

The Story of Kiwanis in Lethbridge by Keith Robin, Past District Governor

Part 1: Kiwanis International

Kiwanis International had its beginning in 1914 in Detroit Michigan. It began under the name "Benevolent Order of Brothers" and it was to be an organization of businessmen who would come together on a weekly basis to exchange ideas and enjoy some fellowship. The name was soon changed - BOBS didn't seem like a worthy name for such an organization. Kiwanis is a shortened version of Kee-wan-is, a native American expression which translates into "We have a good time - We advertise - We trade - We make a noise".

Articles of Association were drafted and the first club was officially chartered January 21, 1915, That club still meets each Tuesday noon at the Detroit Athletic Club on Madison Avenue, Detroit. Other clubs would follow - Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Toledo, New York City, Rochester, Buffalo, Albany. By 1916, when the first Kiwanis convention was organized in Cleveland, there were 12 clubs with delegates attending, George Hixson, Rochester, N.Y., was elected the first President of Kiwanis.

Kiwanis became International in 1916. The first club in Canada was chartered in Hamilton, Ontario. Again, other clubs would follow throughout Southern Ontario and later, elsewhere in Canada. But it would take another 45 years for Kiwanis to extend its membership outside the two founding nations. In 1961, at the Kiwanis International Convention in Toronto, approval was finally given to establish Kiwanis clubs in countries other than the United States and Canada. In January, 2003, there were 288,702 members in 8445 clubs in 86 nations and geographic areas.

The next big step in Kiwanis history occurred in 1987. From its beginning, membership in Kiwanis was restricted to men. On July 7th 1987, at the International Convention in Washington, D.C., Kiwanis agreed to change its bylaws to allow clubs to elect women into Kiwanis membership. As one newspaper noted, in a banner headline - KIWANIS GOES CO-ED. This step was not accepted easily by some, has never been accepted in some clubs, but it has proven to be a very worthwhile decision. In the past 15 years many women have risen through the ranks of Kiwanis to provide excellent leadership at all levels of the organization.

Part II: Kiwanis in Western Canada

Kiwanis came to Western Canada with the organization of the first club in Winnipeg, June 15th, 1917. The movement marched slowly westward to Saskatchewan in March, 1919, to Calgary in June, 1919, and to Edmonton in August, 1919. Medicine Hat would become the third club in Alberta in December, 1924. Wetaskiwin was fourth and Lethbridge was fifth, organized on May 7th and chartered September 4th, 1929. Today there are 53 clubs in the Western Canada District, which extends from Thunder Bay in the east to Dawson Creek in the west, from the U.S. border on the south to Hay River, N.W.T. in the north. British Columbia became part of a separate unit. The Pacific Northwest District extends from northern California, up the western shore of the U.S. through Oregon, Washington, through British Columbia to Alaska and the Yukon. It should be mentioned that the single unifying link for all Canadian Kiwanis Clubs, beyond the union with Kiwanis International, is the Kiwanis Foundation of Canada which exists to serve as a voice on behalf of all Canadian Kiwanians. The Foundation publishes an annual newsletter which is mailed to every Kiwanis member in Canada.

Part III: Kiwanis in Lethbridge

Kiwanis began in Lethbridge when the Kiwanis Club was chartered on September 4, 1929 with 36 members. Charter members included Dr. J. K. Bigelow, Jack Delf, David Elton, Dr. C. M. Fletcher, and Fred Robins in the executive which worked to establish the club.

During the war, members were active in promoting the sale of Victory Bonds. The first Kiwanis Apple Campaign was held in 1945 and continued each September until 1995. In recent years the club has participated in Bingo as one of its major fundraisers.

The club has a long record of interest in music. As early as 1932 the club entered the music festival and won the service club shield. In 1945 the club began sponsoring a boy's choir and in later years became a sponsor of the Lethbridge Kiwanis Band. In 1953 the Kiwanis Club assumed control of the Lethbridge Music Festival, a sponsorship which continues to this day. From a registration of 300 participants in 1953 to the present participation of close to 5000 in 2003, the festival has become the major club project. The club has won numerous service awards for its music festival project in the Western Canada District of Kiwanis and on two occasions won international recognition for a top service project throughout Kiwanis International.

One interesting quotation. on the occasion of the Club's Golden Anniversary in 1979, by then president David Laycock:

“ A short time ago I had occasion to review the club records. I was struck by the tremendous amount of public service that has been rendered by the club to the community over the past fifty years. From summer rest camps for needy mothers at Waterton Lakes, tag days, scholarships at high schools, the community college and the university, to providing television sets for childrens wards in the hospital.”

This service record continues to this day. Consider the Kiwanis Creative Playground built jointly by the Kiwanis Club and the City of Lethbridge in Ridgewood Neighborhood Park with special equipment for physically challenged youngsters. Consider the club's donation of \$20,000 with a matching grant from the Wild Rose Foundation, to help furnish and equip the children's section of the Public Library in 1991. Consider the special project to provide equipment to detect hearing defects for newborn babies at the Regional Hospital. Consider the club's participation as a founding sponsor of the Safety City Society of Lethbridge, which provides safety education to over 20,000 elementary student contacts each year. There are many others.

Remember the 4-H banquets, the annual Citizenship Court held at Ericksen's and sponsored by the club, the Salvation Army Christmas Kettles project which began for Kiwanis over forty years ago, and which still continues each Christmas season, or the junior soccer clinic for 160 adults and boys back in 1956, or the 4-H Beef Achievement Rally with 200 youngsters attending. Yes, we really have made a difference.

And we have had fun. too. The club sponsored the Lethbridge Green Acres Kiwanis Club, the Taber Kiwanis Club and co-sponsored the Brooks Kiwanis Club. On six occasions we have been the host club for the annual Western Canada District Convention. On four occasions a club member has served as District Governor. With a current membership of over 60 men and women we are still the largest Kiwanis club in Western Canada District. We have an enviable record and we should all be proud.