community events, especially in rural areas, even as it provides screening and care.

In 1996, the Rotary clubs again worked cooperatively, this time to fund the printing of a resource guide book that would help teen-agers choose their involvement from among summer activities.

“Super Summers, Springfield” took two years to complete, at a substantial cost of \$30,000. Seventeen thousand copies were distributed to all 7th-11th grade students in Springfield.



Leah Hamilton

Also under the banner of “Save Our City, in partnership with St. John’s Regional Health Center (now Mercy), the Rotary Clubs of Springfield raised a combined \$16,000 to

convert a donated ambulance to a **Mobile Crime Scene Van**.

It was also the year the **Rotaract Club** in Springfield was established on Flag Day, June 14, 1995. Meeting twice monthly, Rotaract has enabled hundreds of younger professionals to development teamwork and leadership skills. Many of them have moved on to become members of downtown Rotary and other clubs.

The increasing number of Rotary clubs in the Ozarks and elsewhere in what had historically been District 6070 resulted in splitting the district into two geographic areas, 6070 and 6080. And yet, the magic is in the details. To put this in perspective is to recall that at least eight Rotarians have found matrimonial bliss, marrying fellow members, as follows:

- Ted Smith married Fay Sturhahn.
- The late Tedd Hammaker married Crista Hogan.
- Steve Schneider married Beverly McDowell.
- Brian Ash married Cortney Little (and asked for her hand during a regular weekly meeting (She said yes).

The perfect example is Rock’n Ribs, a story unto itself born out of Ron Elkins’ serendipitous trip to Orlando. You can read more about the effort in a lengthy sidebar on page 15.

Working together, the six Rotary Clubs of Springfield have raised more than \$20 million for



Margaret Carolla Maes with her husband, Luis Maes, and their two young children, now live in Portland. Margaret was among the first World Peace Scholars chosen for studies at the Rotary Center at the Universidad del Salvador in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her parents, Dr. Bob and Peg Carolla, are now members of downtown Rotary.

children’s charities locally through Rock’n Ribs BBQ Festival, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2019, as the downtown club was preparing to observe its first century.

The event seems to have anticipated that a backyard passion would turn into a national passion based on the competing cooking styles of Kansas City, Memphis and Texas – and the Ozarks?

It all began when Annie Busch heard a suggestion from a district governor at the time that a festival in Clinton (fact check this), had been a successful fund-raiser. Busch passed along the notion to Ron Elkins (then still operating covertly), and a major Ozarks Festival evolved because six Rotary Clubs (initially Ozark), came together to to combine the popular elements of mouth-watering BBQ, outstanding regional music and fellowship. Struggling to overcome April weather of every imaginable stripe, Elkins asked Gail Noggle, Tom Crook and others, to organize an event at Ozarks Mountain Duck Pall Park. (What became of Tom Crook?)

Rotarians have always searched for ways to address local priorities in a uniquely creative way, from entrepreneurship to simply asking members to contribute. When Springfield police demonstrated the skills of drug-sniffing dogs, Rotarians raised funds to buy them.

When several high-profile crimes showed that investigations of hinged on quick analysis of scientific evidence, Rotarians funded a Mobile Crime Lab that could test evidence on the spot instead of shipping it off to a state crime lab, then waiting weeks or months for the results. These days, a permanent state prime lab is based in Missouri State University's Innovation Center operated by the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

In 2005, the first citywide meeting celebrated the 100th anniversary of Rotary International. Meeting in the newly re-opened Oasis Hotel Conference Center, the clubs rose above past rivalries to commemorate 100 years of work by the Rotary International Foundation

The foundation's top priority in recent years has been to raise hundreds of millions of dollars through Polio Plus to wipe out the dreaded mosquito-born poliomyelitis virus worldwide. The effort continues to fund oral vaccinations for every young person on the planet. Today, polio exists only in a handful of nations where political leaders have frustrated the efforts of the Rotary Foundation, with \$450 million in added funding from the Bill and Linda Gates Foundation.

Each of the six clubs, including Rotoract, shared in a Rotary International award for the Mobile Food Pantry project as one of the Best Cooperative Projects.

Rotary International has been at the forefront of world peace initiatives, sending Group Study Exchange Teams* abroad for many years; sending ambassadorial scholars abroad for a year of study in their chosen field. Two scholars stand out, having both been nominated by downtown Rotary.

Leah Hamilton, a graduate of Kickapoo High School and the University of Kansas, was chosen as a 2005-2006 Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholar to study abroad for her master's degree at the Royal Conservatoire in Glasgow, Scotland (formerly the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama), where she studied music.



Tree-planting ceremony has Rotary presidents digging it

On April 4, 2018, Springfield's Rotary Clubs were once again planting the seeds of cooperation, literally this time.

A native Fringe Tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), described by Ozarks arborists the tree as "the best native tree in the Ozarks that nobody knows," is so named for the clouds of fleecy white, softly fragrant flowers that hang from the branches in late spring and early summer.

The ceremony is part of the "Every Rotarian Plant a Tree Project" outlined by Rotary International President Ian Riseley of Sandringham, Victoria, Australia.

Risley requested that the more than 1.2 million Rotarians in nearly 36,000 clubs worldwide plant a tree by Earth Day, April 22, 2018. The goal was to raise awareness of the critical issue of worldwide deforestation.

In addition, each Rotary club has selected a location at a nonprofit or school where they will oversee planting of trees, and many members of Springfield's local clubs also committed to planting a tree on their own property.

Springfield Rotary Clubs have previously contributed more than \$100,000 worth of enhancements at Jordan Valley Park, including the K-Man kinetic sculpture, the climbing rock, the Springfield Wagon play feature, the Rotary Outdoor Classroom and a shaded picnic area arranged in the shape of the Rotary emblem.

The Springfield/Greene County Park Board is a partner in the project along with City Utilities of Springfield.

CU donated the trees and the Missouri Department of Conservation made seedlings available to more than 500 Rotary members.

Other partners include the City of Springfield Department of Environmental Services, donating mulch for the trees; the City of Springfield Department of Public Works and Tree City USA Citizen Advisory Committee, each provided technical and educational support, including educational presentations at each Rotary club; and Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, assisting with seedling distribution.

Leah returned to Springfield to become a downtown Rotarian. She served for four years as director of the Springfield Regional Arts Council, helping organize the Springfield Arts Collaborative, which has raised more than \$2 million for its members, and allows the public to direct single donations to several organizations. She later joined the faculty at Drury University, and now lives in Wiesbaden, Germany with her family.

In the same year, Margaret Carolla, was among 70 international students chosen from among 1,500 as the first class of World Peace Scholars chosen for advance studies at one of seven Rotary Centers for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution. Margaret's two years studies at the Rotary Center at the Universidad del Salvador in Buenos Aires, Argentina, earned her a master's degree in international relations, peace studies and conflict resolution.

From 2010-2014, Margaret served as a foreign service officer at USAID Headquarters in Washington, D.C. and later in Mexico City. She and her husband, Luis Alfredo Maes, and their two children now reside in Portland, Oregon. Her parents, Dr. Robert and Peg Carolla have been members of downtown Rotary since 2008 and 2004 respectively.

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* Some leftover snippets:

The 16th annual **Rock 'n Ribs BBQ Festival** raised nearly \$182,000 for seven children's charities; Southeast Rotarians gave \$68,200 in cash donations and \$95,120 in in-kind donations to Rock 'n Ribs. The 28th annual **Rotary Basketball Tournament** raised \$13,567 for Special Olympics.

***Bud Greve, George Freeman (1976, India), and Jim Anderson, have been Group Study Exchange Team members.**

Sidebar on Kentwood Arms Hotel from Ozarks Alive (Kaitlyn McConnell):

This postcard shows a drawing of the Kentwood Arms Hotel at 700 St. Louis St. The

building in the picture is a six-story structure, but Kentwood Arms is a five-story building. It advertises the Kentwood Arms as a clean, restful and attractive environment within a block of the business and theater center of Springfield. The Kentwood was built in 1926 by local developer John T. Woodruff. Woodruff also developed a golf course on his Cherry Street Farm, which later became the Hickory Hills Country Club. It is mentioned on the postcard as one of the amenities of Kentwood Arms Hotel.

The new hotel contained the **Crystal Dining Room**, which could be rented for banquets, dances and public meetings. Republicans often held their meetings here, as the Democrats usually opted for the Colonial Hotel.

Famous visitors who stayed at the hotel were Harry Truman, Pat Nixon, Bob Hope, Groucho Marx and Jeanette McDonald. The list of African Americans who were not allowed to stay is a long one (see comments from Elaine Graham Estes, a native of Springfield whose parents owned the Graham's Modern Tourist Court and Graham's Rib Station. Lionel Hampton, Satchel Paige, Buck O'Neill and many others stayed there.

History of Rock'n Ribs BBQ Festival

Where there's smoke so sweet, there is award-winning BBQ

Every event worth its place in history has its legends and myths, but Rock'n Ribs might not have happened 20 years ago in 1999 but for the notion of Ron Elkins, past president of Rotary of Springfield (1995-96).

When Elkins nervously wrote a personal check to Memphis in May during a visit to National Barbecue and Grilling Association Show in Orlando, Fla.

His research was serendipitous in that although he was actually there to explore potential markets for Ozarks wood chips on behalf of Jan Strube, widow of another former Rotary president, the late Curt Strube (1994-95), longtime director of the Breech School of Business at Drury University.

Elkins' discussions involved the possibility that he might help organize a BBQ competition in Branson, which had emerged as a kind of summer home for country music along with featuring, countless restaurants and entertainment attractions.

Meanwhile, incoming president Annie Busch was about to take office as the first woman to serve as president of Rotary (1999-2000), a historic milestone in its own right. A district governor from Clinton (**as yet unidentified**) had mentioned to her that his town's Rotary club had organized a BBQ event as a successful fund-raiser. She also began to contemplate the possibilities of a BBQ competition, but in Springfield, not Branson.

Founded in 1977, Memphis in May organizers had visions of expanding its reach to Branson for obvious reasons. Branson had exploded onto the cultural stage, and country music goes with BBQ like rub puts bark on a brisket. At least a dozen new theaters and entertainers of a certain age occupied center stage. The Miss USA Pageant came to Branson

in 1999 and 2000, owned by none other than Donald Trump.

The only issue was that the BBQ folks in Memphis were not thinking about a BBQ Festival in Springfield. Elkins, however, saw it as a potential Rotary fund-raiser. There was one other missing element: Elkins had never even mentioned a BBQ festival to downtown

Rotary, and had no authorization that would allow him to write a check on Rotary's behalf. But the festival franchisers wanted a signature on the bottom line, and a check to close the deal. It was ready, fire, aim at its best.

"I had to make up my mind if we were going to do anything," recalls Elkins. "I didn't tell them it wasn't going to be in Branson."

With as yet no organization behind him, no agreement to make it happen, no sponsors, no

BBQ teams and no judges or volunteers to help make it happen, what he had was the rights to a Memphis in May event – and a turkey fryer bought on a whim.

To which his Rotarian wife, Dona laughingly observed: "What the hell have you done?"

But he did have a compromise location in mind: Price Cutter Park between Ozark and Springfield on U.S. 65, built earlier in 1999 in hopes of attracting a minor league baseball franchise to the Ozarks.

Indeed, the Springfield/Ozark Mountain Ducks played five seasons as a member of the Texas-Louisiana League, (later the Central Baseball League, from 1998 to 2003). The team played in Price Cutter Park a few months each year. While the stadium was readily available, there was a major problem. Christian County would not allow food sales, and that's a major problem for a food festival.



As it turned out, two years later, the Springfield Cardinals (formerly the El Paso Diablos), were reconstituted in Springfield by the St. Louis Cardinals after a 63-year hiatus, but they took the field in the brand-new Hammons Field, arguably the finest pure minor league baseball facility in the land.

Springfield and the Ozarks have seldom lacked for celebrations. From retracing the history of the Mother Road (Route 66) to appreciating the hardships of our pioneer forbears, from spring native plants to apple cider, Mother's Beer, Wingapalooza, Artsfest, ButterflyFestival, Japanese Fall Festival, Cinco de Mayo, Birth of Route 66 Festival, and more gold tournaments than you count on a single scorecard, and even the Queen City Beard and Moustache Federation Competition (10 years and growing in 2019, pardon the pun). Virtually every community in the Ozarks celebrates something unique, but let's not get started.

Twenty years ago, Rotary stoked the embers for culinary fund-raising, and just in time. BBQ has its own worldwide following, its own American Royal World Series of Barbecue®, sponsored by the Kansas City Barbecue Society, with trendy cooking shows and the latest gizmos: ceramic eggs, barrels and drums, hundreds of rubs and innumerable sauces.

Rock'n Ribs BBQ stands among the best of the best events in the Midwest, having switched its allegiance to the Kansas City Barbecue Society; and Springfield even has its own BBQ radio and podcast talk show. (TailgateGuysBBQ.com), since 2016.

The Ozarks' reputation for fine BBQ has the advantage of drawing from Kansas City's sweet sauces; Memphis's tangy vinegar, and the chuckwagon-style rubs that prevail in Oklahoma and Texas.

But back in 1999, Ron Elkins and son John were training to be judges at Millwood Country Club. Gail Noggle and Tom Crook chaired the event the first two years. Memphis in May helped us organize the competition into both backyard and professional divisions.

The pros prepared pork ribs and pork shoulder, chicken and beef brisket – plus a whole hog. The winner whole hog was Ferd the 144th from the Mississippi Colonels. The champion to its highly acclaimed competition, and by 2011, the event had raised more than \$1 million. Sports personality Ned Reynolds announced the winners. In the second year, southeast Rotary joined the event, and has played a major role in the festival ever since. In 2000, more than \$33,000 was raised for local youth charities.

Back then, the first challenge was whether the festival had a reasonable chance to succeed. It did. But could it raise funds for charities? It did. But could it grow? It has now moved twice and expanded exponentially. These days the Rock'n Ribs Facebook page has nearly 10,000 fans. RocknRibs.com a staff, a new logo, and a splendid web site that tells both the history and everything else you might want to know.

Having celebrated its 20th year, some 1,500 volunteers (including many non-Rotarians, it must be said gratefully) under the direction of a fully incorporated board that meets year-round to coordinate the event, now at the Ozarks Empire Fairgrounds.

In 2003, the festival accepted an offer from Bass Pro Shops to relocate the festival to the south parking lot. "Rotary Roadkillers" (a team representing downtown Rotary led by George Freeman and Charlie Denison), won three firsts and a second in the Backyard Division. The following Tuesday, a one-of-a-kind jug of BBQ sauce augmented with bacon sold for \$85.

What transpires in three days is a logistical marvel. In the span of a few hours, a tent city is created, cooking fires are lit in an assortment for contraptions, and a transformation occurs in the form of meat cooked so low and slow, so tender that teeth are optional. Music, dance, and good times roll. Bragging rights and teasing rivalries give way to relaxed revelry and the occasional nap.

Youngsters from the Boy Scouts and Good Samaritan Boys Ranch make sure that trash is

collected. In the wee hours of Saturday night and Sunday morning, the whole scene is dismantled as if, well, it all went up in hickory smoke. Or wild sassafras, cherry, pecan or some secret combination.

Even with record cold in April 2018 (forcing cancellation of Friday night events), Rotary's BBQ festival raised \$248,000 in one day. In 2020, the organizers have added a third day on Thursday evening.

Music is a major attraction, and an infusion of corporate sponsors ranging from manufacturers of the latest in ceramic eggs, to barrels, logo gear, BBQ sauces, rubs and meat. Truth is, if you can stoke a charcoal fire to 225-250 degrees, harness smoke and conjure up some fall-off-the-bone creations precisely just in time for judging, you just might win best of show.

Well, there is the matter of entry fees (now \$500), which includes a booth, tent, access to water and electrical service, and a pair of logo T-shirts just to make it official. Competing teams get the royal treatment and have ranked the festival's hospitality and attention to detail top notch.

On Saturday commences a competition in four categories (brisket, pork shoulder and ribs, plus chicken), followed by thousands of BBQ enthusiasts lined up to sample an estimated six tons of lovingly seasoned meat smoked to mouth-watering perfection by teams who are also competing for a People's Choice winner. Teams representing local businesses, Rotarians and other civic clubs, police and fire departments and of course some of the best professional BBQ chefs in the world (including Canada), share their fare and even some secrets on how to render up that which makes them famous.

With luck, the spring weather can be perfect (though that is by no means certain). A lineup of popular bands entertains for the remains of the day on Saturday under a bigtop tent. Bands have included Big Smith, Ozark Mountain Daredevils, the Kentucky

Headhunters, The Confederate Railroad. As always, there is a Kids Zone to remind all us this has always been a family friendly festival.

Cooking is an overnight endeavor complicated by whatever weather Mother Nature serves up. Each category is carefully screened through a "double-blind" process every 30 minutes with strict deadlines. Miss one and your entry can be disqualified.

At first, if you looked hungry and willing, you could be a judge. To suggest that sampling six entries in four categories is fulfilling is a mouthful. It may diminish your desire to eat for some extended period of gastronomic distress.

Judging is serious business; training and expertise is certified. Discussions are now nuanced in ways only a judge might appreciate. Jargon terms like "low and slow" are now debated along with "hot and fast." The Maillard reaction, smoke ring, umami, Warp 10 (a grilling reference to "Give'er all she's got, Scottie.") and an entire alphabet soup of BBQ jargon.

Lest you think either one of these processes is easy, you ain't tried BBQ competition. Scoring each entry for appearance, taste and tenderness, a panel of sequestered and certified judges carefully score six entries each from the cooks, and then await the next category. Scores are combined to within a tenth of a point to choose category winner and ultimately, a grand champion.

After one year at the Community Blood Center in 2012, Rock'n Ribs moved again, this time to the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds, chartered by the Kansas City BBQ Society, sponsors of the premier American Royal World Series of Barbecue, which celebrates its 40th anniversary Sept 12-15, 2019, at the Kansas Speedway.

Six years ago (2013), the 14th annual event moved to the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds after a year at the Community Blood Center of the Ozarks.

"Rock 'n Ribs requires a great deal of space to set up our cooking teams, vendors, main event tent, which is our music venue," explained Steve Scott, longtime chair of the event.

Leaving ample space for the attendees is a major priority. We think the Ozark Empire Fairgrounds will provide plenty of room for the event. Their location is highly visible with good entry and exit access and plenty of parking."

The new location also made it possible to serve alcoholic beverages following a policy shift at the fairgrounds. The location at Ozark Empire Fairgrounds offers nearly unlimited room to grow, and the E-Plex provides bathrooms and indoor space, plus parking.

May there always be a need for further research as to which barbecue tastes best.

(Possible sidebars on Brad Leighninger of Getting Basted, No. 1 in the world; Elise Graham-Estes and Graham's BBQ, native of Springfield and first woman admitted to Des Moines Rotary where she is an iconic role model.)

Brad Leighninger of Branson might still have his nose buried in a computer somewhere if it had not been for a friend who called to say he was dropping out of Rock'n Ribs, and did Brad want to take his place.

"We just did it on a whim," Leighninger said. "We had a friend who was in the contest and he ended up having to drop out. He had known we talked about cooking and he called us up about a week-and-a-half before the contest and asked, 'Hey, do you want to do this?' We said, 'Sure, what the heck?'"

It was the same year that Reser's Fine Foods offered to sponsor a competition at Rock'n Ribs in 2016. With a borrowed offset smoker



(the fire box is at one end, attached to a chamber with a chimney on the other end), and as Brad describes it, "a drive to be the best," the family revved up its Google search engine to see how it's done. And won \$1,000 for first place and a chance to compete against 70 teams at the World Food Championships in Las Vegas.

Mind you, it was not for BBQ, or even meat. It was for potato salad.

Finishing seventh among 70 teams, it was time to enter a whole new world, the professional BBQ circuit.

In 2018, the entire family competed in at least 50 events.

In March 2017, Getting Basted opened in the Starlite Theatre on the Branson Strip.

In 2019, Brad and his BBQ brood traveled to Australia to compete.