

## **A Brief History of the Rotary Club of Nairobi**

75 years ago Rotary was born in the Kenya and the region. The driving force to this great achievement was Rotarian John Innes from Leeds, who had been inspired when Rotary's Founder Father, Paul Harris visited his club in England two years earlier and encouraged him to use his next business trip to East Africa to initiate a new Rotary Club.

He approached the then Mayor Mr. Charles Udall of establishing a Rotary Club in East Africa. Mayor Udall was impressed by his talk and there and then got together twelve prominent citizens to a luncheon at the New Stanley Hotel on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1930. With this meeting the first Rotary Club between South Africa and Cairo and the third oldest in Africa was born.

His Worship the Mayor, Mr. C. Udall, presided, and among those present were Mr. A.C. Tannahill, Mr. Gill, The South African Trades Commissioner (Colonel Turner), the Very Rev. Dean Wright, and Messrs. W. Tyson, R.F. Mayer,...After listening to Mr. Innes, everyone, without exception, agreed that the forming of a Rotary Club would undoubtedly be to the benefit of this Colony, if its principles were carried out.

Thus the Rotary Club of Nairobi was born and Mayor Udall elected the first President of the club for the Rotary year 1930-31.

The headline on the East Africa Standard the next day, Wednesday, March 12, 1930 read...***ROTARY MOVEMENT COMES TO KENYA***

These first Rotarians had a constitution drafted and approved within two months. The Club started with 12 'persons of high standing in the community.' And by the year's end, 16 Rotarians met at the *New Stanley Hotel* for their weekly luncheon. The speaker at the first regular meeting in Nairobi was Mr. H. Monck Mason Moore, later to become Governor of Kenya. He gave an address on Colonial Constitutions.

The Rotary Club of Nairobi was duly chartered in September 1930 although the charter documents were not received until a year later. By then membership had risen to 16. Since then the Club has gone from strength to strength as every Rotary Club in East Africa today tracing its roots back to the Rotary Club of Nairobi. In the subsequent years Rotary was founded in Mombasa in 1944, Uganda in 1947, Dar-es-salaam in 1949, Ethiopia in 1961 and Eritrea in 1997.

The founder members of the club comprised not only 'prominent' citizens but of amazing characters with the most fascinating backgrounds. For example, the South African Trade Commissioner, Colonel Turner and the Very Reverend Dean Wright had come to the Colony with a predetermined assignment; one to encourage business with South Africa and to spread the gospel respectively. Other professional Rotarians were engaged in local business adventures and are credited with the foundation of some of Kenya's leading organizations. Among these was Ernest Beasley Gill the first qualified accountant in East Africa whose practice later became today's Deloitte & Touche. He was also a co-founder of Unga with Lord Delamere.

Over the years, the club grew in leaps and bounds and its members comprised people who made a difference in the growing colony all the way to post independence and present day Kenya.

The seed planted on that day 75 years ago has seen it sprout to form the largest District in Africa (9200) comprising some 101 clubs in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda and with a total membership of 2,600 members out of the 22,000 Rotarians in 50 countries in Africa.

Rotarians in these countries just like all the rest the world over promote international understanding and good will by means of material, technical, and professional assistance to their local communities and beyond. Rotary projects address pertinent community concerns among them alleviation of illiteracy, access to clean and safe water, fighting diseases where Rotary has contributed financial and material support for polio eradication through its PolioPlus Campaign, poverty eradication among others.

In addition, Rotarians are people who engage in business or the corporate world with the highest standards of integrity and impact the community positively. Rotary eschews treating ones vocation as an opportunity to serve a feat guided by the Rotary motto of *Service Above Self* most have taken up with zeal. Rotarians are supposed to do all in their power to dignify their vocations and to promote the highest ethical standards in their chosen vocations.

The ideal of Rotary is best captured by the words of our founder Paul Harris when he said “the power of Rotary is invisible yet it performs miracles. The gates of empires have been lifted from their hinges by the power of ideas. Beneath the good works of Rotary there is an invisible power. It is the power of good will and by virtue of the power of good will; Rotary exists. Friendship is an evangelizing force. Thousands of men and women are born anew in the spirit of Rotary, into old fashioned friendliness and neighbourliness.....”

The Rotary family also comprises Inner Wheelers who are wives or close relations of Rotarians, Rotaract clubs an international program for adults ages 18 to 30 who want to make a difference and Interact clubs which are service and social clubs for young people ages 14-18 sponsored by a Rotary club.

Within the next seven decades the spirit of Rotary spread to the countries in the region and beyond. In those seven decades the lives of people in the region have been changed and it is worth saying the lives of people in this part of the world would have been different had those invited to join rejected the noble idea of *Service Above Self*.