

A Significant Change in Membership Qualification

By Jim Davis / District Membership News Coordinator

Paul Harris founded Rotary with the idea that businessmen of different occupations could get together once a week to make new friends and to increase business contacts. Over the last century plus years that idea has evolved into much more. Rotary clubs expanded into service to help other people on local, national and international levels.

Rotary started reaching beyond the business community members. The world of Rotary was opened up to government officials, educators and people in non-profit organizations. In the late 1980's Rotary began to admit women, helped along by a United States Supreme Court decision. Rotary has expanded in style and substance far beyond what Paul Harris had envisioned in 1905.

With each expansion came not only new members, but people with new backgrounds and experiences who could bring new ideas about accomplishing the goals of Rotary. With these people and their ideas came more ways to fulfill the "Service above Self" motto.

Of all the changes the 2013 Council on Legislation made in membership perhaps the most significant and far reaching is Section 13-43. Membership eligibility now includes people ***"having interrupted employment or having never worked in order to care for children or to assist the spouse in their work."***

This one change can tap a huge group of people who previously were never eligible for membership in a Rotary club. This will apply mostly (but not always) to women who did not work outside the home, who left work to take care of children and those who worked but were unpaid spouses.

Not only is this a new source of members, but a new resource for talent. Although they did not have a job title that came with monetary reimbursement, most all of them performed tasks that could be used in any Rotary club (or business). They can be the best of multi-taskers. They have usually had to manage budgets, organize schedules for the family (doctor and dental appointments, music lessons, sports activities, etc.) and ensure

that children brush their teeth and do their homework. In addition they have often done volunteer work at school, church, the local food bank, symphony and arts guild or other non-profit organizations.

They may also come with experience in fund raising with these organizations. If so, they know the people to contact in the community who may be willing to give either time or money when the club is raising funds. If you can convince a reluctant 10-year old that it is bedtime, you can convince anyone to donate to a worthy cause.

It is possible that many of them are at the point they may want to enter or reenter the work force. If so, what better place than the Rotary club to start making connections for help in finding a job, locating suppliers, or getting financing for a business or project. This is the ultimate win-win situation.

One major source of potential new members of this group may be the spouses of Rotarians. They not only have talent and experience, they also know a lot about Rotary, what Rotary does and what Rotary stands for.

The new category for membership qualification can have a very large impact on Rotary clubs everywhere. This 20y-plus word change in membership qualification has the potential to add many newly eligible members who have great talents and experiences that will fit in any Rotary Club. Who knows? In a few more years one of them may be come president of Rotary International.