



*History
Of
Soroptimist International
of Santa Rosa*

Founder Region

(1945-2005)

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CLUB HISTORY 1945 to 2005

by Mary Priest

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In the Beginning

The Soroptimist Club of Santa Rosa received its charter on May 26, 1945 at a party held at the Saturday Afternoon Clubhouse. The charter was presented by Regional Director Edith B. Kelley of Sacramento. Visiting Soroptimists from Berkeley, Sacramento and Petaluma were in attendance, as well as representatives from local service clubs and various community civic leaders. The club had twenty-nine charter members. The charter officers were:

Genevieve Mott, President
Lucy H. Allen, Vice President
Ethel Polhemus, Recording Secretary
Eunice Reeder, Corresponding Secretary
Marle Mills, Treasurer
Else Kuntze, Director
Byrd Wyler Kellogg, Director

The other charter members were: Evelyn Doyle Basso, Edna Behrens, Brigadier Ruth Collier, Alicia Deardorff, Eloise Deeths, Evelyn DeTurk, Amie Marie Drake, Agnes Farquar, Rose Flemming, Frankie Green, Sarah Hatch, Adelia Keegan, Anita King, Dorothy Main, Mayme Peterson, May B. Stephenson, Dr. Elizabeth vanArsdale, Dr. Gertrude vanSteyn, Mary E. Ward, Song Wong, Dr. Edith Young, and Ruth Zerintcheff.

Actually, our roots go back beyond 1945. For it was on March 13, 1937 that the Soroptimist Club of Sonoma County, sponsored by the Soroptimist Club of San Francisco, was chartered. Soroptimist Regional Director Mayme Mathey of Los Angeles made the presentation speech. Her topic was "What Soroptimism Will Mean to You." There were eighteen charter members from throughout Sonoma County. Meetings were held monthly and alternated between Petaluma and Santa Rosa.

In the year 1945, with the help of Alta Hengy, Federation Extension Chairman, the Sonoma County Club was divided into two clubs, the Soroptimist Club of Petaluma and the Soroptimist Club of Santa Rosa. The clubs were a part of the Southwestern Region, Soroptimist federation of the Americas, Inc. – out where it all began.

We Give the Gift of Soroptimism

Members were so enthusiastic that they soon extended the gifts of Soroptimism to others by helping to charter new clubs. In 1949, they sponsored the Soroptimist Club of Sebastopol, and, with the assistance of clubs in Petaluma and Napa, started the Soroptimist Club of Ukiah. The year 1956 saw them reaching north to Healdsburg and by 1960 they were organizing Sonoma Valley. Responding to Santa Rosa's growth, another club was sponsored within the city, the Soroptimist Club of West Santa Rosa, whose energetic members served the community until 1995.

A Venture Club was chartered in 1950 and sponsored until 1965. Another Venture Club began in the 1970's and the young members engaged in many service projects, but again the club disbanded after a few years. We have found that it is a struggle to keep these Venture Clubs in existence as their young members marry, have families, and follow employment opportunities to other locales.

In the 1973-74 school year, we chartered the S Club in Santa Rosa High School, the first girls' service club in Santa Rosa. The S Club of Montgomery High School was chartered in 1976. Unfortunately, the S Clubs have also disbanded.

How We Serve

Major Projects Through the Years

Service is our reason for being and is the tie that binds all Soroptimists at work. Our local club projects have been numerous and varied throughout our long history and they continue to include projects in all six of the Soroptimist programs of service. They have involved thousands of dollars in contributions and thousands of hours of personal service to all age groups.

Beginning as we did in the final phase of World War II, one of our first projects was to sponsor and participate in a housing survey. Two thousand homes were contacted in an effort aimed at providing rooms for returning servicemen and their families.

It has always been our practice to cooperate with other civic groups in addition to working on our own. The Sonoma County Heart Association was started as a county group in 1953 and was a cooperative effort of Soroptimists, physicians and lay people of the community to promote heart research, education and

programs of community service. Our Soroptimist steering committee worked with this association until it was well established.

The Sonoma County Visiting Nurses Association was sponsored and established by the Soroptimist Clubs in Sonoma County in 1956 to provide part-time skilled visiting nursing home care and health counseling to individuals and families in Sonoma County. It became an independent functioning agency in 1958.

Working with the University of California Cooperative Extension, American Association of University Women and Soroptimist International of West Santa Rosa, we presented the American Association of Retired People's Financial Information Program, From a Woman's Perspective for two years.

We also assisted in getting a Family Service Agency started, including making a \$4,000 donation.

Our first Community Christmas Gift Preview was held in 1961. Many hours were needed to decorate, operate and supervise this project and during the 1961-62 year, our club received the Helen Gamble Award for this outstanding service project.

In 1967, our club purchased Christmas lights for the Bunya Bunya trees in Old Courthouse Square and donated them as a centennial year gift to the City of Santa Rosa.

For more than 25 years, beginning in 1948, we staffed the Sonoma County Fair Nursery; taking care of spirited children ages 3 to 6 while their parents enjoyed the fair. This was a combined service project and fundraiser as the Fair Board paid the club a small fee for our services.

Another combination service and fundraising project was Sans Souci, an invitational formal dance club which our members supervised from 1953 to 1965. The Sans Souci Dance Club held a prominent place in the community as an outstanding social institution providing a social activity for citizens of the community and affording the Santa Rosa Soroptimist Club a pleasant means of earning money.

We have also stressed fostering a worthy new project and mentoring it until it could become self-supporting, as we did with the organization of the local YWCA.

We have provided financial support for the Agency for Infant Development, A Unique Place for the children of alcoholics, Girl Scouts, the Rape Crisis Center, Kamp Kennedy for the mentally retarded, and the YWCA Emergency Women's

Shelter. We furnished a room at the Senior Citizen Center and at the Family Support Center and we continue to maintain both. We gave office equipment to the Rescue Mission and furnishings for the Konocti Girl Scout Council office. We have supplied Lifeline equipment to the frail elderly and camperships to the young; isolettes for our local hospital, and Positive Pressure Aerosol equipment during a polio epidemic. We gave equipment and furniture to the Salvation Army for their Day Nursery, playground equipment to a Child Development Center for mentally retarded, books, gifts, and a television set for girls at the Los Guilucos State School for Girls, and a wheelchair and camera to the Society for Crippled Children. We provided refreshments for elderly people attending weekly counseling sessions which were conducted by one of our members, and gave anatomically correct dolls for law enforcement personnel.

One of our major projects was providing new shoes to thousands of needy children in Santa Rosa city elementary schools who were referred to us by the school's personnel. Members drove the children to the shoe store where they were individually fitted. Often these were the first new pair of shoes the child had owned. Our club budgeted \$2,500 annually for this project with many members contributing directly into the "Shoe Fund".

In the field of arts, we donated a metal sculpture to the City of Santa Rosa where it is now displayed on the entrance to the City Hall. This was a commission to one of our late members, Florence Dixon.

Our members serve on the boards of many community service and non-profit organizations from the Humane Society to the Concert Association. We have conducted Money Management Sessions and served as hostesses for Hospice Seminars. In 1973, we took a leadership role in the Secret Witness Program in Santa Rosa and provided speakers to other organizations throughout the County and beyond. Our members volunteered four days a week to the Golden Circle Meal Program for seniors, and we have cooked and served hot dogs, (together with the Kiwanis Club,) at the city's annual 4th of July celebration. We have hosted student seminars and the Speakers' Program on the Beijing Conference. Our club member, Soroptimist International Past President, Patricia Daniels, who attended the Conference, was the Mistress of Ceremonies. We annually ring bells for the Salvation Army. The list goes on and on---

Ongoing

We maintain the Fire Safety Education Trailer which we purchased and donated to the Sonoma County Fire Chiefs' Association in 1991. This was an expenditure in excess of \$20,000 and was the culmination of years of fundraising and years of searching for a worthwhile "Soroptimist Only" project. We provide the necessary

coloring books and various supplies and materials each year that are needed in the teaching process. The trailer, which bears our Soroptimist emblem, is taken to schools, nursing homes and convalescent hospitals throughout the county so that young and old alike can be taught what to do in the event of emergency and how to safely evacuate a residence. The trailer is also on display at the autumn Harvest Fair and is driven in the spring Rose Parade. After years of service, the trailer needed to be replaced. Again Soroptimists came to the rescue and we provided the major funding for the new acquisition. This new trailer illustrates safety features for both fire and earthquake. Member Marj Conley, who spearheaded both projects, continues to serve as our liaison with the Sonoma County Fire Chiefs' Association. Needless to say, we are extremely proud of this project!

After having a speaker present a program on the successful rehabilitation of some of the homeless in Santa Rosa, our members decided this project was a perfect model for our service goals--- helping women improve, and in this case, rebuild their lives. Partnering with the InterFaith Shelter Network we provided the \$12,500 seed money to start a residence for up to eight homeless women. The IFSN screens the candidates for this program and provides strict management for the house along with counseling services. On December 1, 2003 the first "Soroptimist House" was dedicated. Our members interact with the residents on a regular basis, mentoring them and providing gifts at holidays and replacing furnishings and supplies as needed. Successes have already been noted. Some of the former homeless residents have already become financially independent and have established homes of their own.

We continue to sponsor a room at the Family Support Center, providing furniture and bedding and Christmas gifts for the resident family. We provide a periodical stand, supplying it with newspapers, magazines and other reading materials at the Homeless Shelter. And we continue to provide for our room at the Senior Center as well as maintain our Jo Deyo Room at the YWCA Domestic Violence Shelter.

We annually host a Making A Difference for Women Awards Luncheon to recognize the work of distinguished women within the community who have provided outstanding service in areas of Women Helping Women, Advancing the Status of Women, and Women of Distinction.

Awards and Scholarships

Our charter president, Genevieve Mott was a teacher at Santa Rosa Junior College and all through the years, our club has been active in promoting educational pursuits. In honor of Miss Mott, we award our Genevieve Mott Scholarship to a second semester student at the Santa Rosa Junior College who

maintains at least a 2.0 grade point average and who has demonstrated financial need.

Our club has been fortunate to receive bequests from dedicated members who, during their lifetime, also served as President.

Josephine Deyo was a psychiatric social worker whose life was dedicated to mental health and social services. Money from her bequest provides support for our Jo Deyo Room at the YWCA Women's Domestic Violence Shelter.

Ethel Polhemus Balbi, a charter member, spent a lifetime in the field of public education. The primary purpose of her bequest is to aid a Master's Degree Candidate but may be used for strictly educational purposes, such as the Youth Diabetes Education Program as recently voted for by the club's members.

Claire Saffell taught music to several generations of students. Her bequest funds two music scholarships at the Santa Rosa Junior College.

The Vera McCulloch Scholarship is given to a woman who plans a four-year college program and has at least a 3.5 grade point average. This scholarship comes from funds given by one of our members, Lee Peele, in memory of her mother.

Our club provides annual funding for the Youth Achievement Award for a student graduating from Ridgeway High School.

We also participate in the Federation Project Women's Opportunity Award to assist women to gain the necessary skills to attain a higher level of employment.

Beyond Our Borders

We participate in the International Project, The Federation Project, the President's Appeals and regularly budget for these items. We have sent aid to victims of fire, floods, earthquakes and tidal waves, the recent Tsunami, AIDS, and trafficking of women and girls, within our own country and beyond. We have regularly contributed toward regional projects such as the Soroptimist Redwood Memorial grove, the Eye Bank, Fellowships for doctoral students, and the Violet Richardson Ward portrait.

Recently, one of our members, Pam Chanter, brought back pictures of the deplorable health conditions of the villagers living along the Amazon River in the Fernando Lores District of Peru. One in five children die from contaminated water before they are age five and the average lifespan is 35 years. Once a source of life, the river has turned deadly with toxic pollution runoff from the

multinational industries. A water purification system was found that was transportable, inexpensive and could be built and maintained by the natives themselves. A local engineering firm provides the engineers pro bono to go to the sites along the Amazon and instruct the villagers in how to secure potable water. Our member has monitored its successful progress. Our club intends to support this project in partnership with APECA, Inc. and Rotary Clubs in Santa Rosa and Peru. Soroptimist International of the Americas announced that our club was a semi-finalist in Soroptimists Celebrating Success recognition award for this project.

We share our enthusiasm for Soroptimist ideals with friendship links in Angouleme, France; Kagoshima, Japan; Charter Towers, Australia; and Amur River, Russia.

Fundraising

Fundraising projects have included fashion shows, casino nights, publishing and sale of cookbooks, Mardi Gras dinner dances, raffles and rummage sales. Here in the Sonoma County, the heart of the wine country, we have found combination wine tasting and auctions pleasant and profitable functions, as hosted by our gracious member Dr. Irene Becker Lampson and her husband Keith in their beautiful gardens. Local artists have provided us with paintings and other craft items.

In recent years, our members have held an annual "A Night in Italy" pasta dinner and live auction. We share the profits from this event with the Santa Rosa Boy's and Girl's Club who assist us with serving. One of our members is the celebrity chef and another member's brother serves as auctioneer.

We continue to look for new ideas to raise monies for our service projects and to bring recognition to our Soroptimist goals.

Expanding our Horizons

We are particularly proud of the service which our own club members have given to Soroptimist beyond the local club. They have served and continue to serve with distinction at the district, region, federation and international level. We are most proud to claim Soroptimist International Past President Patricia Daniels as a regular member of Soroptimist International of Santa Rosa since 1973! She has previously served as President of Soroptimist International of the Americas, Founder Region Governor and District IV Director.

Marjorie Conley, member since 1959, served as Federation Treasurer, Federation Foundation Treasurer, Federation Foundation Director, and Southwestern Region/Founder Treasurer and Region Governor.

Lorraine Komor, member since 1973, served as Founder Region Governor and Founder Region Secretary.

Current life member Nina Arrabit was a young mother and grocer when she joined in 1957, but later found time to pursue the duties of District IV Director.

Kay Barrett Ritter, member since 1971, served as District IV Director.

Other members serve on Region and Federation Committees.

We have regularly hosted district meetings and region conferences.

Looking to the Future

As we evaluate our history in the year of 2005, on our Sixtieth Anniversary, we look toward the future. Our current challenge is to rebuild our membership numbers – a challenge that is being faced by many such organizations. We started in 1945 with twenty-nine active members and experienced steady growth for many years. We reached a peak in 1980 with sixty-three active members, nineteen life and thirteen sustaining members. We currently have thirty-one regular/active members, one retired and eight life members.

While many professionals now look to Rotary and other service organizations, we feel that Soroptimist still offers a unique opportunity for women to hone leadership skills in a supportive environment. In addition, our treasured General Consultative status as a non-governmental organization (NGO) at the United Nations, gives us the pride and opportunity to stress meeting the particular needs of girls, women and family around the world. Attracting new members, helping to develop leadership skills and interesting them in work beyond the local club level is a major goal. Attaining this goal, increasing our membership, is essential if we are to maintain the level of community service and involvement of which we are so proud.