

President's report 2016-17

Judy Ginn

For me, the most fun part of this year was the event we held on January 29, 2017 celebrating the men of Seattle International District Rotary who worked to admit women to Rotary and successfully admitted the First Fifteen women in 1986. The title of the evening was *Rotary's Broken Ceiling: Honoring Those Who Broke It*.

The evening included a silent auction and raise the paddle to support our projects both local and international, a buffet dinner, a new video that included interviews with three of the men who were involved in the effort to admit women and clips from past interviews and TV news. Finally, we had a speaker, Dean Rohrs, a Rotary Director, who spoke of how the events in her life opened her eyes to others and how she became a Rotarian.

A program was created that included all the men who voted to admit women, the First Fifteen Women and contemporary comments from both the men and women. Although it makes this report rather long, I am including the cover, sponsors and comments from the men and women who were involved in breaking Rotary's Ceiling.

The club also continued our service in Vocational, Youth, Community and International Service. We awarded scholarships to graduating high schools students (outstanding all), supported Seattle University Interact Club, volunteered at Rotary First Harvest, Chinatown Clean-up, cleaned up Dearborn Street, provided heaters for Tiny Houses, supported several projects at Bailey Gatzert Elementary, gave dictionaries to third graders at Wing Luke elementary and Bailey Gatzert Elementary, worked with The Mountaineers to provide outdoor activities for Gatzert students and supported several international projects including a Russian Rotary Inter-Country Delegation in Seattle, EKARI Foundation that does academic work in Malawi, a water project in Zanzibar and became the lead club on a Global Grant teaching STEM teachers in Kenya. We also revised our by-laws to update them and to add new types of memberships. We were a 100% Every Rotarian Every Year club.



Rotary Club of Seattle-International District

presents

# Rotary's Broken Ceiling



## Honoring Those Who Broke It

Sunday, January 29, 2017

4:30 - 8:30 PM

Northwest African American Museum

2300 S Massachusetts Street

Seattle, WA 98144

# Thank you to tonight's sponsors



**PARATEX**



**PEST CONTROL SINCE 1908**



# Schedule of Events

- 4:30 Check -in  
No Host Bar  
Silent Auction  
50/50 Raffle Tickets on sale  
Visit Museum
- 5:15 First Section Closes
- 5:35 Second Section Closes  
Please find your seats
- 5:40 Welcome  
Greg Imel, Principal,  
Bailey Gatzert Elementary School
- 6:00 Buffet Line Begins  
Pick up Dessert Dash forms
- 6:40 Announcing the 50/50 Raffle winner  
Scholarship Speaker  
Raise the Paddle for Scholarships  
Dessert Dash  
Honoring Those Who Broke Rotary's Ceiling  
Keynote Speaker: Dean Rohrs
- 8:20 Closing

## **The men who voted to admit women**

Craig Abramson	Don Erickson	Paul Mar
Lloyd Barnes	Hwa-Tsun Feng	Danny Mitchell
Bob Beardemphl	Phil Gai	Peter Moy
Joe Bell	Phil Ginsberg	Harry Obedin
Ron Bishop	Lloyd Hara	Walle Ralkowski
Carl Blandford	Bob Hasimoto	Steve Rall
Rufo Bruan	Al Igarta	Mark Robison
Bruce Caplan	Ahmed Jaddi	Jesus Sanchez
Ken Chai	Dick Jenner	Dave Sims
Richard Chan	Jim Johnson	Jim St. Germain
Yee-Lam Chao	Kent Kawaguchi	Dennis Su
Doug Chin	John Kemple	Dick Taggart
Glenn Chinn	John Kinney	Jesse Tam
Max Clough	Nick Licata	Banks Warden
Narco Damo	Mike Maksimowicz	B Douglas Williams

## **The First Fifteen Women and Their Occupations Admitted July 1986**

Kay Blackard - Director of Education, Harborview Medical Center  
Ginny McCormack - Executive Director and President, Seattle Goodwill  
Cinthia Chirot - Senior Vice President, Federal Home Loan Bank  
Sonja Kim - Associate Directory, Washington State Department of Social Work  
Harriett Cody -- Attorney-at-law  
Assunta Ng - Publisher, Seattle Chinese Post  
Reiden Crowley - Customer Programs Administrator, Puget Power  
Dolores Sibonga - Seattle City Councilwoman  
Katherine Fletcher - Chair, Puget Sound Water Quality Authority  
Barbara Vanderkolk - President Barbara Vanderkolk & Associates  
Patricia Frank - Executive Directory, Puget Sound Big Sisters  
Sister Charlotte Van Dyke - Director of Corporate Relations, Sisters of Providence  
Jane Hardeson - Executive, Canadian Consulate General  
Karilyn vanSoest - President, Travel Bugs, Inc  
Carol James - President, Carol James Talent Agency

## **Excerpts from Reports of the First Three Club Presidents Regarding Admitting Women**

### **Lloyd Hara President 1985-85**

Lloyd felt the new club should consist of members who were business people who had cultural ties or interest in matters affecting the International District or Pioneer Square ... For a new club, the group was ethnically very diverse and generally a younger club with most members in the late 30's early 40's. Only Lloyd and Bob were Rotarians with other clubs. These factors allowed opportunity for a new group of people to be challenged and get involved. It also was the start of non-traditional activity.

The club charter application was slightly altered from the standard Rotary charter by striking out any reference to male membership. The application was returned unapproved because the new club had deleted the male gender clause and several other minor elements to comply with the interest and realities of the new members. The club debated whether it was better to accept the traditional charter or not. Finally, it was decided to approve the standard charter language and go through the formal process to change the by-laws at the legislative convention

### **Bob Beardemphl President 1985-86**

Those were indeed exhilarating times. We were a group of young people who did not believe that the status quo was necessarily the way things should be. We were very committed to some basic values of decency, humanism and multicultural advancement. We ...made several early decisions to implement our personal beliefs,

We laid a very careful course of legal and moral doctrine that was unanimously approved by the entire membership at each phase of implementation. This club was excited about being able to practice what we sincerely believed in... As I look back on us at that time, I am very pleased that we were not deterred by Rotary International, the District Governor or the other clubs in our region. ... I remember several of our members reminding us that we needed female members if Rotary was to survive. They did not need us nearly as much as we needed them.

We...felt that barring a group from membership for all of the wrong reasons was incorrect and we could not agree with Rotary International and their insistence on being discriminatory. We merely did what we thought was right. I take great pride in our stubbornness and dedication, Isn't it amazing what a difference ordinary people can make when they have extraordinary convictions?

## **Jim Johnson President 1986-87**

I was fortunate to be ...president during the year in which the Club admitted women. One hundred percent (100%) of our members voted in favor of taking this "radical" step and facing the risk of being expelled from the Rotary International. The unified, emotional commitment made by the Club members is my strongest and best memory of my time in Rotary.

All the press conferences, interviews, television coverage etc., which resulted from admitting these new members, made me feel a little like a pioneer and also very RIGHT! I recall that one night Hwa-Tsun Feng called me at midnight to review what I would say at the press conference scheduled for the next day. Special note should be made of Glenn Chinn who was always there to help me with the necessary details of leading the Club during this exciting time.

I received a lot of negative responses from the other club presidents and the District over what we did including letters and public ridicule at District meetings. However, I received many more supportive letters from members of Rotary worldwide. Hwa-Tsun Feng and I accepted the Mentor's Award from the Seattle Women in Business Association and were very proud to explain what the Club had accomplished.

After my term as president was over, I accepted the District Governor John Henry Award for outstanding contribution toward the good of Rotary...presented at the District Conference in Whistler, B.C.

## **Hwa-Tsun Feng President 1987-88**

To commemorate the 30th year anniversary of our club first admitting women, Hwa-Tsun Feng has provided his personal reflections on these events in this essay, based upon talks he has given over the 28+ years. On the club website it is found under the Club History tab at the very bottom of the page. The essay is too lengthy to print here but is excellent reading.

[Essay: The Women in Rotary Story: The Role played by the Rotary Club of Seattle-International District.](#)

[www.seattlerotary.org](http://www.seattlerotary.org)

## **Comments From Some of the First Fifteen Women**

### **Karilyn Van Soest President 1988-89**

My year as president was exciting. Being the first "official" female President of a Rotary Club in the world was an unbelievable and unforgettable experience. Many of my most vivid memories are of the time prior to my taking office.

I will never forget the PETS (President Elect Training Seminar) ... in March 1988 at the Sheraton Hotel for two days. It seems that my reservation had somehow slipped through the cracks and no one was aware that a female would be attending for the first time. When I check in at noon, it was quite obvious that a female was not expected by the shocked and surprised looks on the faces of the men present. They didn't know what to say to me.

I promptly went to my room and became very nervous about the whole weekend. There was a cocktail party scheduled at 6:00 PM. I decided it was time to make my appearance. I exited the elevator on the Ballroom level, took a deep breath, and headed toward the sea of men, all 430 of them, in the foyer. Someone notice me and my President-Elect badge that proved I was "one of them." He whispered to the man next to him, who whispered to the man next to him, and so on. all of a sudden, the men stopped talking and a path opened up for me. It reminded me of Moses parting the Red Sea. I headed to the bar, smiling and acknowledging the hellos. I ordered a Coke, nervously paid for it, then turned around to face my peers. A man walked up to me, introduced himself, and shook my hand welcoming me to PETS. That started it. I don't know how many hands I shook in that hour before the banquet, but I never got to drink my Coke.

It was now time to go into the Ballroom for dinner and I was invited to join a table of men from Oregon. Opening speeches were made and, of course, many of the speeches included jokes which were somewhat "sexist". When a wife was part of any joke, she was referred to as a "Rotary Ann". It was obvious that the speakers had not been told that there was a female president-elect in the audience. the Rotary men sitting near me looked very embarrassed and concerned for me. At one point a speaker told a "sexist" joke and then his eyes met mine. He did a double-take, looked right at me, appeared embarrassed, and changed the whole content of his speech.

The rest of the weekend was wonderful, with everyone wanting to meet me and almost every question having to do with women in Rotary.

Another memorable experience was the International Convention in Philadelphia in May 1988... There were 25,000 Rotarians at the Convention from all over the world. I was so proud to be one of them. One afternoon, I attended a forum on "Women in Rotary". It was exciting - people from all over the world expressing their opinions for or against women in Rotary. I was welcomed by many. The only bad experience I had was when a man from Germany noticed my "president-elect" ribbon, looked at me with disgust on his face and said, "Your club must have been in a lot of trouble to elect a



woman as president" and then walked away. I was so shocked I couldn't respond before he left.

During my presidency I visited other clubs who were coping with the question of women in Rotary. Some of the questions I received included the following: "What will you women do if you get pregnant and can't make the meeting requirements?", "What will you wear to meetings, dresses or pants?" and "Some Rotary wives are concerned that some of the single women in a club will have affairs with their husbands... isn't this a concern of you women?"

Thank you, Hwa-Tsun (Feng) for 'twisting my arm" and talking me into accepting the nomination as the first official female president of a Rotary Club, our Rotary Club. I will never forget that wonderful year of my life.

## **Assunta Ng**

### **The World's First Chinese Female Rotarian**

Excerpted From January 12, 2017 Northwest Asian Weekly

Most people know me as a journalist. But my most unusual title is: First Chinese female Rotarian in the world, thanks to a group of smart men who decided in 1986 that women should be a part of Rotary, despite opposition from their peers.

Today, I am still a Rotarian, a member of the Rotary Club of Seattle. With the two clubs (Seattle International District ID Rotary Club, 1986-91), I have been a proud member for 30 years, and I have no intention of retiring.

When the ID Rotary invited me to join, I was surprised. I didn't hesitate for a second. All I knew was, it was a prestigious group and an honor. Why me? I was only a few years into my publishing career. I guess I was in the right place at the right time. What a gift and privilege that these men have given me.

Now that I look back at what these men did, they were forward, innovative, and strategic thinkers, and blazing trails for equality. They had lined up pro bono attorneys to fight the case in court and savvy spokespersons to deal with the media. Their sophisticated campaign had created a movement for those who fought for equality in male social clubs. Bravo!

I'd like to thank all these men for opening doors to millions of women, and creating a lasting legacy not only for themselves, but for the entire global Rotary community, which has over 34,000 clubs and 1.2 million members. If not for these men, it could be 100 or more years for women to get in. So thank you, thank you, thank you for your courage to challenge the status quo.

## Harriett Cody

I became a 4th generation Rotarian in 1986, when I signed on to be one of the Seattle 15, as well as a named plaintiff in the lawsuit which the ID Rotary Club filed the same day it announced to the world that it was challenging RI's gender ban as a violation of state and federal anti-discrimination laws. Before the year was over, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled against RI on the issue, and another glass ceiling was broken in the long history of gender discrimination in America. It all started with a very small number of ID Club members, all men, inaugural members of that small, new Rotary club. I salute those visionaries, activists, and determined members who stepped up and stepped out to challenge the behemoth RI's indefensible ban on female membership.

I will forever be proud and happy to celebrate and remember the 30th anniversary of that bold and courageous step taken by the ID Rotary Club. (Seattle 4, then the largest and the fourth oldest Rotary Club in the world, with all the muscle of the business and government establishment of the city, turned down the small ID club's invitation to take the lead on the issue! Not a proud moment in their history.)

Reflecting on the famous history of the ID Rotary Club on this issue, and looking ahead to the threats which face our democracy, our government, and our planet today, I call on Margaret Mead's statement to inspire us all:

**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."**

Harriett M. Cody (King County Superior Court Judge, retired)

(My great-grandfather and my grandfather, both lawyers, were members of the original Paul Harris Rotary Club in Chicago at the turn of the 20th Century. Later, my grandfather was a devoted member of the Winston-Salem Rotary Club and served as its president. My father was a member of the Winston-Salem Rotary Club after WW II. I have always been proud to have followed in their footsteps.)

# The men whose comments are below, were among the men who voted to admit women to Rotary.

## **Jim Johnson**

As President of the club at the time-I was honored and excited to lead this "radical", so it seemed at the time, movement to take on the establishment! Needing to learn all about Rotary, meeting and getting to know the new people forming our club, all the legal input about injunctions, pro-bono, amicus briefs, etc while legally needing to keep it all confidential added to the excitement.

As a WASP from the Midwest, I had not experienced discrimination like many of our members had in their lives. But I was motivated, also, because Sandy and I had just adopted our daughter Jenifer and I wanted her to have any and all opportunities that were available to males. And it was obvious Rotary was not living up to their own 4-Way Test. To be the President of the club with all these talented members was a wonderful experience!

## **Ken Chai**

I voted to include women in Rotary because I believed that women would become good Rotarians. After six years at Seattle International District Rotary Club, I joined #4 Seattle Rotary Club and became a Paul Harris Fellow.

## **Richard Y Chan**

I believe in the value of diversity and what would happen to the world if there's no women?!! There will only be Yang and no Yin? No way.....

So, without much further thoughts, it's a no brainer, just went along with the club's leadership at that time.

## **Walle Ralkowski**

I was one of the charter members involved in starting the Seattle-International District Rotary Club. The main reason I joined was understanding that the initial and primary mission of the club was to include women. At the time, I was aware the Rotary Club was a "men's business club" and thought it was unusual and biased for a club to be exclusive requiring it to be challenged to include women. So, I voted YES to include women in Rotary. Based on the excellent results of the Seattle-International District Rotary Club we made a great decision and I am proud to be part of your history.

I was not able to continue with Rotary because of my business travel schedule and not able to keep up with attendance or make up meetings.

However, I have continued with community service and am presently on the Board of Directors (Emeritus Board Chair) with the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle; [www.urbanleague.org](http://www.urbanleague.org).

Thank you to the members of your club for your service and positive influence in our community.

**Bob Hasimoto**

I remember our brilliant attorney, Margaret McKeown of Perkins Coie, outlining the path we would undertake, speaking in one of the rooms at Four Seas Restaurant in Chinatown. I recall our vote was unanimous. The women members we admitted were incredible unafraid people. They went all over the country and the world to attend make up meetings and report on their experiences. If you ever been oppressed in your life, this was not a difficult decision.

**Ahmed Jaddi**

Jim Johnson and I had offices at 1200 Dearborn Street. Jim invited me to join the Club in formation. I obliged. Jim reported to the members that he went to see our neighbor the President of Goodwill to invite her to join the being formed Club. She told him that Rotary does not admit women. Jim did not know it, neither did I. She offered Mr. Anderson, the Vice President, to be a member. Anderson joined the group. The idea of a President of an organization can't be a Rotarian but her VP was abhorring to me. I knew that that discrimination is a human prejudice but controlling such emotions is humane. Phil Ginsberg was utterly opposed to such behavior. I wanted to withdraw my admission. Phil suggested that let us join and work to change it. So I obliged again.

Lloyd Hara, Clubs Founding Father was City Treasurer. Being a good politician and tactful he appointed a committee of three to work on this issue. Phil, Watson and I were the honored members of the Committee. Then other two members were invited, one being Nick Licata, who later on was elected to the Seattle City Council.

Those days I used to live on Mercer Island. The Mercer Island Rotarians questioned me whether I will do such a thing in "My Country", meaning India. Like any society, multitudes of sub-cultures in India have their prejudices. However, I was raised to rise above such distasteful behavior. My father worked in the Department of Justice. He had a great sense of human equality not just equal opportunity. Both my parents taught me how to respect domestic servants. Mother told me, do not look down upon a person because he is poor or sick but be thankful that you are blessed. Do not look up to people who are better off than you and be jealous but try to be better than them.

I told the members, who among us has not suffered prejudice or who among us has not refrained from such a behavior. Should we not then control such an emotion? Do not we all want our mothers, sisters, daughters, and wife to be treated with due respect? They all are women. How can anybody forget mother's love and her sacrifices and grow up to be gender discriminator?

**Craig Abramson**

We are stronger together and must celebrate our differences to expand our shared opportunities. We will never achieve parity without love, acceptance, tolerance, understanding, familiarity and education.

As Elie Wiesel said, "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim."

There was no risk, who would want to be in a discriminatory club?

## **Hwa-Tsun (Watson) Feng**

Very Simple. It was the right thing to do

## **Paul Mar**

As a charter member of our Rotary Club, I was very well aware, from the very start, about our quest to get women admitted to Rotary. I attended most of the planning meetings and was impressed with the leadership team. I was totally supportive of our effort and took part in the unanimous vote to start the process. I must confess, though, at the time I had no idea of the ultimate worldwide impact of our club's action to admit women

## **Lloyd Hara**

There was never any doubt that I would support admitting women.....it was the right thing to do.....when our club was formed, it was the most ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse Rotary Clubs in the world. I personally recruited most charter members, and knew they would be very progressive with a broad range of interests and open to change. Admitting women was a no-brainer.

When we submitted Rotary Charter, we crossed out any reference to male members. As you know, the revised Charter was returned and not accepted by Rotary, and we were informed that we had sign the Charter as written. Many club members were disappointed at the rejection. We met with the District Governor and he mentioned that there was the formal process to amend the Rotary by-laws at its legislative conference. We signed the pro forma Charter, but would go to the legislative conference.

At the legislative conference, we were voted down to change the Charter. Many members had faced discrimination in their lives and did not feel our cause to admit women was only minor road bump. Our lawsuit and joining the Durarte Club legally opened women into Rotary.

## **Phil Ginsberg**

I was reluctant to join Rotary as I thought it would be a bunch of old white Republican men. On the contrary, I found it to be an interesting and diverse group of men. When the issue of women in Rotary came up, I thought it was the right thing to do.

I went to three different lawyers who were in Seattle 4 and were members of prestigious firms. I got shocked reactions from each of them and they all turned me down. When I asked Mary Margaret McKeown, now Ninth Circuit Court Judge, she paused maybe 30 seconds before agreeing to take on the case.

## **Jesse Tam**

I have always been a true believer of equal opportunity for those who work hard and have the opportunity to fulfill their dreams, no matter men or women. I came to this country alone 45 years ago as a young teenage boy with that in mind to participate for equal opportunity and to do something meaningful. When the matter came to my life 30 years ago in Rotary, I could not imagine women were not allowed to participate in one of the largest service organizations in the world. I had never been so sure in my life that I was doing the right

thing. I felt totally honored as one of the male members who stood up for the vote and for the movement far beyond everyone of us individually.

### **Mike Maksimowicz**

Wow, 30 years ago-seems just like yesterday when we voted. Glad we did. Rotary is a better organization because of it. Congrats to Seattle Int'l District Rotary on this historic night!

### **Nick Licata**

I actually hesitated in joining Rotary because they did not admit women. It had been recommended that I do join from David Sprague, one of the three principals of the insurance brokerage firm of Sprague Israel Giles where I worked as a broker. So when I did, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that there had been discussions among some of the members about admitting women. I soon found myself very involved in the effort as one of the committee members guiding the effort.

There was some tension among the members, and perhaps one or two may have stopped coming but I recall that even the most conservative of the members decided to support the decision to admit women when our club made the final decision. However, there was concern expressed that the International Leadership of Rotary would never approve of some Rotaries in the US admitting women, because in a number of other countries that would be automatically rejected, largely because of their cultural traditions. So there was some real concern that our club could be bounced out of Rotary. There was another club in California that did admit women and I believe that is what happened with them. They filed a lawsuit after losing their recognition, and our club filed an amicus brief in support of their lawsuit. Consequently we pursued our own effort with some trepidation but also in a manner that we felt would still allow us to remain in Rotary. As it was, we were not kicked out. The details of executing that strategy is probably best remembered by our member Phil Ginsberg, an attorney and who may have been the lead in crafting it.

I remember feeling that those opposed to admitting women never attacked the idea directly, but rather based their position on how impractical it was because of the problems described above. Nevertheless, there was also a similar movement to admit women being made about the same time with some other nationally prominent voluntary membership service organizations that were either on the cusp of admitting women or had just done so. Perhaps it was the Lions Club?

Overall, I would say that our effort brought our membership closer together and we were very proud of having taken a lead in an effort that became successful despite at first appearing to be a near impossible task. It reinforced my own personal belief, passed on experiences like this, that with determination and a thoughtful plan the impossible can become a reality.