

It started in 1914

Allen S. Browne organized Kiwanis 75 years ago

"My name is Browne, Allen S. Browne," says the intense, bespectacled man on your doorstep. "I want to discuss the possibilities of organizing a group of business and professional men into a fraternal club, with a sick benefit feature."

It's August 1914. Detroit is buzzing with the news that war has broken out in Europe. It's hot, and this man is obviously some sort of salesman. What do you do with him?

If you tell him you're not interested, you've missed the chance of a lifetime—the chance to become the first Kiwanian. Joseph G. Prance, a 33-year-old merchant tailor, was not one to close the door when opportunity came knocking. He invited Allen S. Browne into the shop to discuss his proposal.



ALLEN S. BROWNE, the man who created Kiwanis.

Out of that conversation between a professional organizer and a respected but otherwise unremarkable tailor came one of the great service organizations of the world, Kiwanis International. It wasn't, of course, quite that easy.

Browne earned his living by organizing lodges for the Loyal Order of Moose. He looked upon his new organization as a business venture. Prance had served for

three years as president of a similar fraternal group, complete with "sick benefit feature," and was not entirely satisfied with his experience. Yet he wanted to try again.

Together, they began recruiting new members. Browne, as the professional, would receive the \$5 membership fee from each member for his services. Prance was the first to sign up.

But he was not yet the first Kiwanian, for the name that Browne had chosen for the group was truly in the spirit of the times—The Supreme Lodge, Benevolent Order Brothers. The growing membership soon fixed that. As one member remarked, "Who wants to belong to a club called BOB?"

With a helping hand from a Detroit historian, a phrase from a local American Indian language, "Nun Kee-wan-is," was adapted as a name. The phrase translated as "We trade," "We get together," or "We have a good time, we make a noise."

During a club meeting in January 1915, Kiwanis was approved as the new name for the club, which had attracted nearly 200 members in only six months. A corporate charter was issued by the State of Michigan, dated January 21. That date has been the official birthday of Kiwanis ever since.

Browne envisioned Kiwanis' primary purpose as encouraging business patronage between the members. Only four men in each business category could belong to the club, and Browne's recruiting pitch suggested that joining Kiwanis would result in patronage of the new member's business by his fellow Kiwanians.

With the founding of the Kiwanis Club of Detroit, Kiwanians discovered that they were having a good time and that they could indeed make a noise in the world. But not by scratching each other's backs in business. They could do it by rendering important community service without thought of personal gain.

Even before the Detroit club was formally chartered, its members were do-

ating funds to churches for food baskets to aid the needy at Christmas. Not long after, the Detroit Kiwanians legally adopted a five-year-old boy from a broken home, providing for his support and education until his mother remarried.

Meanwhile, however, trouble loomed. The founding club of an organization that today embraces 315,000 members in 8,500 clubs in 73 nations faltered and nearly failed only six months after it had so proudly adopted its new name.

The cause? Allen S. Browne. Or, more specifically, club members who did not like Browne or the financial arrangement Kiwanis had with him.

The membership fee, collected and kept by Browne, was up to \$10 by July 1915. And Browne legally "owned" Kiwanis. During a club meeting with Joe Prance presiding in the absence of president Don Johnston, accusations were made against Browne. They weren't true, but a furor developed that left the first Kiwanian watching helplessly as the first Kiwanis club disintegrated before his eyes.

Afterward, Joe Prance wrote: "Everyone started talking at once, all 175 of them. The meeting was not only getting out of control, it was a stampede. When the smoke cleared, we had about fifty members left. Secretary Otis Robertson and Allen Browne, disgusted, left for Cleveland to organize a Kiwanis club there."

It was a wise move. Browne and Robertson started a club in Cleveland that boasted a membership of 135 in ten weeks. The Cleveland Kiwanians enthusiastically began building other clubs. And it was in Cleveland that Kiwanis service and its special concern for children took firm root. The new club soon started a nursery school for underprivileged children.

Meanwhile, Detroit president Don Johnston diplomatically pulled his club together. More important, he eagerly supported a membership drive to bring the club back to full strength.

Kiwanis had stumbled during the summer of 1915. But it did not fall. And now, with major clubs in Detroit and Cleveland and with others on the way, it was back on its feet—stronger than ever.

Those first Kiwanians sensed the destiny of their small but vigorous organization. And they knew what to do when a spark ignites a fire. They fanned the flames by calling the first Kiwanis convention in Cleveland for May 18-19, 1916.

The delegates elected officers, adopted a constitution and returned home believing, as the first Secretary, Albert Dodge, would declare at the Detroit convention a year later, "We belong to a wonderful organization."

The delegates gathered in Detroit in 1917 represented more than 70 clubs and more than 5,700 Kiwanians in two nations. Two nations? That's right. The club that made Kiwanis international—Hamilton, Ontario—was organized on November 1, 1916. So important did the *Hamilton Spectator* newspaper deem the event that it devoted nearly 14 pages to the new club and to the goals and achievements of Kiwanis.

At the 1918 convention in Providence, Rhode Island, Secretary Dodge was pleased to report that 83 Kiwanis clubs had been chartered, with 10,000 members. Kiwanis ignited a burning desire for service and fellowship; it was spreading.

Yet within the organization a fire of a different sort still smoldered. When Allen Browne's contract was brought up for discussion in Providence, the fire flared.



DELEGATES to the first Kiwanis convention in 1916 wore paper Indian bonnets during the banquet, to represent the derivation of the Kiwanis name from an American Indian phrase. This was one Kiwanis tradition that did not last long.

Many Kiwanians recognized and honored Allen Browne's great contribution as the founder of Kiwanis. Yet others were uneasy, even angry, that their organization was owned for an individual's profit.

Then, during the May 21 morning session of the 1919 convention in Birmingham, Alabama, the "Browne matter" was settled for all time. A new contract with Allen Browne came up for review. Its terms were simple: Browne agreed to sell his interest in the organization for \$17,500 if he received payment within 24 hours.

The delegates were thunderstruck and immensely pleased. The Kiwanis Club of Baltimore put up the first \$500. The rest was raised in an hour. It was an historic moment. Kiwanis had "bought itself" and was free to chart its own future in growth and service, limited only by the imagination and energy of its members.

During the following year, something important crystallized for Kiwanis. Something that inspired Roe Fulkerson, the gifted first editor of *Kiwanis Magazine*, to propose two simple words as the Kiwanis motto.

"I have written for you probably 100,000 words," Fulkerson later told a Kiwanis convention, "every one of which has been forgotten save two. God inspired me to write those two: We Build. I am prouder of them than any other accomplishment of my life. I believe that those two words perhaps justify my Kiwanis activities."

Roe, of course, went on to write many more words for his fellow Kiwanians, contributing to their magazine until his death in 1949. But it was the coining of that motto, after five years of painful and exhilarating growth, that put Kiwanis into its stride. In their hearts, Kiwanians had always known why they were Kiwanians. Roe Fulkerson put it into words.

That was 1920. Kiwanis numbered 267 clubs and 28,000 members. The immediate future held much: adoption of the six Kiwanis Objects, the founding of the first Key Club for high school students, phenomenal growth.

Yet those two words, "We Build," became the guiding force and inspiration for the important work of Kiwanis. They promised then, as they do now, that for Kiwanis, the best is yet to be.

THE OBJECTS OF KIWANIS INTERNATIONAL

Adopted 1924

I

TO GIVE PRIMACY to the human and spiritual rather than to the material values of life.

II

TO ENCOURAGE the daily living of the Golden Rule in all human relationships.

III

TO PROMOTE the adoption and the application of higher social, business, and professional standards.

IV

TO DEVELOP, by precept and example, a more intelligent, aggressive, and serviceable citizenship.

V

TO PROVIDE, through Kiwanis clubs, a practical means to form enduring friendships, to render altruistic service, and to build better communities.

VI

TO COOPERATE in creating and maintaining that sound public opinion and high idealism which make possible the increase of righteousness, justice, patriotism, and good will.

What has 83 acres, a window on a new world, two barking dogs and a ton of fun? Camp Wyman... the St. Louis area's camp for underprivileged children, is many things to many people.

For the underprivileged children of St. Louis, it is a place to romp and discover nature. Area senior citizens find a golden opportunity in it to enjoy the outdoors. And for St. Louis-area Kiwanians, it is a major service project that provides them with a great sense of satisfaction.

Located in Eureka, Missouri and

adjacent to more than 3,000 acres of forest, Camp Wyman is a year-round, outdoor education facility. Approximately 250,000 people have attended the camp in its 84-year history.

In 1947, local Kiwanis clubs assumed sponsorship of the camp as well as day-to-day management of the facility. Kiwanis International, a community service organization, raised more than \$65 million this year for community service projects. With more than 320,000 members in 8,000 clubs, the K-Family serves 73 nations and includes two, coed youth affiliates.

A KIWANIS CONCERN

CONGRATULATIONS on the 75th Anniversary

STEVEN C. FOSTER

B.A., LL.B.

Barrister & Solicitor

37 Main St. South
Georgetown
L7G 3G2

(416) 873-4961

Congratulations on your 75th Anniversary

COMPLIMENTS OF

the HERALD

HOME NEWSPAPER OF HALTON HILLS

ESTABLISHED 1866

45 GUELPH ST. GEORGETOWN 877-2201

CONGRATULATIONS on the 75th Anniversary



NORTH HALTON GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB
Georgetown, Ontario

877-5236