As Kiwanis celebrates its 90th anniversary, each of the past 90 years was important for those we serve. Here are nine years that were especially important for the organization, when events changed the history of Kiwanis.

1914 – Allen S. Browne, a professional organizer for fraternal groups, has an idea for a new kind of club and begins recruiting business and professional men in Detroit, Michigan. Browne’s proposed name for the group, the Benevolent Order Brothers, is rejected, however. As one member commented, “Who wants to belong to an organization called BOB?” A committee consults with a local historian, who tells them about a phrase in the local American Indian language: Nunc Kee-wanis, which means, approximately, “We get together” or “We trade.” The club adopts an abbreviated version of this phrase, Kiwanis. January 21, 1915, becomes the official birthday of Kiwanis when the Detroit group receives a corporate charter from the State of Michigan.

1919 – A debate over the organization’s purpose: personal business advantage or community service, reaches a climax at the convention in Birmingham, Alabama. As a professional organizer, Browne owns rights in the organization and supports the business exchange model for Kiwanis. Anti-Browne majority offers to buy him out and Browne names his price: $17,500. Members and clubs quickly subscribe the sum on the convention floor. Kiwanis “buys itself” and service triumphs over business interests.

1924 – A constitutional convention is held in Denver, Colorado. A more democratic constitution is adopted, the six Permanent Objects of Kiwanis are adopted, and Kiwanis International becomes the official name.

1925 – The Kiwanis Club of Sacramento sponsors a club for “key boys” in the local high school. This first Key Club will eventually grow to the world’s largest service club for high school students. Key Club will be joined by Circle K for collegians, Builders Club for junior high students, and K-Kids for elementary students in future decades.

1940 – Kiwanis marks its 25th anniversary with a birthday party in Detroit. Twenty-five silver dollars decorating the cake are auctioned for $625, the first funds of the new International Foundation. In the future, the foundation will become a major partner in Kiwanis service, receiving and granting more than $1 million each year to support Kiwanis service programs.

1955 – After almost 40 years of renting ever-expanding office space, plans are made for Kiwanis to own its own headquarters. Delegates approve a $1 increase in dues for three years to pay for the building. The 1958 International Convention is held in Chicago to witness the laying of the cornerstone, and the staff moves into the new Kiwanis International Building in 1959.

1961 – The convention in Toronto is the largest in history with almost 14,000 registrants. In a historic action, convention delegates approve Kiwanis extension outside the United States and Canada. Today, Kiwanis clubs are active in 94 nations.

1987 – After 15 years of debate, the International Board recommends adoption of a women’s membership amendment, and delegates to the Washington, DC, convention approve the historic change overwhelmingly. US President Ronald Reagan addresses the convention and honors the Kiwanis school drug abuse program with a Presidential Citation for Private Sector Initiatives, the nation’s top award for community outreach programs.

1994 – The first Kiwanis Worldwide Service Project to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders is officially launched at the International Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana. The $75 million fund-raising goal is surpassed in 2001, and today Kiwanis-funded IDD programs are active in more than 90 nations. The United Nations Children’s Fund, our project partner, estimates that these programs are protecting 75 million children each year from the risk of mental retardation.

I can be contacted @ 315-449-8613, the District Office: 315-735-3463 or email: pepster@aol.com should you have any questions on the Ki Foundation.

All club presidents received a letter from the Ki Foundation along with a brochure to complete. To be eligible for distinguished club, a club needs to contribute at least $5 per member based on the club’s membership totals as of 10/01/04 or $100, whichever is greater. The club will also receive a banner patch if at least $25 is donated unless the club contributes at the distinguished criteria level, it will not count towards the 100% contribution award for the division.

The monies are used to support Specialized Youth Education, scholarships, Kiwanis Education and grants...so PLEASE be generous.

Historically, the NY District has lagged behind most of the other 48 Districts in Kiwanis International in this area of need. We usually get only 40% of our 300+ clubs to make a contribution. Let’s buck that trend and give this year.

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