

On the afternoon of Tuesday, August 19, 1947, twenty-two Lawrence County businessmen met in the hot and muggy dining room of the Lawrenceburg Hotel Coffee Shop to listen to Pulaski and Lewisburg Rotarians discuss the pros and cons of starting a new Rotary club in Lawrenceburg.



Rotary Club of Lawrenceburg meeting at the Round House Cafe - 1947.

At that first meeting, after assurances from the representatives of the two neighboring Rotary clubs that they would sponsor the proposed Lawrenceburg chapter, it was agreed by all present to step off on a new journey of community service. Twenty-one men signed a charter request and seven men were immediately elected by secret ballot to serve as the new club's directors. The seven then met in another room of the hotel to select officers for the remainder of the year and, after a short deliberation, recalled the main meeting to order to present their slate.



Rotary International District 676 Governor Mort Greenstone presents club president, Hiram Holtsford, with the club's charter - 25 September 1947.

Not surprisingly, a young educator turned lawyer, Hiram Holtsford, who also happened to be a member of Mimosa Masonic Lodge and the local Lions Club and was also the City of Lawrenceburg's Commissioner of Finance, was chosen to become the first club president.

Hiram was far from being the only prominent citizen at that first assembly. Others present included J. Robert Hood, who would serve as the club's vice president. He is remembered as a meek

and well-mannered insurance salesman and an aggressive real estate broker and auctioneer who came to life when he stepped upon the auction block. Bob Belew and Edd Elder were elected secretary and treasurer respectively. Polk Hickman, F.F. Locke and Hobe Warren would serve as directors. Polk Hickman was the secretary treasurer of Lawrenceburg Federal Savings and Loan and the City of Lawrenceburg's municipal government. F. F. Locke was the Law partner of Hiram Holtsford and a self-proclaimed horse fancier. Hobe Warren owned the Big Red Store in Appleton and had recently opened Warren Wholesale Grocery Company in Lawrenceburg. He also ran the mule barns in Lawrenceburg and Minor Hill, and owned the Appleton cotton gin.



Lawrenceburg Rotary's first 6 club presidents on the Lawrenceburg Square in 1955 celebrating Rotary's 50-year Golden Anniversary.

The list continues with the elderly dentist A. G. Buckner—his wife, Claire, had passed away in mid-March at the age of 72. For Doc Buckner, the fellowship of Rotary would help fill the void in his life left by her death. Dr. Harold Nance, a young and energetic local veterinarian was there and, like Dr. Buckner, he would dedicate the rest of his life to the fellowship and community service goals of Rotary. Both Dr. Buckner and Dr. Nance would go on to serve as club presidents. Dr. Nance would eventually garner the distinction of being the oldest living charter member still on the club roster at the time of his death in 2005 at the age of 94. Dr. W.O. Crowder, Jr. was another charter member who also held the distinction, though notorious, of being the first Lawrenceburg Rotarian to be terminated by the board of directors—a casualty of the strict attendance requirements of Rotary. He missed four consecutive meetings!

Perhaps the names of some of the other charter members will ring a bell, names of men such as: Andrew Dugger, cashier at the First National Bank; Charles Freeman, owner of Freeman Funeral Home; Boss Holander co-owner of H & H Electric Appliances; and Wilson Warren, Wendell Coffey, Harry Berman, Floyd Bloom, John Craft, Mack Rutherford, Ben Smith, and Buddy Richardson.

W. L. Gladish was one of the twenty-two local businessmen there that night but would not become a member until April the 15th, 1949—it just takes some folks a little while to make up their mind. At that first meeting, the board of directors set noon on Friday as their regular weekly meeting time—an hour and day

that has yet to be changed—and agreed on the Lawrenceburg Hotel dining room as their designated meeting place. Over the years, as the club grew in size, it would meet at many different locations before finally settling into its own meeting spaces in Rotary Park in 1994.

The fledgling club received their official charter on September 3rd and set the evening of September the 25th, 1947 for their Charter Night celebration banquet. When that night came, over 200 people were in attendance including Will R. Manier—Past Rotary International President (1936-1937). He spoke to the gathering and congratulated them upon receiving their charter. Other dignitaries from Rotary International were there as well, along with many Rotarians from all over Middle Tennessee—some presenting gifts of congratulations.



The Lawrenceburg Rotary Club began in the dining room of the Lawrenceburg Hotel located on the southeast corner of the Square.

The new club immediately became involved in community service. They raised and donated money to the Crippled Adults Hospital in Memphis, installed Health Stations in each school in the County, erected \$1,200 worth of playground equipment at Rosemont Elementary School, and initiated a Rat Eradication campaign to eliminate the city's burgeoning rat population.



The Lawrenceburg Rotary Club's first major community project - Rat Eradication, 1948.

The next year they expanded the Rat Eradication project countywide. Local businesses donated to the project and many people volunteered to help. The Future Farmers of America organized 'Rat Patrols' to collect the dead and dying rodents for sanitary disposal.



THE RAT PATROL - Lawrence County High School Future Farmers of America volunteer to help collect dead rats, 1948.

In 1950, the Lawrenceburg Rotary Club entered into an agreement with the City of Lawrenceburg and the Lawrence County Fair and Park Association to begin producing the county fair. The Lawrence County Park and Fair Association, which was a private enterprise, was wanting to dissolve the corporation because of the high taxes that the annual production of the fair required but didn't want to see the fair come to an end. The City wanted to develop the fairgrounds into a public park but did not have the means to pay for the land, and the Rotary Club needed an annual fundraiser and project.



Fairview Park in 1950. The park was later renamed Rotary Park.

It was agreed that the Lawrence County Fair and Park Association would sell Fairview Park to the City of Lawrenceburg for a sum of \$57,000 and that they would give the rights to produce the fair to the Lawrenceburg Rotary Club. The Rotary Club was then to enter into a contract with the city to lease the park for two-weeks out of the year for \$3,000 (the amount of the annual land payment per year) and that they would agree to continue to produce the fair for a period of 20 years. During the remainder of the year, the City of Lawrenceburg would maintain

the park and make it available to the children of the community for free.

Not only did the resulting agreement satisfy all parties, it turned out to be one of Lawrenceburg's greatest assets and continues to be today.



Rotary Park Entrance, 1979. At the left of the picture are the newly covered grandstands and to the right is the Rotary Ticket Office, which was replaced with a new two-story block building in 2002. The grandstands were replaced in 2014.

Today the Lawrenceburg Rotary Club continues that legacy and is in its 66th year as sponsor of the Middle Tennessee District Fair. Since 1950, the Rotary club has expanded the footprint of the park, made numerous improvements to the park grounds, installed modern lighting, and added new buildings and entertainment structures.



1952 - Disabled American Veterans food booth at the Middle Tennessee District Fair. Many civic organizations in the county benefit each year by having booths at the Middle Tennessee District Fair that serves as their major fundraisers for the year.

On March 9, 1990, the Lawrenceburg Rotary club admitted its first female members, Jane Jennings, a soon to be prominent attorney in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee and Polly Powell Marsh, a local CPA. They were inducted into the ranks of Rotary by club president David Allen. Less than two years later, Margaret

Weathers became the third female member to join the club – her dad, Paul Norwood, was also a Rotarian. Margaret became the first female club president in 2005, and Polly Powell Marsh became the second in 2008.



On March 9, 1990, Polly Powell Marsh (L) and Jane Jennings (R) were inducted as the Lawrenceburg Rotary Club's first female members by president David Allen.

Throughout the club's history, many prominent men and women have served as members and many notable people have visited the club as guest speakers.



Pictured (L-R) are Lawrenceburg Rotarian and Tennessee Commissioner of Safety, Greg O'Rear; Tennessee Speaker of the House, Ned Ray McWherter; club president and District Attorney, Bob Gay; and Gentry Crowell, Tennessee's Secretary of State.

From the very beginning, the Lawrenceburg Rotary Club has led the way in community service and each successive generation has built upon that proud heritage.

If we could summarize Rotary's goals into one simple phrase, it would be "To Do Good In The World" and the men and women of the Lawrenceburg Rotary Club have unquestionably done that all these years.