

The late Albert H. Foret, editor, manager and part owner of the Coronado Journal in the 1920's, must be given credit for revealing a wonderful glimpse into the early history of Rotary Club of Coronado. Foret was not one of the club's charter members, but he was an active Rotarian during that era; and, thankfully, he was a man who loved to observe and record local history.

Foret describes Coronado in the Fall of 1925 as a lovely community-quiet, little traffic, no traffic signals, no condominiums, no high rises and lots of open space that included many vacant lots. Because of their vast holdings of businesses and land, the Spreckels Companies were very powerful in Coronado, causing some resentment among the local citizens who were not part of the Spreckels sphere.

Foret became concerned about a possible serious conflict. He conceived the idea of a business-mens' weekly luncheon meeting to promote better understanding, fellowship and friendship. He contacted numerous businessmen, including A.E. Holloway, who was a resident of Coronado and an officer at San Diego Gas and Electric Company. As it turned out, Holloway was a member of the well-established San Diego Rotary Club, which was founded in 1911. He suggested that Foret organize a Rotary Club in Coronado to promote Foret's goals for the city.

Exhibiting his typical diligence, Foret started to organize by inviting eight other Coronado businessmen to meet Holloway to learn about Rotary. Foret's proposal to form a Rotary Club in Coronado was received with great enthusiasm, and the vote to organize was unanimous. Twenty members were required to receive a charter so more businessmen and professionals were recruited. In all, twenty-two Coronadoans became the official charter members of the Coronado Rotary Club, and the application for

charter was sent to Rotary International in Chicago in November 1925.

The new charter, dated March 8, 1926, was presented by District Governor Tom Bridges of Oakland at a dinner at the San Diego Yacht Club on Monday evening, April 19, 1926, at which were present some thirty Rotarians from San Diego and other clubs in the county. The new Rotary Club was officially welcomed to Coronado by Dr. Humphrey J. Stewart on behalf of the city trustees. Coronado Rotary Club still has its original charter framed on the wall in its office.

Rotarians, then, and now, are listed in membership in accordance with their classification, or occupation. The classifications of the charter members varied widely, and in some cases, reflected what was then considered normal commerce in the roaring 1920's in Coronado. The classifications were: automobile sales and service, banking, realty, insurance, pharmacy, home building, plumbing, clergy, photography, high school administration, ice distribution and gasoline sales, dentistry, gas and electric power, produce retail, building contracting, bungalow rentals, lumber retail, law, sheet metal fabrication, printing and meat retail.

Between November 1925 and April 1926, Coronado Rotary Club had been meeting for lunch every week at the Blue Lantern Café, located at 1017 Park Place, the site now occupied by the Hotel Marisol Coronado. The café was owned by Nellie Madden, and it was leased by Mesdames Mariani and Esrey who were the café operators. Because of the quality of the food and service, the café was a popular place. Its culinary art rivaled that of the Hotel del Coronado. Besides Rotary meetings, the building was used for dinner dances, dinners, bridge luncheons, teas, etc.

However, in the fall of 1926, Nellie Madden sold the building to Mr. and Mrs. Alex Rutherford. A permit was then issued to the Rutherford's to move the building to 915 H Avenue to convert the building into their home. That happened. Coronado Rotary Club had to move also, first to the San Diego Yacht Club which was then located where the city of Coronado Club Rooms and Boathouse are now located. It was there where the official first photograph of the club founders was captured in May 1927. That photograph is on our club website hangs framed in our office

After the lot was vacated, a permit was issued to a Mr. W.S. Stephens to erect a hotel on 1017 Park Place at an estimated cost of \$45,000. That was accomplished, and the first name mentioned in the permit process was Hotel Ritz, now, after several name changes, the Hotel Marisol Coronado. The dwelling at 915 H Avenue still exists...our club's original meeting building.

In April 1929, the club moved again to the Coronado Country Club, where lunch was catered by the Hotel del Coronado. There are several photographs of club members at that location in the club's archives at Coronado Historical Association. By that summer, membership totaled over 40 dedicated Rotarians, each of which thought the hotel's food and service were very good. As expected, members asked about meeting at the hotel.

By April 1930, the club moved its meeting location to the Hotel del Coronado's Silver Grill, which is now called Coronet Room. Ever since that fateful month in 1930, Coronado Rotary Club held its weekly lunch and meeting at the world famous Hotel del Coronado for decades thereafter. Since the covid pandemic, the club has also met at the Coronado Yacht Club, the Coronado Cays Yacht Club and at the Nautilus Room on the city's bayfront. Meetings were originally held

on Friday, but in 1941 the club voted for Wednesday meeting days.

The club's weekly publication, The Corotator, which was originally known as the Coroto, was first published on February 15, 1927. It was published irregularly thereafter until January 28, 1932, when it was terminated because of publication expense. Fred Boyer, with fortunate access to a new mimeograph machine, revived the newsletter for a few months, but it could not be sustained. Finally, during the 1937-1938 term of club president, R.E. Archibald, and with Neil Taylor as editor, the newsletter was put back on its feet and has been published regularly ever since.

Coronado Rotary Club has accomplished many projects through the years in the community, the region and abroad. The club's community project that is probably most dear to all ages is the city's star pine Christmas tree. After Coronado Rotary Park was established at the intersection of Orange and Isabella, Coronado Rotarians, with help from Emily T. Thompson, widow of Rotarian Charles Thompson, planted the beautiful star pine tree in 1936. The tree is named "Coronado Rotary Club Christmas Tree" and it still stands today symbolizing the club's strong commitment to community service.

Not to be outdone, the following generation of local Rotarians then installed the seating benches and the double water bubbler at Coronado Rotary Park. On the Centennial of Rotary International, February 23, 2005, today's Coronado Rotarians christened a magnificent town clock at Coronado Rotary Park as another gift to Coronado. In 2009, the magnificent Jim Verneti Fountain was christened in Jim's name reflecting his more than 56 years of dedicated and loving community service, including his successful effort to bring Little League to Coronado in 1954.

Almost 100 years of Rotary in Coronado have elapsed with successive presidents leading the club to

new heights. However, those members who have passed on and who have worked so diligently to carry forward the traditions of Rotary shall never be forgotten. The present officers and members salute those Rotarians who have served so well, and at the same time look forward to even bigger and better days for Rotary in Coronado as we proceed beyond our club's own Centennial year in 2026.

Originally researched and written in April 2005 by Club President Steve Duermeyer

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