

Service counts

Kin founder looks beyond dollar signs

Hal Rogers, founder of the Kinsmen Club, looks beyond the dollars involved in the organization and instead likes to talk about service.

The value of Kinsmen community service projects reached \$43 million last year. Although Rogers calls that impressive, he says the almighty dollar is second to service provided by the clubs.

"The church was opposed to the Kinsmen club in the early, for a reason I still don't understand."

FOOD BASKET

"Kinsmen would meet secretly in a different house every week. Every Saturday they would prepare a food basket and leave it on the doorstep of an unfortunate family," he said.

As Rogers tells the story, club members would ring the doorbell of a house, then leave before it was answered.

One night, a recipient called after a man was seen leaving the house asking who had left the food. The Kinsman replied: "God sent it."

Rogers uses the story to illustrate the principles of the Kinsmen Club.

"We believe in helping the other guy and we are not looking for money or signs of recognition in our work," he said.

That "help your neighbour" policy can be illustrated 100 times by Rogers, dating back to the founding of the club in February 1920.

FIRST PROJECT

It was Rogers' desire for fellowship as a newcomer to Hamilton, following service in the First World War, that prompted formation of the Kinsmen Club and its first project.

After the war, Rogers joined the family plumbing and heating supply business with his father Charles Rogers.

The young man, at age 21, wanted to join a service club but was rejected by Rotary because his father was already a member.

Soon after, Rogers met another Hamilton newcomer and the two organized a dinner at the Namking Cafe. Eleven men gathered for the dinner and within a year Kinsmen had signed 50 members.

In the club's first project, members made contact with newcomers in Hamilton and welcomed them to the city.

NO PRESSURE

"A number of them joined the club but we put no pressure on them to do so. Our main concern was to make things easier for them in a strange city," Rogers recalls.

As members of the original club moved away, new clubs were formed across the country and by the end of 1930 there were 26 clubs and a national organization complete with a constitution.

With a depression under way and the Second World War around the corner, few would anticipate the Kinsmen Club would have its best years.

For Rogers, the years spanning the depression and the Second World War were the best.

"The club seemed to grow under adverse conditions. There was a greater need than ever before to meet the needs of young people and the community," he says.

GROWTH PERIOD

Instead of buckling to the times, the Kinsmen Club grew from its 900 members in 1930 to 5,000 by 1945.

As men were called to war, more men joined the club out of a need to be active, "a desire to be part of it," Rogers says.

As the war made greater demands on Kinsmen, the Kinettes, wives of Kinsmen, continued with the work.

"We are a family organization," Rogers says.

Close to \$3 million was raised to buy 50 million quarts of milk for Great Britain's children. Another \$100,000 was raised for food parcels.

Kinsmen war savings stamps were sold at a rate of \$225,000 a week. Sixty-five tons of magazines were shipped to the merchant marine.

"We were more active then than before or after."

WAR YEARS

The war years set the tone for Kinsmen community and world service in the years that followed.

Although the complexity and size of the organization — with more than 600 clubs and 18,000 members — has changed, the goal is still the same.

"We are never at a loss to find something that justifies service work. There is always a challenge and an opportunity," Rogers says.

Only recently Kinsmen donated \$10,000 in disaster relief to the tornado stricken Woodstock area.

ORDER OF CANADA

There have been so many standouts in the life of the Kinsmen club but Rogers is hard pressed to name one.

On a personal level, he was awarded the Order in Canada for his contribution.

More than 300 individuals wrote in, nominating Rogers.

"I am very proud of that award," he says.

Kinsmen means a variety of things to a variety of people but Rogers says the

movement is most significant in what it has done for Kinsmen families.

He tells a story of an Englishman who moved to Ajax, found a job and worked for some time before he could afford to bring his family over from England.

He had found a house but couldn't afford to furnish it.

He travelled to Montreal to meet his family but on returning stopped in Oshawa, explaining to his wife that they should spend the night there, rather than return to the barren house at night.

But his wife insisted on seeing their new home.



Kinsmen founder Hal Rogers (left) receiving Order of Canada from former Governor General Jules Leger

When they arrived they found a furnished house complete with a welcoming party of Kinsmen and Kinettes.

HOT MEAL

"The house was furnished, a hot meal provided and the kids were tucked in bed," Rogers said.

The story can be repeated many times across Canada.

Despite the club's record of service Rogers says Kinsmen should not be the dominant factor in a member's life.

"First comes family, then your business, your church and the community through the Kinsmen Club."

Over the years, Rogers says the Kinsmen Club has never strayed from the original intent.

"I am completely satisfied with the work that has been done," he says.

Although further expansion and perhaps some change is anticipated in the future, the club's basic role — fellowship and community service — will always be in the forefront.



ALBERTA KINSMEN

District 4 (Alberta) Kinsmen set out to raise \$110,000 for cystic fibrosis research in 1978. When all the district projects were tallied up, the final cheque to the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation was \$128,706. CF Sweetheart Janice Rudkowski proudly dis-

plays the giant cheque at the annual District 4 convention of Kinsmen. Kinsmen contributions to the foundation are expected to approach \$1 million a year now that increased emphasis is being placed on CF by six of the eight Kinsmen districts.

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