HISTORY OF ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

The first four Rotarians (from left): Gustavus Loehr, Silvester Schiele, Hiram Shorey, and Paul P. Harris, circa 1905-12.

Paul P. Harris, an attorney, wanted to create a professional group with the same friendly spirit he felt in the small towns of his youth. On 23 February 1905, Harris, Gustavus Loehr, Silvester Schiele, and Hiram Shorey gathered at Loehr's office in Room 711 of the Unity Building in downtown Chicago. This was the first Rotary club meeting. They decided to call the new club "Rotary" after the practice of rotating meeting locations.

Within five years clubs had formed across the country, from San Francisco to New York.

In August 1910, Rotarians held their first convention in Chicago. The 16 clubs that existed at that time united to form the National Association of Rotary Clubs.

In 1912, the name changed to International Association of Rotary Clubs to reflect the addition of clubs in other countries. The name Rotary International was adopted in 1922.

By July 1925, Rotary had grown to more than 2,000 clubs and an estimated 108,000 members on six continents.

Rotary's reputation attracted presidents, prime ministers, and a host of other luminaries to its ranks — among them author Thomas Mann, diplomat Carlos P. Romulo, and composer Jean Sibelius.

As Rotary grew, members pooled their resources and used their talents to serve their communities. The organization's dedication to this ideal is best expressed in its motto: Service Above Self.