

Published June 6th, 2012

A Man for All Women

Cathy Dausman



The first female club president (Rotary club of Duarte, 1987) and current District Governor-elect Sylvia Whitlock (left) smiles with Moraga Rotary member and past Rotary International President Clifford Dochterman, Jean Irwin Hatfield, Ambassadorial Scholar and teacher for the hearing impaired, and past District Governor Deepa Willingham. Photo Cathy Dausman

The issue was strongly opposed, he said, partly because of cultural differences in South America, Asia and Europe.

When Dochterman became International Rotary President in 1992, there were still clubs that did not want to admit women. Single gender Rotary clubs, however, were permitted. "Never in the world did the old guys realize that a one-gender club meant that the gender could be 'all women' clubs," said Dochterman.

A "difficult adjustment time" followed, he said, but by 1995 there were eight women Rotary District Governors. Today women serve as Rotary Foundation Trustees and sit on Rotary's International Board of Directors. Rotary estimates that 20 percent of its current 1.2 million worldwide members are female. Local numbers back that up: Jose Avelar, Secretary for Rotary Club of Orinda says 13 of its club's 69 members are women. Rotarian Rich Render says six of Moraga Rotary's 29 members are women, including its 2011-2012 president Nora Avelar (Jose's daughter).

"Rotary is alive and thriving because of the contributions of women Rotarians," Dochterman said. And he might know - his wife is a Rotarian, too!

If Clifford Dochterman seemed to stand out a bit during a May 18 Rotary gathering, at least he was pleased. Dochterman, a Moraga Rotary member and past Rotary International President, has made it part of his mission over the years to allow women to join Rotary International. The retired university administrator modestly admits having had "somewhat of an involvement" in the process. The gathering he attended-and spoke to- celebrated 25 years of women in Rotary.

Dochterman, the self-proclaimed "token male," shared the podium with keynote speaker Deepa Willingham, Past District Governor; Sylvia Whitlock, the first Female Club President, Rotary Club of Duarte; and Jean Irwin Hatfield, a teacher for the hearing impaired and a Rotary ambassador scholar. Dochterman said the vision of women in Rotary has been "one of the most influential factors in my entire Rotary experience."

Rotary was an all-male organization when it was established in 1905. It was still that way in 1981, the year the U.S. Supreme Court appointed its first woman (Sandra Day O'Connor) to the bench. That same year Dochterman chaired New Horizons Committee, an international Rotary group. Among some 30 recommendations, "was the proposal that the membership of Rotary be opened to women." Eight years later Dochterman attended the international Council on Legislation in Singapore, where as a voting member, he suggested the organization eliminate the word "male" from its documents.

Reach the reporter at: cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA