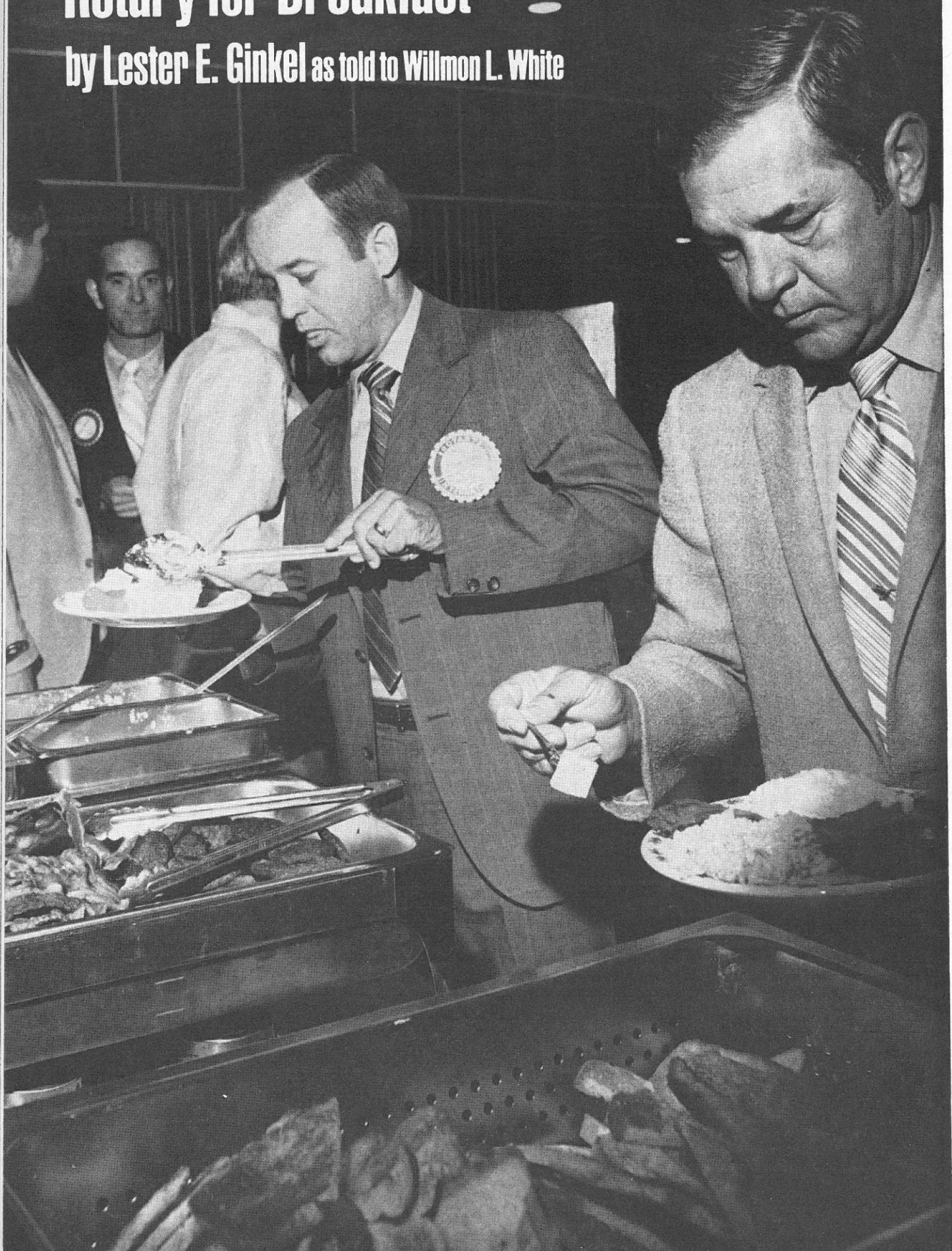


Rotary for Breakfast

by Lester E. Ginkel as told to Willmon L. White



While roosters sound reveille, some Floridians roll out of bed and hustle off to the weekly breakfast meetings of Rotary Clubs. The early-morning experiment seems to be paying off.

THE ROTARIANS retrieved their name badges, paid for the meal, and in little eddies of conversation drifted to the buffet line opposite the speaker's table. They laughed and talked of politics, football, the economy, and crops as they served themselves heaping portions of eggs, bacon and sausage, hominy grits, hot biscuits, and steaming mugs of coffee . . .

Eggs, bacon, and biscuits? That's right, this tableau represents a group of Rotarians in my home state of Florida who meet for breakfast. Altogether, at least nine Clubs in central Florida have Rotary for breakfast. Isolated examples of Rotary breakfast Clubs are to be found elsewhere, but the innovation took firm root in the lake, citrus, and cattle country of Florida about two years ago. The experiment is proving to be a resounding success and may well spread to other corners of the Rotary world. Attendance and membership growth have been above average in most of the Clubs which are trying the idea. One 12-year-old Club has been completely revitalized by the change in meeting time. What's more, programs, fellowship, and participation in the four avenues of Rotary service have been vastly improved in many cases.

The Florida breakfast Clubs include Orange County East, Seminole County South, Windermere, St. Cloud, and Cypress Gardens of District 695 under Governor Mark Hollis; and the Rotary Clubs of Cape Coral and Naples North in District 696 under Governor Dan McLeroy. Efforts are also underway to organize new breakfast-meeting Rotary Clubs at DeBary-Deltona and Lake Placid in Florida. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Breakfast Rotary Clubs in the U.S. are also reported in Bow, New Hampshire; Ligonier, Indiana; and Vail-Eagle Valley, Colorado. Have still others been overlooked?)

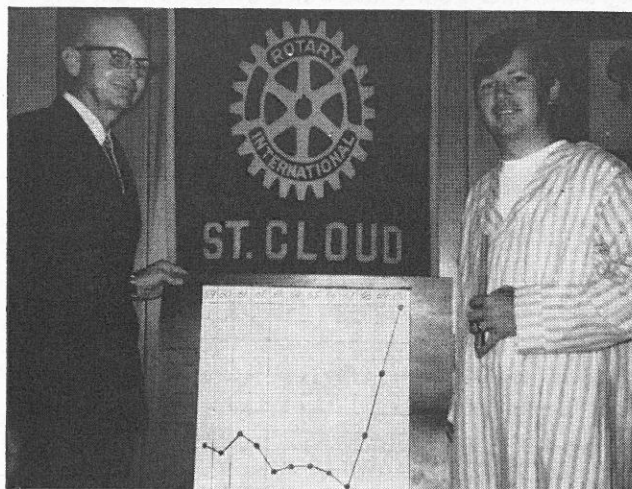
Nothing in Rotary's rules specifies what time of day a Rotary Club shall meet. Rotary is called the first of the "luncheon clubs," but in a sense the very first Rotary meetings were evening meals shared by Paul Harris and Silvester Schiele at Madame Galli's restaurant in Chicago, culminating in Rotary's birth on February 23, 1905. Later, the Rotary Club of Chicago and those which followed it met regularly for the noon meal. Years later, there was a movement among many Clubs for more convenient evening meetings. But unless some Rotary Club somewhere has voted to assemble for a midnight snack, the breakfast Club is the newest thing on the horizon. It may also be one of the most promising.

Appropriately, the Florida breakfast Club idea was

Hungry Rotarians Bill Britt and Charlie Jones (see left) dig into a breakfast buffet at the Seminole County South Rotary Club in Casselberry, Florida. . . . Levity enlivens many breakfast Clubs. Bob Kersten, right center, clangs to order the Rotary Club of Orange County East in Winter Park . . . while Barth Engert and Earl Soop, lower right, huff and puff at candles on a hominy-grits cake marking the Orange County East Club's second birthday.

conceived at a two-man breakfast shortly after Rotary International's Mexico City Convention in 1968. Past District Governor Win Pendleton and I were having breakfast in a Winter Park, Florida, restaurant. We discussed the newly-enacted membership provisions which permit a Club's active membership to be based either on residence or on business address. In short, men could belong to Rotary where they live and not

Graphic proof of how a breakfast meeting helped the Rotary Club of St. Cloud double its membership in one year. Nightgowned Past President Tommy Heyward poses with new member Chuck Alcorn.





In the dawn's early light, candle-bearing Dave Gomer gropes for his badge at the Cape Coral, Florida, Rotary Club. Other breakfast Clubbers from left: Don Brownfield, Tom Gray, Hubert Clarke.



A game rooster, "to help awaken" members of the Rotary Club of Windermere, is presented to Club President Whit Chase by Otho Watford, left, President of the sponsoring Club of Winter Garden.

only where they work. One of us half-seriously suggested that the Winter Park Club, which meets at noon, might cede all of its territory for a second club which met for breakfast. This was Constitutionally illegal but the Winter Park Club did give up part of its territory in a growing residential area where a university and hospital are located. Most of the community's outstanding men either worked in the two institutions or commuted many miles to their jobs. A noon-meeting Club was out of the question. The result was Orange County East, the first of the Florida breakfast Clubs, chartered in 1968.

P. D. Meadors, President of the Orange County East Club, elaborates on some of the advantages of Rotary for breakfast: "We enjoy the benefits of starting the day with Rotary. In meeting at 8 A.M. for breakfast, our minds are not yet cluttered with business details or the worries of the day. Good programs prevail as there is no difficulty scheduling good speakers who ordinarily have a busy noon or evening itinerary. The time one spends away from his job or business is cut to a minimum and attendance is unhindered by pressing work de-

tails which may arise during the day. We've had many favorable comments—from members, make-ups, and visitors—and no complaints about the hour."

Mark Hollis, Governor of District 695, agrees: "You find a wonderful spirit and morale among these Rotarians who meet for breakfast. The stock market has not yet fallen, the Rotarian hasn't yet been told that his secretary plans to resign this Friday, his teenage son hasn't delivered the news that he is quitting school and joining a hippie colony." Many Rotarians in breakfast Clubs speak of a more relaxed atmosphere and a freer fellowship at the start of the day.

Past RI Director Ken Wacker, of Winter Park, a zealous booster of breakfast Clubs, points out that for years Rotary and other service clubs have suffered under the "meet and eat" stereotype. The breakfast Club takes much of the emphasis off the meal and puts it where it belongs—on Rotary information and business, fellowship, programs, and service activities. I know from my own experience as a Past District Governor that it is often difficult to find a good place for a luncheon meal,

FIRST CALL FOR BREAKFAST

IN LATIN AMERICA the Spanish word is *desayuno*, the day's first meal. In France it's *petit déjeuner*, literally translating as little lunch. Japanese speak of the morning meal as *asa gohan*. The English word breakfast derives from breaking the fast of the night.

If Rotary Clubs around the world met for breakfast, the combined menu would form a culinary cornucopia:

- The light continental breakfast—usually sweet rolls and breads with coffee, hot chocolate, and milk—is common in Italy, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Austria.
- In North Europe—Sweden, Finland, Denmark—continental-style breakfast is also popular, sometimes with fancy pastries, cheeses, and eggs. Norwegians traditionally eat hearty, with a "smorgasbord" heaped with fish and lobster, sausages and cheese, meats, potatoes, eggs, salads, and jams.
- The English often eat meat such as kidneys or

sausage, kippers, toast and marmalade, stewed fruit, and tea. Breakfast in Ireland consists of cereal, Irish bacon and eggs, toast, and sometimes, spiked "Gaelic coffee." The Australian breakfast, like the country itself, is big; steak and eggs are common fare. So are lamb chops.

- Breakfast in Brazil includes *café ou le* (warm milk added to coffee) and French bread. In Paraguay it consists of *mate*, a bitter tea, and rolls.

- In India, the average breakfast is similar to other meals: bread, wheat or other grains, beans.

- Japanese at breakfast have rice with pickles, *miso* (a form of bean soup), raw fish, seaweed, soybean curd or paste, an occasional egg, and tea.

Good morning, Mr. Rotarian. Your order?





Hot coffee and warm fellowship are sampled by Rotarians of the Seminole County South Club. In the inner circle, from left: President Larry Carroll, Dick Prater, Glenn Williamson, Dale Bennett.

but many fine restaurants and clubs can handle a breakfast. Inflation has driven luncheon prices up at many restaurants so that the problem of 'non-eaters' has become serious among retired men and young Rotarians on limited incomes. In addition, many health-conscious members are fighting the battle of the waistline; a light breakfast doesn't scuttle their good intentions about dieting and keeping their weight down.

In general, breakfast is easier and faster to serve, calls for less labor and planning, and causes fewer interruptions. Says Larry Carroll, President of the Seminole South Club at Castleberry, Florida: "We did change meeting places once because of food problems, but this can happen to any group meeting for a meal. Our breakfasts are pretty hearty, usually consisting of three meats, scrambled eggs, grits, hash brown potatoes, spiced fruit such as apples or oranges, orange juice, coffee, and homemade biscuits with plenty of butter. Occasionally the sky has really fallen in the form of filet mignon or smoked pork chops. The members may be sleepy when they get there, but they wake up when they dig into all of this. Of course, I can't speak for their performance the rest of the day."

To me, a major plus for the breakfast meeting is that it avoids the business conflict of the luncheon meeting and the family conflict of the evening meeting. Warren Sickel, President of the Cypress Gardens Club, concurs: "The breakfast Club offers numerous advantages and very few drawbacks. Several members have commented that they like the early morning meeting because it frees them to go through their business day without the worry about that lingering phone call or last-minute appointment that may make them late for the Rotary luncheon or absent altogether. Going to Rotary becomes the first order of the business day. We also serve as a convenient make-up Club for Winter Haven, our sponsoring Club. I'm sure we've lost one or two potential Rotarians due to our early meeting hour. On the other hand, we have some new members who couldn't attend anything *but* a breakfast meeting. This is particularly true of the Rotarian who operates a one-man business or the professional man who must be on duty during midday activities."

Another factor in favor of the breakfast meeting over



Hamming it up, Cypress Gardens Rotarians feed Bill Tyner pancakes at a meeting recognizing the Club's perfect attendance. From left: Carrol Faircloth, Jim Wisman, Art Hampson, Paul Loar.

the evening meeting, it seems to me, is that it enhances family life. In an age when many of us businessmen and professional men spend too little time with our wives and children, the proliferation of evening meetings is a hardship. I personally know of more than one Rotarian's wife who welcomes the breakfast Rotary meeting. It allows her to "sleep in" one morning a week with the comforting knowledge that the breadwinner will still get a nourishing breakfast.

The Cape Coral Club is one which switched from an evening to a breakfast meeting. From its formation in 1964, the Club had a disappointing attendance because many of its members operated one-man businesses they could ill afford to close for two hours at noonday. Finally, the board of directors voted to try the breakfast meeting on a trial basis. The results were so gratifying, reports Past President Don Brownfield, that no other meeting time has since been considered: "We experienced no drawbacks whatsoever. Attendance improved steadily, reaching new levels." George Gascon, Club President, makes a point with which I fully agree: "We see no reason why there should not be a trend to breakfast meetings wherever possible in the Rotary world. They should be considered by any Club which needs a 'shot in the arm' to bring it out of the doldrums of poor spirit, lagging attendance, and general lack of vitality."

The St. Cloud story is a case study of a "comeback Club," one rejuvenated by its change in meeting time. "We have been meeting at the breakfast hour for more than a year and the improvement in our 12-year-old Club is amazing," President J. L. Hutchinson recently explained to me. "Our charter membership was 18 and we rocked along for a decade with no growth. Interest waned and no new members could be attracted; our noon meeting in a rundown restaurant was killing Rotary in St. Cloud by degrees."

Interest was rekindled with [Continued on page 60]



Past Governor of Rotary District 696, in 1963-64, Lester E. Ginkel is a member of the Rotary Club of Winter Park, Florida, with the classification of land development. As a Governor's special representative, Les has helped to organize several breakfast Clubs in Florida. Willmon L. White is an assistant editor of THE ROTARIAN.