

SERVICE ABOVE SELF



*This certifies that the Rotary Club of
Punta Gorda, Florida,*

*having been duly organized and having agreed,
through its officers and members, to be bound by the
Constitution and By-laws of Rotary International,
which agreement is evidenced by the acceptance of
this certificate, is now a duly elected member of*

*Rotary International
Club No. 2001*

*and is entitled to all the rights and privileges of
such membership.*

*In witness whereof the seal of Rotary
International is hereto affixed and the signatures of
its officers, duly authorized, are subscribed hereto this
twenty-second day of April, Anno Domini 1925.*

Ernest Smith
President, Rotary International

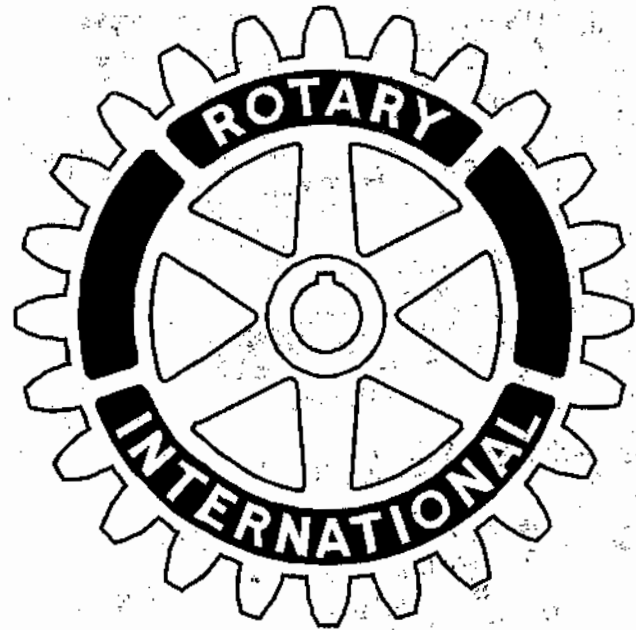
Samuel R. Perry
Secretary, Rotary International

THE MOTIVE FOR WHICH WE SERVE BEST

**This booklet prepared by Club History Committee:
Editor, Lindsey Williams; Research, Frank Chance,
Paul Edrington, Emil Held, Red Schultz; Interviews,
Wayne Geff, Jack Letz; Roster Photos, Fred Mesler.
Special thanks to U.S. Cleveland, president,
Charlotte Harbor Area Historical Society.**

Printed by Martin Press International • Charlotte Harbor, FL

75 Years Of Service Above Self



Rotary Club #2001 Punta Gorda, Florida

Proclamation

City of Punta Gorda, Florida

WHEREAS, the Rotary Club of Punta Gorda was chartered on the twenty-second of April, 1925; and

WHEREAS, the Club was organized by seventeen Punta Gorda citizens and is the oldest service club in Charlotte County; and

WHEREAS, the Club's is dedicated to Service Above Self with its initial project being the inauguration of a new Boy Scout Council for this district; and

WHEREAS, the Club led a drive to build the first hospital in Charlotte County at Punta Gorda followed by the organization of many other worthy projects for the benefit and enjoyment of the citizenry; and

WHEREAS, the Club's individual members have been leaders in civic endeavors beyond number; and

WHEREAS, the Club has funded creation of a beach at Ponce DeLeon Park to commemorate its 75th anniversary; and

WHEREAS, the Club of 82 members is an integral part of Rotary International consisting of 1,175,000 members in 29,000 clubs in 162 nations along with 315,000 members of youth auxiliaries;

NOW, THEREFORE, The City Council of the City of Punta Gorda, Florida does hereby proclaim the year 2000 as the Rotary Club of Punta Gorda's

75th ANNIVERSARY

and congratulates the Club on its anniversary and offers thanks for the many good deeds performed without petition for the citizens of Punta Gorda.

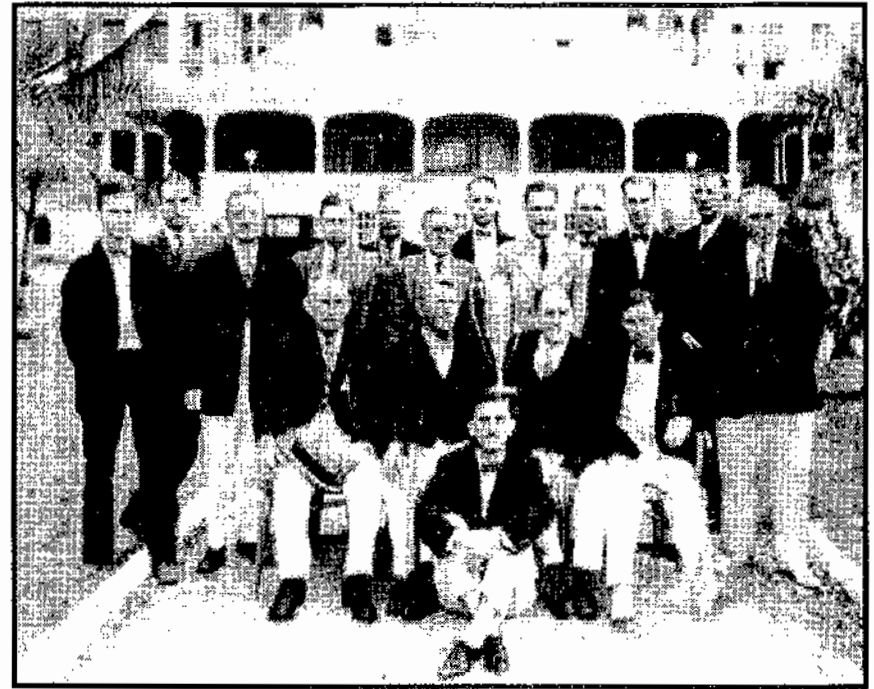
PASSED AND DULY ADOPTED this 25th day of May, 2000.

CITY OF PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA


Robert H. Shedd, Mayor

ATTEST:


Sue Selner, City Clerk



CHARTER MEMBERS – APRIL 22, 1926

Proud members of Charlotte County's first service club pose for their group picture in front of Hotel Punta Gorda.

From left, standing: Gray Holmes, George O. Dewey, R. Kerby Seward, John E. Skipper, R. Chester Blount, John R. Jack, Charles F. Johnson, C. Potter Lucas, Vernon J. Jordan, Baynard J. Malone, Jr., James N. Sikes, Farmer J. Bowen.

Sitting: W.H. Johnson, James K. McClelland, Allan B. Tucker, Wallace E. Mobley, and President W.S. Whitfield.

75 Years Of 'Service Above Self'

Every Rotary Club has a "Godfather" sent by an existing club to organize new groups of Rotarians nearby. Such was the mission in early 1925 of Ora E. Chapin, past president of the Fort Myers club.

Rotarian Chapin found Punta Gorda to be a bustling town with progressive businesses and enthusiasm – essential prerequisites for a Rotary Club. He had no difficulty enlisting 17 petitioners for a charter.

The small number of charter members is interesting to modern Rotarians inasmuch as a minimum of 25 is required today. Noteworthy are the "classifications" of the original members – that is, their types of work on which membership is based still today:

Chester Blount -- clerk, Circuit Court.
Farmer Bowen -- engineer, builder-contractor.
George O. Dewey -- real estate (later postmaster).
Gray Holmes -- manager, Charlotte Bay Hotel.
John R. Jack -- Chevrolet dealer.
Charles Johnson -- movie theater, Pontiac dealer.
W.H. Johnson -- port pilot, real estate.
Vernon Jordan -- dentist.
Potter Lucas -- real estate.
Baynard Malone -- lawyer.
James McClelland -- mortician.
Wallace Mobley -- druggist, Seminole Pharmacy.
Kirby Seward -- proprietor, Punta Gorda Dry Goods.
James Sikes -- manager, Power Company.
John Skipper -- president, Fidelity Trust Co.
Allen Tucker -- city sanitary inspector, capt. Militia.
W.S. Whitfield -- real estate.

Officers pro tem were W.S. Whitfield, president; W.H. Johnson, vice-president; Baynard J. Malone, Jr., secretary; and John E. Skipper, treasurer. The board of governors were R. Kirby Seward, James N. Sikes and R. Chester Blount.

All were thrilled to receive Charter Number 2001 on April 25. They took the coincidence of becoming the first club of the next thousand in Rotary as an omen of good fortune for itself and Rotary.



Charter members took along their wives to Rotary International convention at Cleveland, Ohio.

The outlook was well founded. Rotary today is comprised of 1,175,000 members in 29,000 clubs in 162 nations.

Two months after Punta Gorda Rotary's founding, the sixteenth annual convention of Rotary International was held at Cleveland, Ohio, June 15-19, 1925. The new, local Rotarians determined to attend en-mass.

The trip was reported in detail by the *Punta Gorda Weekly Doin's*, but it did not mention that most of the men were accompanied to the convention by their wives and all traveled by chartered bus.

"Despite the fact that Cleveland is 1,442.6 miles from this city, the club attended the convention one hundred percent strong and was awarded the Eustis Attendance Trophy, with a total of 114,000 points. The convention was attended by 7,500 delegates and about 5,000 other visiting Rotarians from 32 countries.

"The attendance trophy is awarded on the basis of the percentage attending the convention from each club, multiplied by the mileage traveled -- the club with the highest aggregate, of course, being declared the winner. Nearest competitor to Punta Gorda was the Rotary Club of Sydney, Australia, with 29,034 points, or 116,226 points less than acquired by Rotarians of Punta Gorda.

"Next year's convention will be held in Denver, and the club again intends to be present one hundred percent. (Ed. Note: no one made it.)

"At the Cleveland convention, Tom J. Davis, of Butte, Montana, third vice-president of Rotary International, placed before the delegates: "Rotary in Cycles."

"He called upon, in turn, representatives of Rotary No. 1 of Chicago; Rotary No. 1000 of York, England; Rotary No. 2000 of Ketchikan, Alaska; and then said, 'Next is a group of men who have come from that enterprising town in Florida -- Punta Gorda -- Rotary Club No. 2001.

"These men have been so imbued with the spirit and ideals of Rotary they have come to the meeting one hundred percent.

"It gives me a lot of pleasure to present them to you under the leadership of Rotarian Whitfield, their president, and to express to Ora E. Chapin, member and ex-president of the Rotary Club of Fort Myers, Florida, who was the special representative in the organization of this club, our deep appreciation."

Doin's wrote: "On the way to the Cleveland convention, and at that gathering, the members of this club presented thousands of copies of this City's song, *Punta Gorda Fair*, which follows:

PUNTA GORDA FAIR

By A.J Holt

(Air -- When The Roll is Called Up Yonder)

Where the Tamiami Trail
Concretes its way across the bay,
Where it joins the Dixie Highway to the sea,
Here stands Punta Gorda fair,
In her balmy ocean air,
While she beckons to the stranger: "Come and see."

CHORUS

When you come to Punta Gorda,
When you stand upon her shore,
When you live in Punta Gorda,
You will longer live, and live to love her more.

Here the stately royal palm
Lifts its Grecian columns high;
Here the royal poincianna blushes bright,
Here the bridal orange bloom
Fills the air with sweet perfume;
Here the birds trill out their sweetest notes by night

CHORUS

Here the coconut is sweetest,
Here the banyan tree is broad,
Here the poinsettia spreads its flaming charm,
Here the avocados grow,
Here artesian waters flow,
In our harbor here a million fishes swarm.

CHORUS

Here the air is ever sweet,
Here all excellencies meet,
Here pineapples are the greatest in the world,
Here mankind may find rebirth,
In a paradise on earth,
Here where Punta Gorda's glories are unfurled.

CHORUS

Upon returning, club members took on their first service project -- helping organize the Charlotte County Fair Association -- while enjoying weekly fellowship at the Charlotte Bay Hotel on West Marion Avenue where the Professional Building now stands.

Boy Scout Movement

Primary leadership of a major project was assumed by Punta Gorda Rotary in December 1925. Said *Doin's*:

"Under the auspices of the Punta Gorda Rotary Club, representatives of Punta Gorda, Arcadia and Fort Myers met here last Thursday to discuss the plan of organizing southwest Florida into a special district for the promotion of the Boy Scout Movement.

Sponsors of this movement are attempting to secure the services of a good executive, who will probably be located in Fort Myers. Organization of a new district should greatly increase interest in Scouting."

The first Boy Scout troop in Punta Gorda was organized in 1918 but lost its charter two years later for lack of a scoutmaster. Troop 5 was organized in 1921, now the oldest in Florida. It was in support of this troop that Rotary took the initiative.

Reported *Doin's* a week later: "That Gulf Coast Boy Scout Council was organized here last week and I. Williams of Fort Myers was unanimously elected president. The new Council comprises Charlotte, DeSoto, Lee, Hendry, Collier and Glades counties.

James E. Sikes, was elected vice-president for Punta Gorda; W.W. Dunwoody, vice-president for Arcadia; Walter S. Turner, vice-president for Fort Myers; W.S. Harns of Fort Myers, treasurer; and Colin English, secretary. Allen B. Tucker of Punta Gorda was elected representative to the National council.

"A budget of \$7,000 was voted for 1926, of which \$3,000 will be raised in Fort Myers; \$2,000 in Arcadia, \$1,500 in Punta Gorda, \$250 in LaBelle, and \$250 in Moore Haven.

"A well qualified man will be secured as director of this district, rather than a low-salaried, mediocre man.

"The Punta Gorda Scout Council is composed of the following: W.S. Whitfield, Colonel H. Holderby, Max Price, Rev. W.S. Bingham, A.G. Price, A.G. Dewey, J.K. McClelland, W.H. Johnson, W. Mobley, John Skipper, Harry Dreggors, P.L. Eddy, J.F. Cooper, Luther Koon and Clay Chadwick.

"A meeting will be called shortly to organize a campaign to raise Punta Gorda's budget assessment and to make necessary plans for the work here."

It is interesting to note that Punta Gorda Rotarians were half the local representation.

Rotary capped its first eight months of service by distributing Christmas baskets of food and toys to needy families.

Baseball Fever

The "Roaring Twenties" and "Great Florida Land Boom" were well underway when Punta Gorda Rotary was organized. Confidence in the future was unbounded. The Kiwanis and Lions service clubs were established within months after Rotary. Each club, individually and cooperatively, worked to improve the town.

Rotary president W.S. Whitfield heard that the Baltimore Orioles were looking for a spring training camp. He proposed building a baseball park at Punta Gorda and subsidizing spring training for the team. The Chamber of Commerce, service clubs and town people cheered.

A consortium of citizens first formed the Charlotte Amusement Company to finance the venture. As enthusiasm grew, the Charlotte County Fair Association was incorporated to sell stock and build a permanent baseball facility with other uses.

The *Punta Gorda Herald* reported on Jan. 15, 1926: "Walter French, outfielder for the Philadelphia Athletics who batted .370 last year, was a guest at this week's Rotary meeting. He will supervise work on the ball park at the invitation of the Charlotte Amusement Company to see that the fields and stands are laid out correctly."

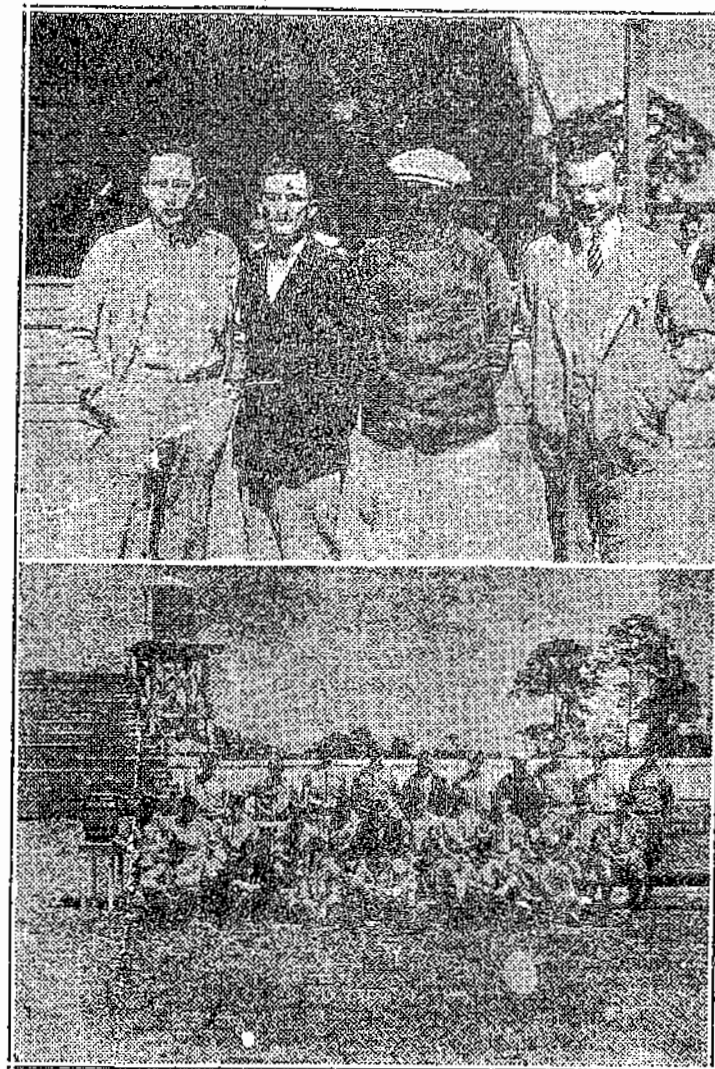
Starr Matthews, a *Baltimore American* sportswriter, arrived on the scene in February. He wrote a glowing account of the town and its prospective baseball park at the end of Carmelita Street, now the Little League fields:

"This place is a delightful feast for the eyes with its fragrant orange blossoms, trees with the golden fruit weighing down the branches, the flaming red poinsettias, and the wide-spreading banyan of which the town boasts.

"The grandstand, painted a vivid green, is almost finished. It will seat about 1,000 cash customers. There are two bleachers. Surrounding the park is a fence 600 feet from home plate which is hard to see with the naked eye. Anyone who hits the ball over the boards will be a home run king of immense proportions.

"The movement to bring the Orioles here was started by President W.S. Whitfield of the Rotary Club. The Chamber of Commerce, of which E.P. Gage is president, is taking a very active part in the preparations.

"The city is spending \$25,000 in this form of advertising. It is paying the Orioles \$5,000 to come here, and Punta Gorda is taking the gate receipts."



Orioles manager Jack Dunn (cap) poses with Punta Gorda leaders who organized spring training camp. They are, from left, John Petzel, W.S. Whitfield, Dunn, and Mose Darst.

Entire Orioles baseball team pose for a group photo. Water tank served showers for players.

This was equivalent to approximately \$600,000 in today's dollars – a staggering sum for a town of barely 3,000 people.

Officers of the association – all large stockholders – were President John Pelzel (Legion); First Vice-president W.H. Johnson (Rotary); Second Vice-president Ernest Pearce (Lions); Secretary-treasurer Mose Darst (Legion); Directors W.S. Whitfield (Rotary); Frank Smoak (Kiwanis); and R. Chester Blount (Rotary).

The Orioles were quartered at the Charlotte Bay Hotel and driven by volunteers to and from the baseball park each morning and afternoon.

The first game was scheduled for March 5 with the Athletics from Fort Myers. John R. Jack, Punta Gorda mayor and Rotarian, declared a half-holiday so the whole town could attend.

To celebrate an expected victory, the town was invited to a dance at the hotel. A special attraction was a "Charleston contest with \$50 prize for the couple showing the greatest skill at this newest expression of the terpsichorean art."

On opening day, the *Herald* reported: "Everything started off right when Mayor Jack heaved the first ball in the general direction of north-by-east. Catcher McKee might have been able to catch it if assisted by a pair of wings, a butterfly net and stepladder. As it was, the mayor was charged with an error."

A crowd of 1,000 spectators saw the Orioles defeated 5-3. The Orioles ended their spring season with five wins and nine losses.

The Orioles never came back because the visit was a financial disaster. Gate receipts failed to meet expenses so the stockholders lost their investments. The loss was

covered by a note from the bank pledged by Chester Blount, W.H. Johnson, Frank Smoak and two other men whose names are not known.

The Florida Land Boom collapsed that year, followed by the Great Depression starting in 1929.

Civic leaders who pledged the note could not make payments. Blount lost his home. Only Smoak, later Punta Gorda mayor, was able to make partial payments with difficulty.

Finally the bank forgave the balance, settling for 20 cents on the dollar. The county took over the ballpark and the remaining debt of \$15,000.

Founder Speaks

Chastened by the ballpark experience, Punta Gorda Rotarians concentrated on service instead of boosterism..

W.L. "Varsity" Johnson was elected second president of the club and led just two others – Past President W.S. Whitfield and Jack Whitmire -- to the District Rotary Conference at Tampa in April 1927.

The district at that time encompassed all of Georgia and Florida. Today, Punta Gorda is part of Southwest Florida District 6960 consisting of 49 clubs under the guidance of District Gov. Gary D. Wilson of Clewiston.

The Tampa convention was a momentous one for the three Punta Gorda Rotarians. Paul Harris, founder of Rotary International, spoke for two hours.

He explained a proposal to create national child-welfare hospitals, and to foster world peace through the cooperation of 2,060 Rotary clubs and 130,000 members worldwide.

Mr. Harris enthralled the Rotarians with reminiscences of the start of Rotary on Feb. 23, 1905.

He grew up on a Vermont farm, was graduated with a law degree by Princeton and opened his office in Chicago then rapidly expanding.

The city was plagued by corruption and shady businesses. Paul missed the small-town neighborliness and mutual trust he had experienced in small-town Vermont.

In five years at Chicago, he had come to know -- as luncheon partners -- just three other men in the downtown Unity Building.

On that raw winter evening in February, he asked his few friends to join him in discussing his proposal for a new kind of club -- one based on fellowship, high business ethics and service to others.

His companions were Gus Loehr, a mining engineer; Hiram Shorey, a merchant tailor; and Silvester Schiele, a coal dealer. Within a few days, other friends and acquaintances were drawn into the circle. They decided weekly meetings would be held "in rotation" at members' offices -- hence Rotary.

To turn off cares of the day, they started by singing popular songs -- a universal practice of American and Canadian Rotarians still today.

New Challenges

The vision and dedication of those first Rotarians were to be inspiration for Punta Gorda members in the new challenges approaching.

Johnson was succeeded as club president in 1927 by Charles Dunn, agent for several automobile agencies.

People were not buying cars as readily as they first did when Henry Ford brought out his Model-T.

Dunn resigned the presidency after only one month to move to New Jersey and sell insurance. Varsity Johnson was re-elected to fill out Dunn's unexpired term.

In an attempt to restart the boom, civic leaders along the route of Barron Collier's Tamiami Trail pushed for its rapid completion. Punta Gorda Rotary brought in Collier and other speakers to explain its benefits.

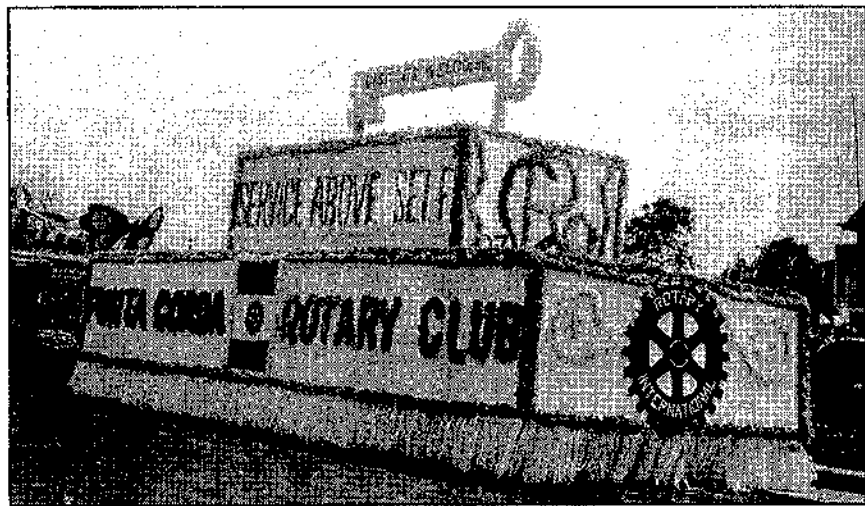
The Trail was completed in 1928. It soon became evident that the narrow, first bridge built across Charlotte Harbor seven years earlier was inadequate for increased traffic. Consequently, a wider bridge was built and opened July 4, 1931.

To celebrate the event, the little town of Punta Gorda invited everyone to a free fish-fry in Gilchrist Park at the foot of the bridge. Special trains brought folks from miles around. People with cars drove back and forth over the bridge to marvel at its convenience.

All Punta Gorda clubs were enlisted to prepare and serve the feast. Rotary and Kiwanis fried mullets in six, huge syrup pans and lifted them out with pitchforks. It was estimated that 15,000 guests were served.



Free fish-fry attracted 15,000 guests at bridge opening.



Rotary float was prize winner at July 4, 1931, parade.

This was valuable experience for Rotary that thereafter conducted fish-fry dinners on occasion to raise money for special projects. The club's annual mullet dinners began in 1955 at Gilchrist Park – first on Memorial Day and later on Labor Day.

The “Black Friday” stock market crash of Oct. 29, 1929 – forerunner of the worst economic crisis in U.S. history – hit all Rotary clubs. Unemployment nationwide rose to 15 percent. Workers with jobs took pay cuts or worked part time.

Under these circumstances, bank customers withdrew their savings at an accelerated rate. Many banks failed. As they did so, panic spread.

Three local Rotarians were particularly affected: Seward, a director of the Punta Gorda State Bank; Sikes, vice-president of First National Bank; and Skipper, president of Fidelity Trust.

Rotary and Kiwanis met jointly at the Woman's Club in January and April 1932 to express confidence in the Punta Gorda banks.

However, it was too late for First National and Fidelity Trust. They collapsed before newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt in March 1933 closed the nation's banks for a four-day “holiday” to reorganize and calm depositors.

By this time, however, the Great Depression was at its depth. Rotary membership which had grown to 28 members, dwindled to just 15 as businesses went bankrupt or closed for lack of patronage.

Vasco Peeples, grocer, was inducted into Rotary at this time and sold food on credit to struggling families. Later, he was elected Rotary president. He never let the store's cash register get below 75 cents so he would be sure to have lunch money every week for Rotary.

Despite declining membership and limited funds, Punta Gorda Rotarians hosted prominent speakers and devoted their energy to Scouting, school affairs and community improvements.

The club staged minstrel shows, turkey shoots and baseball games to raise money for families “on relief.”

Rotary's long-standing practice that “activity attracts active men” (now, “and women”) revived the club membership. The trend has been upward ever since.

Hospital Project

Outbreak of war in Europe boosted U.S. production which greatly reduced economic problems on this side of the Atlantic. Thus, Rotary was able to turn its attention to a long-sought hospital.

As early as 1938, Rotary had invited speakers who emphasized the need for a local hospital. There were only two, active doctors in Charlotte County – Dr. Walter B. Clement and Dr. Braxton Blount. Nearest medical facilities were at Arcadia and Fort Myers.

Rotary managed to get a proposed tax levy on the county-wide ballot that Fall for building a hospital. However, it was defeated 217-135.

Dr. Clement, Rotary president 1939-40, was especially devoted to the project. He appointed a committee chaired by John Jack to redouble efforts for a hospital.

Committee members went all over the country looking at small hospitals to get ideas.

Years later, Dr. Clement recalled: "We wanted the best facility we could get for the money. That was when we were still suffering from the Depression. Hamburgers cost 15 cents. Some local groups opposed the hospital because it would cost a lot of money."

The committee located a fine hospital site on the east side of town between Marion and Olympia avenues. Mrs. C.C. Carlton, widow of a prominent fruit packer, was willing to sell it for a hospital for \$1,000 – considerably less than its worth.

The *Herald* reported in June 1941 that citizens at a public meeting agreed to the project and location. The Charlotte Hospital Association was established to guide the project and obtain funds. With this show of determination, Mrs. Carlton gave the land.

Rotary solicited assistance from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) that had been established to provide jobs during the Depression. A 40-percent WPA participation was approved.

The County Commission in August was petitioned for official support necessary for WPA, but not a levy. John Jack was busy preparing plans for a hospital of six private rooms, and two 4-bed wards.

Dr. Clement announced Nov. 27, that "beds and other equipment are in storage awaiting the hospital."

Unhappily the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor just 10 days later. Congress next day declared war against the "axis partners" – Japan, Germany and Italy.

The hospital project was shelved. All manpower, building materials and money were reserved for the war effort.

World War II

With the declaration of war, Rotarians turned to related activities. They participated in scrap metal drives, War Bond rallies and Civil Defense "sky watch" posts on lookout for enemy bombers.

The Army Air Force in Sept. 1942 began constructing a huge training center at Punta Gorda for fighter pilots.

With this, Rotary and all other clubs devoted many of their activities to supporting the airfield. It was given to the county after the war.



Airmen at World War II Punta Gorda Base changed town.

✱ Today the Charlotte County Airport is one of ten unimpeded by jetliners but capable of handling a major air show featuring the Navy Blue Angels and the Army Golden Knights.

The 20th annual show in May 2000, conducted by volunteers, netted \$115,000 for 57 charities. Rotary's job for years has been to direct parking for thousands of cars.

Maj. Forrest Munger, commanding officer of the new base in 1942, appealed to local residents for rooms to rent for dependents of airmen. The *Herald* relayed the request in a front-page editorial:

"Greetings To The Army! Punta Gorda became an Army town this week as troops moved in to prepare for activation of the new airbase here.

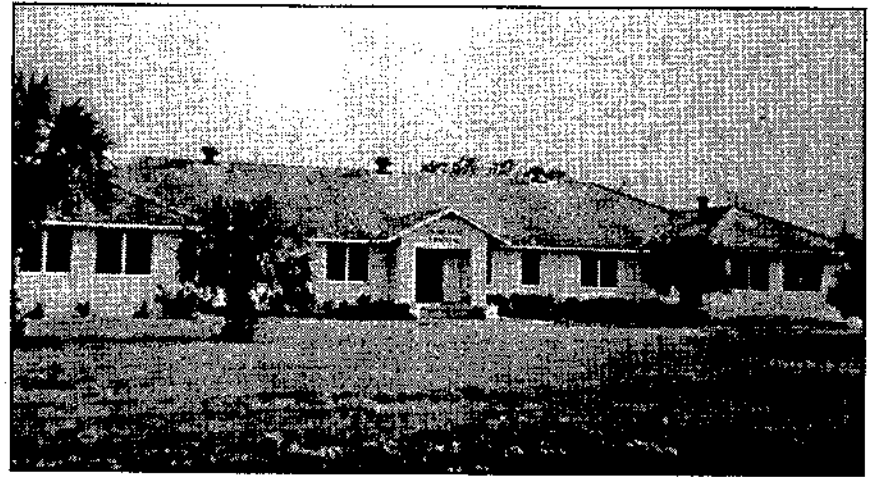
"It was a spectacular change from the quiet community of a week ago. Streets that had not been crowded, except on Saturday nights, are filled with soldiers and their families.

"Speaking of families, the United States Army is the marrying-est army in history. Many of their wives and children are here with them. Rooms and apartments have already been snapped up. Real estate and rental agencies are urged that more accommodations be made available."

Rotarians opened their spare bedrooms – as did many other residents – to the need.

The Womans Club transformed its auditorium on Sullivan Street into a United Service Organization (USO) center. Rotary members took a regular turn as servers.

Kiwanis had built a cabin for Scouts across the Harbor. However, it was little used during the early years of the war because gasoline to travel there was rationed. Rotary moved the cabin to Gilchrist Park in Punta Gorda so Scouts would have a place to practice outdoor skills.



Punta Gorda Medical Center Hospital opened with 22 beds.

Hospital Realized

Shortly after America entered the war, Dr. Clement turned over his practice to Dr. Braxton Blount and joined the 101st Airborne Division as a flight surgeon. His back was broken during a parachute landing at Normandy.

This limited Dr. Clement's military service, and thereafter he wore a back-brace for the rest of his life. Upon his return to Punta Gorda, Dr. Clement resumed his practice. Rotary appointed him to spearhead the drive to build the delayed hospital.

Dr. Clement again asked Dr. Blount to take over his practice while he devoted full time to the hospital project. "Rotarians worked from door to door getting donations and conducting many fund-raising events," he said in a 1969 speech to the club.

"We had to deal with all kinds of boards. Ebbie Rountree and I went to Tampa to appear before the War Assets Administration. In those days of shortages, new buildings had to be approved by them. It was a long, delayed process, riddled with red tape and bureaucracy.

“Another Rotarian, Johnny Jack, put in a lot of time and work on the hospital. He and I went to Washington over and over for reviews and to seek necessary permits.

“When we finally got the permits, the hospital was 80-percent completed. We opened in 1947. The first patient was Rotarian Vasco Peeples’ daughter, Gussie, who had her tonsils taken out.”

The Punta Gorda Medical Center hospital was a great success. In addition to its 22 beds, it had five bassinets, an incubator for premature babies, an X-ray machine and an “iron-lung” to treat polio, a dreaded scourge of children in those days before the Salk vaccine.

The hospital experienced constant financial difficulties in those days before Medicare, Medicaid and widespread health insurance. Friction over billing procedures arose between the medical staff and the Charlotte Hospital Association.

A proposal to turn over the hospital to an experienced non-profit religious group divided the Rotary club as well as the public. Law suits were pursued. Leaders on both sides of the controversy resigned.



Rotary-sponsored Cub Scouts “fly up” to Scout Master U.S. Cleveland, right. Cub Master Jim Brown, shirt, prepared them.

Finally, the hospital was given to the Southern Adventist Health and Hospital System, Inc., in 1969. It sold the Punta Gorda facility in 1992 to Health Management Associates, Inc., of Naples, Fla.

Today the Charlotte Regional Medical Center is a leading hospital with 208 beds and a medical staff of 225 doctors – including four cardiac thoracic (open heart) surgeons.

During this time, Rotarians started the first Cub Scout pack at Punta Gorda. Dr. Clement and Elton Ingraham were “drafted” as den mothers to start off. When Little League baseball and Pop Warner football began, the club sponsored teams in both sports for many years.

Interstate-75

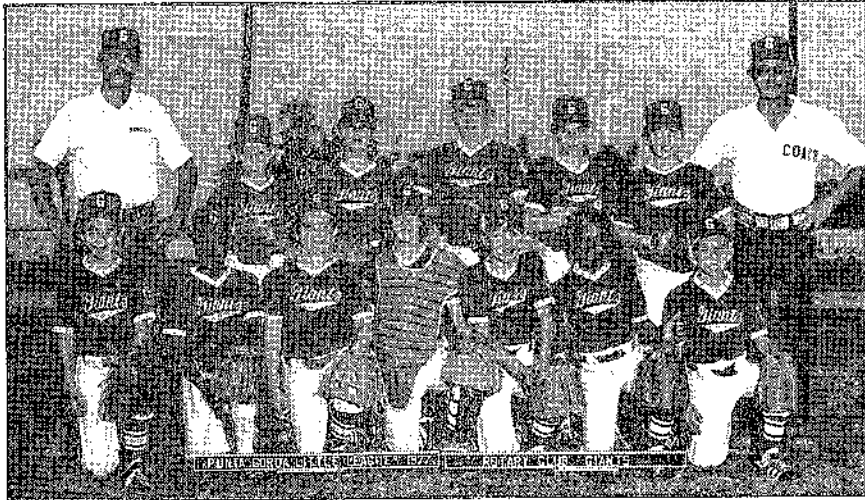
Punta Gorda Rotary Club and Past President Joyce Hindman played a key role in getting Interstate Highway 75 extended from Tampa to Naples years ahead of schedule.

Hindman was chairman of several civic groups, one of which was the Regional Planning Council for Waste, Water and Roads.

He explained years later in a newspaper interview: “Jim Route, a fellow Rotarian at Fort Myers, called me one day in 1964 and said we had to do something about getting an Interstate to pep up tourism and growth.

“We began talking up the problem, and sentiment seemed to favor a toll road. Finally we decided to submit formal petitions to the state. Punta Gorda Rotary directed Kenton Haymans, then an attorney but now a county judge, to draft a resolution to that effect.”

Punta Gorda Rotary adopted its “Resolution” in April 1967, as follows:



Punta Gorda Rotary sponsored Little League and Pop Warner sports teams for many years.

WHEREAS since 1961 there has been a marked increase in industrial and commercial development in the same Southwest area of Florida; and

WHEREAS Interstate-4 has now been authorized for extension into St. Petersburg, and a North-South Expressway connecting the present terminus of Interstate-4 and the Sunshine Skyway is being engineered and will be under construction within the next two years; and

WHEREAS Interstate-75 has been constructed into Tampa and shortly will tie into Interstate-4 there; and

WHEREAS present interstate highway funds and programming make construction of Interstate-75 south of Tampa unlikely for perhaps fifteen or twenty years; and

WHEREAS numerous citizens of Hillsborough County have indicated an interest in construction of an expressway on the east side of Tampa Bay; and

WHEREAS the counties along the Southwest coast of Florida are desperately in need of additional road facilities; and

WHEREAS Governor Claude Kirk has announced April 19, 1967, that a feasibility study of a turnpike to serve Southwest Florida is to be commenced; and

WHEREAS it has been stated by the Florida Turnpike Authority and the State Road Department that a West Coast Turnpike will not interfere with the four-laning of U.S. 41;

NOW THEREFORE, we, the Punta Gorda Rotary Club do hereby petition the Florida State Turnpike Authority as follows:

1. At an early date, to perform a feasibility study of a toll-financed, limited-access, four-lane highway parallel to the coast of the West Coast counties of Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Lee and Collier – close enough to the coastal communities to provide easy access, but far enough inland to ensure minimum right-of-way costs.

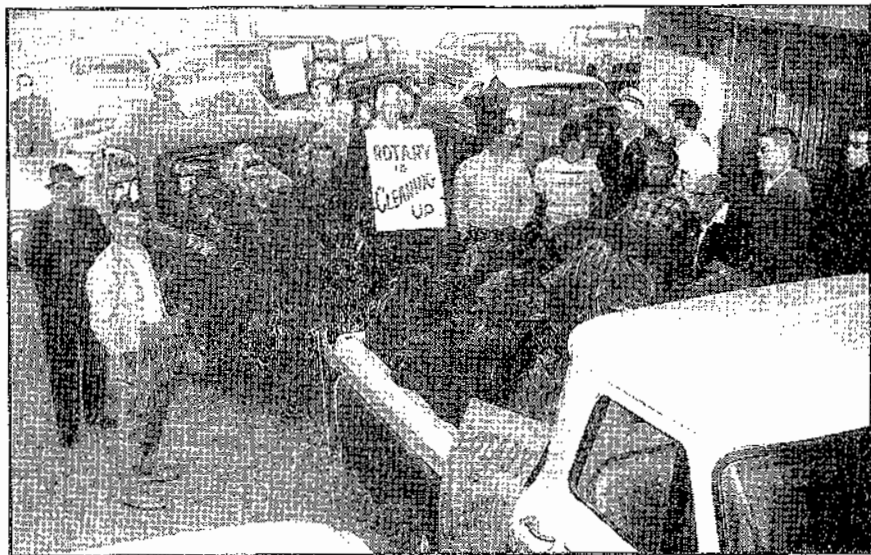
2. To study the feasibility of having this limited-access highway terminate in the greater Fort Lauderdale-Miami metropolitan area, or, if this is not feasible, to terminate in Collier County. Account should be taken of the soon to be completed Alligator Alley.

3. If results of the new feasibility study indicate the [suggested] highway is feasible, to construct same at the earliest practicable date.

ADOPTED and passed this 28th day of April 1967.

“We called Governor Kirk and asked for an opportunity to discuss it,” Hindman recalled. “He said he could spare 15 minutes. We went to Sarasota and talked the White Sox baseball team, then in spring training, to fly us up to Tallahassee.

“We got to see the governor for exactly five minutes. However, he promised to see us a few weeks later for as long as we wanted. In the meantime we persuaded Senator Randolph Jennings of Virginia, a member of the



Rotary Pick Up, Fix Up and Clean Up Day in 1967.

Senate Transportation Committee, to come down and inspect the proposed route. We drove him the length of U.S. 41. The traffic convinced him we needed the highway badly.

“When we went back to see Gov. Kirk, he took us to lunch, and we talked about the highway for three hours. He assured us he’d support our request with Washington.

“On the flight home, we heard Florida Congressman Cramer Young announce on the radio that Interstate-75 had been approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation. I continued to serve as Charlotte County Highway Committee chairman until the road was completed.”

International Service

As the Punta Gorda Club approached its 25th anniversary in 1950, with a balanced program of community projects, members became more active in Rotary’s other major “avenue of service.”

Rotary International Foundation endowment provides funds for a variety of cross-border scholarships, poor-nations development and health projects.

The Foundation was begun in 1917 by Arch Klumph, sixth president of Rotary International, “to do good in the world.” That objective is well met by its unprecedented Polio Plus program nearing completion.

Crippled children have always been a concern of Rotary. Poliomyelitis, often called “infantile paralysis,” once afflicted many thousands of children worldwide.

There was no defense against the dreaded disease and no cure. It struck the affluent and the poor indiscriminately. As noted, the “iron lung” kept many afflicted children alive until lung muscles recovered but arm and leg muscles often did not.

Punta Gorda Rotary made sure its hospital had an iron lung. In addition, it conducted an annual President Franklin D. Roosevelt Ball and helped organize March of Dimes drives.

President Roosevelt’s legs, of course, were paralyzed by polio. His likeness was embossed on dimes after his death. These were collected to buy iron lungs and to subsidize special education for crippled children.

A specific vaccine developed by Dr. Jonas Salk in 1952, eradicated polio long ago in developed countries. However, it continued unabated elsewhere.

Consequently, The Rotary International Convention in 1985 voted unanimously to join the Pan American Health Organization to wipe out polio everywhere by Rotary’s 100th birthday in 2005. It would be “a gift to all mankind.” They were joined three years later by the World Health Organization.

The last mass-immunization is now underway in the jungles of Congo despite a raging civil war there. “Days of Tranquillity” are declared when Polio Plus specialists and volunteers conduct inoculations.

WHO provides supervising specialists through its 166-nation membership. More than 250,000 Rotarians have volunteered in the various areas.

To date, Rotary International Foundation -- through donations by its clubs and individual philanthropists -- has contributed \$450 million worth of polio vaccine. It will top a half-billion dollars before the coming five-year mop-up and certification period is over.

Total cost of the program for all parties will be well over a billion dollars. It is estimated this is about a fourth of what it would have cost without Rotary's contributions of money and volunteers.

Punta Gorda Rotary fully met its starting, monetary quota under the guidance of Rev. Jim Latta and has contributed continuously since.

Paul Harris Fellows

At the death of Paul Harris in 1947, Rotarians from around the world made gifts to the Foundation in his memory. Contributors of a thousand dollars or more receive a medal designating them Paul Harris Fellows.

Currently there are 41 local Paul Harris Fellows -- 37 club members and four non-Rotarians. In addition to their gifts, the club contributes to International Service projects in which it takes part.

Punta Gorda Rotary regularly participates in Group Study Exchanges. The International Foundation provides grants for teams of five or six young business and professional non-Rotarians in reciprocating Rotary Districts to travel abroad for five or six weeks.

They move about in the host Rotary district to talk with community leaders, observe business practices and study their host country's culture. Meals and lodging are provided by host clubs' members. District 6960 currently is exchanging with Brazil.

An International Rotary Foundation activity which Punta Gorda Rotarians supports enthusiastically is the approximately 1,400 scholarships annually for vocational and journalism students, teachers for the handicapped, and Goodwill Ambassadors Abroad for graduate scholars of advanced subjects.

Other special foundation projects are 150 grants each year for Health, Hunger and Humanity needs, up to six Peace Forum meetings, and assistance to communities devastated by major disasters.

Punta Gorda Rotary incorporated its own non-profit Charity and Scholarship Foundation in September 1991 to distribute funds for local causes. Paul Edrington was the first president, followed by the present Robert Lynch.

The late Rotarian Jack Durig donated \$10,000 to start the foundation endowment now amounting to \$122,000. It grows each year by proceeds from the annual Labor Day fish-fry, Charlotte County Air Show and the Service Above Self Award banquet honoring a non-Rotarian citizen embodying that ideal.

The banquet was organized and chaired until recently by Rev. Robert Schlichter

Those honored todate are Col. Franz Ross, Leo Wotitzky, Phyllis Smith, Dr. Robert Shedd, Col. Russell Bryant, Bernice Russell, Vernon Peeples, Dr. David Klein, Ann Kelly Gateff, and Garnette Scholl.

In the current Rotary year, donations from endowment earnings were made to causes not part of United Way. They are: American Cancer Society, Charlotte-DeSoto Alzheimer Association, County Public Schools Early Childhood Education, Charlotte High School "Project Graduation," Edison Community College for two 2-year full-tuition scholarships, Florida Rotary Camp for



Mrs. Vasco, Lois, Peeples, first lady Rotarian here.

the Deaf and Blind, Department of Family and Children "Well Kids" Christmas party. Patrick Thompson to defray costs to state high school swimming tournament, Punta Gorda Rotary's Career Breakfast for high school students, Rotary District "Gift of Life" heart surgery for poor children, Rotary International Foundation, Society for Entertainment and the Arts, United Way of Charlotte County, Vocational-Technical Center for two 1-year full-tuition scholarships.

First Woman

When Paul Harris and his friends started Rotary nearly a hundred years ago for "fellowship," the term was customarily taken to mean "men" rather than its true, old English definition of "companions sharing work and wealth." It was unseemly at the turn of the century for married men and women to fraternize with the opposite sex not their spouses.

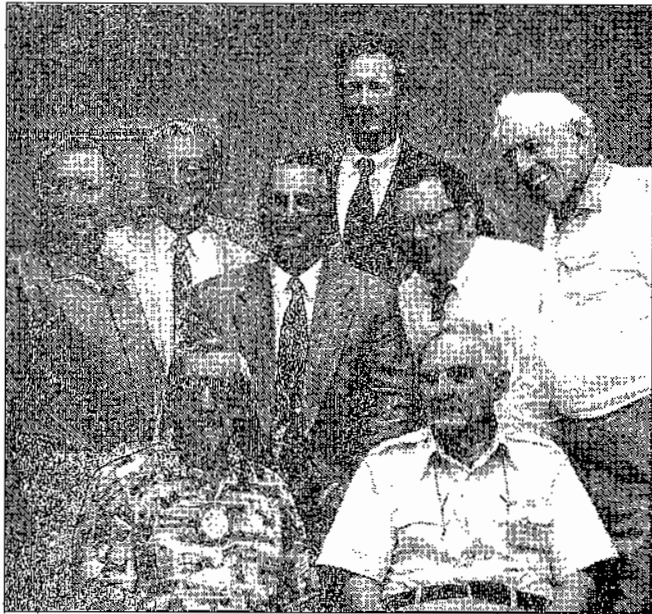
Thus, Rotary clubs were comprised solely of men until 1987. At that time the Rotary International Convention agreed to let approving clubs, mostly in the United States, admit qualified business and professional women executives.

A few Punta Gorda Rotarians grumbled about "letting women in." However, all opposition melted when President William Burkhart in June 1989 recommended Mrs. Lois Peeples, the highly respected widow of Vasco Peeples who had been president of the club and a dedicated member before he died in 1985. She died in 1994.

Today the club has 12 valuable lady Rotarians. One of them is Mrs. John, Andrea, Bivens, veterinarian and mother of Jared, a babe in arms. Inasmuch as their little son is too young for day care, Andrea brings him to Rotary – to the delight of grandfathers. The members have made him an "Honorary Rotarian," certainly the youngest in the world.



Jared, baby boy of Rotarian Andrea Bivins and husband John, attends meetings regularly as "Honorary Rotarian."



Anniversery Officers - (bottom row, from left) Keith Austin, President-elect; Hank Swindell, Dist. Lt.Gov; (middle) Bill Dryburgh, Sgt.-at-arms; Jim Van Dooren, Secretary; Jerry O'Halloran, President; John Dzuras, Dir.; Pat Gorman, Dir.; (top) Ross Schultz, Vice-pres. Photo unavailable: Roy Borrego, Treasurer, Jim Sanders, Dir., Vicki Stass, Dir.



A pleasant day at Punta Gorda Rotary Anniversery Beach for Erik Hager, Cona Mae Garman, Cona Williams and Lorie Hager.

PUNTA GORDA ROTARY CLUB ROSTER

* Paul Harris Fellow >Past President this club <Past President
another club #Past District Governor x Past R.I. Representative

(Not available for photo: Clinton Cooper, Paul McAfee*,
Skip Mansfield, Jim Paschal and Chuck Sleichter)



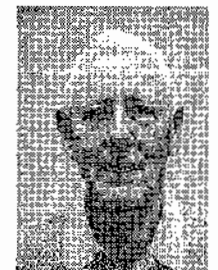
Lee Allen* >



Jim Anderson* >



Jack Andreas



Arni Arnason



Keith Austin *



Geri Basye



Howard Batchelder



Judie Beaumont



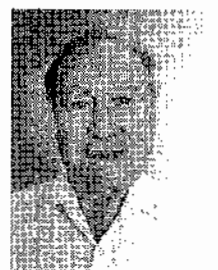
Andrea Bivens



Roy Borrego



Judy Boswell



Gaspar Bufia <



Dick Chamberlain



Frank Chance* >



Wessven Cornell



Don Crane <



Larry Hartman*



Pat Hayes



Ken Haymans >



Emil W. Heid



Jim Crambaugh



Hank Dawson* > < *



Cliff Deane



Jerry Downs



Frank Hicks*



Ed Kaiser* <



Richard Kenyon



Bob Kiskaddon*



Bill Dryburgh



John Dzerek



Paul Edrington*



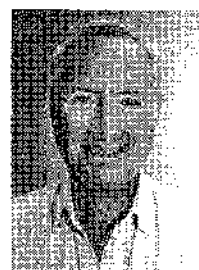
Hank Ford <



Margaret Lacey



William Lacey



Jack Lotz > >



Peter Locke <



Wayne Goff*



J.H. "Pat" Gorman*



William Haber



Herman Harte*



Blair Lovejoy Lee



Bob Lynch*



Greg Mappadi



Fredrick Masler



Paul Miller*



John Mizell* >



Douglas Morey



Al Morgan



Rod Schultz >



Ross Schultz* >



Douglas Shadle



Lloyd Smith



Ted Murray



Paul Nelson*



Rick Kovak



Jerry O'Hanoran*



Don Staas*



Vicki Staas*



Jim Steiner



Lloyd Stokes*



Allan Pope



Jerry Presseller* >



Jack Price* >



Josh Putter



Hank Swindell* >



Kay Swindell



Charles Talley



James Van Dooren*



Jim Sanders



Robert Sanders



Joni Sandies



Robert Schlichter*



Hona D. Walsh*



Jacqui Williams



Lin Williams* <#x



Wayne Woodard* >

Punta Gorda Rotary Presidents

The Rotary Year of July 1 to June 30 facilitates international activities affected by different Hemisphere seasons.

THE ROTARY CLUB OF PUNTA GORDA

75TH ANNIVERSARY

Master of Ceremonies Wayne Goff
 Opening remarks President Jerry O'Halloran
 Invocation Past President, Franklin Chance
 Pledge of Allegiance Past President, Leo Wotitzky
 God Bless America. Sergeant of Arms, Bill Dryburg
 Toasts: District Governor, Dick Dodderidge
 Club President, Jerry O'Halloran
 Lt District Governor, Hank Swindell
 (Response to all toasts: "Hear! Hear!")

Dinner

Introduction of guests President Jerry O'Halloran
 History of our club Lindsey Williams
 City of Punta Gorda Proclamation Mayor Bob Shedd
 Rotary International District Governor, Dick Dodderidge
 Recognition of Paul Harris Fellows.

CHANGE OF WATCH

Master of Ceremonies Wayne Goff
 Recognition of past presidents Wayne Goff
 Final comments and board recognition Jerry O'Halloran
 New Officers District Governor-elect Gary Wison
 Closing remarks President Keith Austin

Thank you for sharing this special event with us!

1925-26	William S. Whitfield	1961-62	Richard Saunders
1926-27	William S. Whitfield	1962-63	Russell Shakeshaft
1927-28	W.L. Johnson	1963-64	Jessee S. Cox
1928-29	Charles Dunn / W.L. Johnson	1964-65	James Anderson
1929-30	Ferguson Johnson	1965-66	Kenton Haymans
1930-31	Ferguson Johnson	1966-67	J. Martin Kelly
1931-32	Frank F. Forth	1967-68	John T. Longhorne
1932-33	Charles K. Dodd	1968-69	John H. Daniels
1933-34	William T. Adair	1969-70	Joyce C. Hindman
1934-35	A.L. Stebbins	1970-71	John Lotz
1935-36	Daniel F. Gibbons	1971-72	James Longstreth
1936-37	Paul Eddy / Alton J. Mooms	1972-73	Thomas Lee Allen
1937-38	Vasco Peeples	1973-74	John L. Fugus
1938-39	Edward H. Scott	1974-75	Thomas W. Smith
1939-40	Walter B. Clement	1975-76	Robert J. Lehman
1940-41	T.I. Kennedy	1976-77	William Bostwick
1941-42	J.L. DeLaney / W.P. Shelby	1977-78	Robert Hollander
1942-43	Joseph Manning	1978-79	Charles E. Ogle
1943-44	Fred Quednau	1979-80	Donald F. Roll
1944-45	E.B. Yeager	1980-81	Franklin S. Chance
1945-46	Leo Wotitzky	1981-82	Wayne Woodard
1946-47	John T. Rose, Jr.	1982-83	Tom Pinder
1947-48	John T. Longhorne	1983-84	Steven A. Bostwick
1948-49	Edwin Rountree	1984-85	James Stiner
1949-50	Ellis P. Green	1985-86	Arnold A. Summers
1950-51	Robert Donald	1986-87	Robert Alwood
1951-52	X.L. Garrison	1987-88	Rod Shultz
1952-53	Bradley Fowkles	1988-89	William C. Burkhart
1953-54	Edwin Rountree	1989-90	Paul Marshall
1954-55	Leo Wotitzky	1990-91	Ray Jasica
1955-56	Joyce L. Hindman	1991-92	Jack Durig
1956-57	Lewis Kennedy	1992-93	Jack Price
1957-58	Thomas Kannady	1993-94	Jerome Presseller
1958-59	Edwin Gerson	1994-95	Lawrence Taylor
1959-60	Franklin S. Chance	1995-96	John Mizell
1960-61	William Crosland	1996-97	Hank Dawson
		1997-98	Ross Shultz
		1998-99	Hank Swindell
		1999-2000	Jerry O'Halloran