



KIWANIS: THE BEGINNING TO THE PRESENT

There always has been a need for good fellowship and service. Since the beginning of time, there was a need for camaraderie and the desire to support communities. The history of Kiwanis and how it began is, in large part, the story of how fellowship and service developed within an organization. It is the special kind of service Kiwanis offers and which today crosses many national, cultural, and personal lines. Today, as in the early 1900s, Kiwanians demonstrate in many ways how they join together, understand, and help to solve the pressing problems their communities face.

THE BEGINNING

Two natives of Detroit, Michigan, Allen S. Browne, a professional organizer, and Joseph C. Prance, a tailor, had an idea one day in August of 1914. It was a concept, rather, to develop an organization that provides not only fellowship, but insurance features as well. They wanted to develop a group that was like no other organization. They first constructed this group as a strictly fraternal club that only young professional businessmen could join. They also wanted to provide an opportunity for other men to experience new ideals in human relationships.

Together, these two men began recruiting new members. Browne, as a professional, would receive the \$5 membership fee from each man. Prance was the first member to sign up. But he was not yet the first Kiwanian, for the name that Browne had chosen for the group was truly in the spirit of the times: The Supreme Lodge Benevolent Order Brothers. Kiwanis it was not. The growing membership soon fixed that. They quickly grew tired of belonging to an organization known as “BOB”. With a helping hand from Detroit’s official historian, an Indian phrase—“NunKee-wan-is”—was adapted as a name. During

a club meeting in the first week of January 1915, Kiwanis was approved as the new name for this club, which translated as, “We trade.” A more thorough check later revealed that a truer meaning is, “We have a good time - we make noise.” The club attracted nearly 200 members in only six months. The corporate charter was returned by the state of Michigan, dated January 21, 1915. This date has been the birthday of Kiwanis ever since.

THE MOTTO

In 1920, something important crystallized for Kiwanis; something that inspired Roe Fulkerson, the gifted editor of the Kiwanis magazine, to propose two simple words—“We Build”—as the Kiwanis motto. It was the coining of the Motto, after five years of painful and exhilarating growth, that put Kiwanis into its stride. Then in 2005, during the 90th anniversary year of Kiwanis, delegates to the International Convention voted to adopt a new motto, “Serving the Children of the World,” to emphasize the primary focus of Kiwanis service over those nine decades and make a commitment for the years to come.

THE FIRST CLUB AND BEYOND

With the founding of the Kiwanis Club of Detroit Number One, Michigan, in 1915, Kiwanians discovered they were having a good time and they could make a noise in the world, but not by scratching one another’s backs in business. They could do it by rendering important community service without thought of personal gain. Yet trouble loomed. The founding club of an organization faltered, and nearly failed, only six months after it had so proudly adopted its new name. The cause? Allen S. Browne. Or, more specifically, club members who did not like Browne and the financial arrangement Kiwanis had with him. The membership fee, collected and kept by Browne, was up to \$10 by mid-July

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1915. And Browne legally “owned” Kiwanis. During a club meeting, accusations were made against Browne. Though untrue, a disturbance developed that left the first Kiwanian watching helplessly as the first Kiwanis club disintegrated before his eyes. After the situation, Joe Prance wrote: *“Everyone started talking at once, all 175 of them. When the smoke cleared, we had about 50 members left. Secretary Oattie Robertson and Allen Browne, disgusted, left for Cleveland to organize a Kiwanis club there.”* It was a wise move.

Browne and Robertson started a club in Cleveland that attracted a membership of 135 in 10 weeks. The Cleveland Kiwanians enthusiastically began building other clubs. And it was in Cleveland that Kiwanis service and its special concern for children took firm root. The new club started a nursery school for underprivileged children. Meanwhile, Detroit president Don Johnston diplomatically pulled his club together. More important, he eagerly supported a membership drive to bring the club to full strength. Kiwanis had stumbled during the summer of 1915. But it did not fail. And, now, with major clubs in Detroit and Cleveland and with others on the way, it was back on its feet—stronger than ever with continued growth. Those first Kiwanians sensed the destiny of their small but spirited organization.

THE LOCATION

Until the first joint meeting of the early Kiwanis clubs in Cleveland in 1916, the “headquarters” of the organization truly was to be found in the clubs. They alone kept records, and each club administered its own affairs without considering the activities of the other clubs that were being organized slowly by Kiwanis’ founder, Allen S. Browne. With the naming in Cleveland of George Hixson as the first President and Albert Dodge as Secretary, the few general records were maintained either in Dodge’s office in Buffalo, New York, or in Hixson’s office in Rochester. There was no paid staff. Dodge was a volunteer just as if he were a club secretary.

This administration continued through 1916, 1917, and part of 1918. At the Providence Convention, two Chicagoans—Perry Patterson, elected President, and Dan Wentworth—spearheaded a campaign that resulted in the naming of Kiwanis’ first professional Secretary and the establishing of the International Headquarters in Chicago. Upon returning to Chicago from Providence, the new

Secretary, O. Sam Cummings, set out to find a headquarters whose space and cost coincided with Kiwanis’ needs and available cash. At this time, there were fewer than 100 clubs to be served, with a total membership of 10,000. Cummings selected a small, two-room office in the Webster Building on LaSalle Street in Chicago’s Loop. This space was rented for \$50 per month. By 1919, the growing organization needed more space. The Kiwanis headquarters was then moved to the Mallers Building on Wabash Avenue in downtown Chicago, where 1,600 square feet was available to house a staff that reached 20 the following year.

By 1924, Kiwanis Club International (as the organization was called until the adoption of the Constitution and Bylaws at the Denver convention that year) had well over 1,200 clubs and almost 90,000 members. The Mallers Building was no longer adequate, and during that year the headquarters moved to the Federal Reserve Bank Building at 164 West Jackson Boulevard, still in the Chicago Loop.

Even though the crash of 1929 and the Depression that followed had serious effects on Kiwanis, the headquarters was moved once again, this time out of the Loop and a number of blocks north to the “Magnificent Mile.” The McGraw-Hill Building at 520 North Michigan Avenue was selected as the site of the new headquarters of Kiwanis International. On March 1, 1931, work started in the new location, which required an annual rent of \$5,700. For 24 years, the “K’s” on the windows of the building were seen by millions of passers-by.

But as Kiwanis grew, the need also grew for more space, and the search began anew. Then came a piece of good news from the president of the Lake Shore National Bank, which was located just one block from Kiwanis’ headquarters. In a telephone conversation, the bank president told Secretary Peterson that lawyers for the estate of the late Mrs. Anita McCormick Blaine were prepared to offer her former home at 101 East Erie Street—just 70 feet west the North Michigan Avenue—for sale. The one remaining heir, a niece of Mrs. Blaine, was living in Boston, Massachusetts. She was consulted on each step of the negotiations for the purchase of the land. The site was a corner lot next to another former McCormick residence, which had been converted into a famous restaurant, and directly across the street from another McCormick property. The permanent headquarters of the

Metropolitan Sanitary District of Greater Chicago occupied that location. The Kiwanis Board made its final offer of \$335,000. Mrs. Blaine's niece gladly accepted the offer.

Groundbreaking ceremonies took place in the late fall of 1957. Construction began. The cornerstone was laid on June 29, 1958, coinciding with the International Convention in Chicago that year. Construction and the move from 520 North Michigan to 101 East Erie was completed on March 21, 1959. The dedication of the Kiwanis International Building took place on Sunday, October 25, 1959, just before the official opening of that year's International Council. More than 400 guests were present, including the last living founder of Kiwanis, Harry A. Young, of the Detroit Number One Kiwanis Club.

Once again, 20 years later, to accommodate a growing organization, plans for revamping office space moved along quickly. The urgency of a full review of future space needs and the location of that space was evident at the May 1979 Board meeting. After continual Board meetings and consultations with builders and realtors, the Board opted to buy property and begin the construction in Indianapolis, Indiana, at 3636 Woodview Trace. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the new building were staged on September 26, 1981. The Kiwanis International staff began the process of moving once again, completing the move by August of 1982.

THE PRESENT

Today, Kiwanis is a worldwide service organization of men and women who share the challenge of community and world improvement. Since its founding in Detroit, Michigan, in 1915, Kiwanis has grown to more than 8,400 clubs in 96 nations. There are about 606,608 active members in the Kiwanis family, representing nearly every culture on every continent, all seeking to improve people's lives. Kiwanians give their time to make their communities and world better places in which to live and work. As members of a club, they have opportunities to make business and professional contacts; learn firsthand about local, national, and international issues; improve and use leadership skills; participate in the life of their community and world; and develop life-long friendships.

An item of unusual interest in the Past International Presidents' room of the International Office, is a massive redwood table that measures 15 by 6 feet.

This large redwood table has an interesting history. Brought from California to Chicago as an exhibit for the Columbian Exposition in 1893, it was stored for years before being finished and brought to the "520" building, where it was used as the Board table. According to research by the Redwood Association, the slab from the table dates back to the year 391 A.D.

Kiwanis clubs take on humanitarian and civic projects that many public authorities are not prepared or able to perform. A typical Kiwanis club plans hands-on projects focusing on the special needs of the community, such as helping the elderly, promoting literacy, or supporting youth sports. In addition to attending a club meeting, Kiwanis members volunteer about two hours each month for projects involving children or persons in need. The Kiwanis family includes organizations for young people, which are sponsored by clubs, and the Kiwanis International Foundation. **K-Kids**, at the elementary level, **Builders Clubs**, at the middle school level, **Aktion Clubs**, for people who are living with a disability, **Kiwanis Junior**, for young adults in Europe only, between the ages of 18 and 32, **Key Clubs**, at the high school level, and **Circle K Clubs**, at the college level, provide youth the opportunity to help others, become personally involved in their community, and build a positive future for themselves.

Kiwanis has accomplished many programs and projects to help those in need. One major continuing program is the Young Children: Priority One program. This special program addresses the needs of children through projects in pediatric trauma, safety, child care, early development, infant health, nutrition, and parenting skills. Under this program, Kiwanis is engaged in its first Worldwide Service Project. Kiwanis has teamed up with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to virtually eliminate iodine deficiency disorders. These disorders cause various degrees of mental and physical impairment in the fetus and in young children. The Kiwanis International Foundation assists Kiwanis International in serving the world by funding worthy causes that are beyond the capacity of clubs.

Today, Kiwanis has adopted a new slogan: "Serving the Children of the World." The Kiwanis International Office received major attention when it erected the "Children of the World Garden" sculpture. This sculpture is a 16-foot-tall orb that is tilted slightly displaying graceful lines of shimmering

stainless steel and glass with silhouettes of children holding hands in a circle that connects all the way around. A final touch was implemented with the handprints of children in cement.

There are beneficial opportunities from being a member in Kiwanis. A member will gain respect and fellowship within the community and also is considered a community leader. Research shows adults still value community service and voluntarism. The corporate community is open to cause-related marketing projects and can react to

the needs of its community.

Being a Kiwanis member can be rewarding in many ways. The greatest gift you could ever give yourself as a person is the gratification in knowing you are contributing your help, time, and efforts to people in and out of your community who are in dire need. Raising funds to help the poor, participating in fellowship, and giving something back to your community are the highest levels of self-satisfaction you can ever encounter.

Source: *Dimensions of Service, The Kiwanis Story*
by L.A. "Larry" Hapgood.