History of Rotary International

Our 1.2-million-member organization started with the vision of one man - Paul P. Harris. The Chicago attorney formed one of the world's first service organizations, the Rotary Club of Chicago, on 23 February 1905 as a place where professionals with diverse backgrounds could exchange ideas and form meaningful, lifelong friendships. Rotary's name came from the group's early practice of rotating meetings among the offices of each member.
On 23 February 1905, Harris, Gustavus Loehr, Silvester Schiele, and Hiram Shorey gathered at Loehr's office in Room 711 of the Unity Building in downtown Chicago. This was the first Rotary club meeting. They decided to call the new club "Rotary" after the practice of rotating meeting locations. Within five years clubs had formed across the country, from San Francisco to New York.

In August 1910, Rotarians held their first convention in Chicago. The 16 clubs that existed at that time united to form the National Association of Rotary Clubs. In 1912, the name changed to International Association of Rotary Clubs to reflect the addition of clubs in other countries. The name Rotary International was adopted in 1922. By July 1925, Rotary had grown to more than 2,000 clubs and an estimated 108,000 members on six continents. The organization adopted the Rotary International name a year later. As Rotary grew, its mission expanded beyond serving club members' professional and social interests. Rotarians began pooling their resources and contributing their talents to help serve communities in need. The organization's dedication to this ideal is best expressed in its motto: "Service Above Self". During World War II, many clubs were forced to disband, while others stepped up their service efforts to provide emergency relief to victims of the war. In 1942, looking ahead to the postwar era, Rotarians called for a conference to promote international educational and cultural exchanges. This event inspired the founding of UNESCO. In 1989, the organization

voted to admit women into clubs worldwide and now claims more than 282,550 female members (as of 2nd July 2021) in its ranks. Today there are around 11,67,000 Rotarians with over 37,000 Rotary clubs in 534 Rotary districts in 220 countries and geographical areas (as of 2nd July 2021).