ROTARY CLUB

Local Rotarians mark 90 years of service

Clubs & Associations

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SANTA CRUZ — In a nod to the Santa Cruz Rotary Club's founding in 1922, local rotarians donned dapper suits and flapper dresses for the organization's 90th anniversary dinner.

Before entering, though, attendees had to whisper the password to get in the door at the Boardwalk's Cocoanut Grove: Judge Harry Bias, the club's first president.

About 130 rotarians gathered in the historic ballroom on Saturday to celebrate the Rotary Club of Santa Cruz's 90th anniversary. The evening included a video highlighting the Santa Cruz branch's history, swing dancing to the band Wally's Swing World and an abbreviated version of the club's weekly bulletin.

"It was interesting to go through the archives and find out about the club's history," said Tom Foster, the Santa Cruz branch's president. "For 90 years our members have quietly been among those that built, led and managed this city, county and state."

Foster noted in a speech that newer Santa Cruz businesses such as the Santa Cruz County Bank and Lighthouse Bank are both founded and run by Rotarians, and older local businesses such as the Seaside Company and the Santa Cruz Sentinel are run by Rotarians.

In addition to shedding light on the business networking club's local and international impact, the evening also honored members who had been involved with the club for up to 55 years.

"I was young when I first joined, and they had a good plan of helping people out," said Rod Atchison, who has been a part of the Rotary Club for 50 years. "I've also always had really good friends here."

The Rotary Club of Santa Cruz is one of 34,282 clubs worldwide. The Santa Cruz branch has 131 members, and there are 1.2 million Rotarians globally. The first club was started in Chicago, aiming to allow business members to network while providing humanitarian services.

The Santa Cruz branch was the first Rotary Club to be founded in a city with less than 11,000 people. The charter was officially presented by the San Francisco club at a banquet held at the St. George Hotel on Pacific Ave. on June 24, 1922.

Since then, the Santa Cruz branch has provided various services for the community including repaving the tennis courts at Santa Cruz High School, raising money for a class at the Monterey Bay National Marine Exploration Center in Santa Cruz and providing student scholarships.

The Santa Cruz branch has also aided in eradicating polio throughout the world and aiding in free eye surgeries in Guatemala.

"There are a lot of things that need to be done in the world," said Arley Marley III, the rotary 5170 district governor.

Beyond celebrating the past, though, the president of the Rotary Club of Santa Cruz Sunrise Darlene de la Cerna said Rotary International wants to look to the future.

"We're reaching out to the community to make rotary more visible," de la Cerna said. "We especially want to make it visible to younger citizens."