

# TRADITION OF SERVICE

## Rotary Club will mark 75th date

BY BUFORD GREEN

**T**he Jacksonville Rotary Club will soon mark three-quarters of a century of contributions to its community, with a stable, enthusiastic membership keeping the club's long tradition of service alive and well.

The club will celebrate its 75th anniversary March 19, with a reception at 6 p.m. at Beecher Hall and a banquet at 7 p.m. in Cummings Dining Hall on the Illinois College campus. Widows of past members will be guests of the club, and all former and current members and spouses will be invited, as well as members of the other 49 clubs in Rotary District 6460.

The Rotary Club has plenty to celebrate, according to two veteran club members who join all other past presidents on the celebration committee. Vern Fernandes has been in the club for almost 25 years, joining within 30 days of moving to Jacksonville; and Fred Osburn has been a member the past 10 years. Both quickly sing the praises of what the club has done for them as well as Jacksonville.

"The club's primary goal is service above self, the Rotary International theme," said Osburn, who will be district governor next club year and expects to travel approximately 20,000 miles on his club visits.

"Rotary is the oldest of the local service clubs, and Rotary is not committed to any specific organization," Fernandes noted when asked how he might sell someone on becoming a club member. "Not being committed to a specific organizations or cause lets us work with many organizations. The club's Youth Fund, which is a completely anonymous thing, is a great thing for me. If kids need shoes or a suit for graduation, we can take care of it."

Osburn says Rotary especially tries to emphasize support of youth programs among its many community projects. "We contribute to JoeAnna Caldwell's Faith Center efforts and Saturday's Children and have since the beginning. We sponsor and host youth exchange students annually, with Bob McKinney being a great leader in that for many years at the district level. We are very active in the Ambassadorial Scholar Program and this will be the



Among the key workers on the Jacksonville Rotary Club's renovation of the bandstand in Community Park were, from left, Keith Toby, Vern Fernandes and Wallace Jamison. The club is marking its 75th anniversary this year.

Bill Hagen

ninth year for our Scholar-Athlete Dinner, which is growing every year. There are a lot of other projects we do anonymously."

The Jacksonville Rotary Club was chartered March 22, 1918, with 25 charter members; 13 years after Rotary was founded in Chicago. The club first met in the Pacific Hotel at the corner of East State and East Streets and has moved over the years to at least eight other hotels, restaurants or clubs before moving to the Blackhawk for Friday noon meetings several years ago.

The local club sponsored clubs in Petersburg, Litchfield and Roodhouse in the mid 20's.

The club grew quickly and began contributing to community projects, including land at Meredosia Bay donated by club members and a club house for Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts less than two years later.

By the 60's, the membership had topped 100. The club purchased and

began operating a Ferris Wheel in Nichols Park in 1958 and continued the project until recently when insurance costs closed it down. Proceeds from the Ferris Wheel funded many Rotary projects for approximately a quarter of a century.

"We get money from what we call 'recognitions' at the meeting each week," said Fernandes recently. "Anyone who has their name in the paper or receives any kind of notoriety contributes, usually \$1, or members can contribute to honor someone. We make money from our calendar sales each year, which is our biggest fund raiser, and from dues."

The Rotary Club took on another major project last year when it agreed to hold the city's Fourth of July celebration. "We will have a three-day celebration this year, and we are hoping to make it a money-maker, which it was not last year," said Osburn.

The club, which now has just over 90 members after a high-water mark of 137 a few years ago, is considered stable in number and about where the club would like to be, Fernandes and Osburn noted.

Another project the club is especially proud of is the complete renovation of the bandstand in Community Park, similar to the one moved from the park to the Smithsonian several years ago. The bandstand, named for former member Floyd Cox, took thousands of hours of work by members to restore, with then-club president Tom Young and member John Urbance among the leaders in the movement.

The Rotarians are also noted for having outstanding programs at their meetings, from political debates to top government, business, education and religious leaders.

Fernandes calls the club members generally "a little older, a little staid and a little conservative," but

quickly notes that the club is composed of people dedicated to providing a community service.

"I have grown through Rotary," admits Osburn, a retired school administrator. "My desire to serve the community has increased by being a Rotarian, and the opportunity opened up for me to know the needs of the community."

Fernandes, a retired military man, and Osburn agreed that the Rotary Club has made Jacksonville a better community during the past 75 years. "It's sometime just little things," Fernandes said. "We recently had an appeal through Rotary channels from the part of Europe that is in turmoil, for blankets and clothing, so we got almost \$600 in a collection at a meeting to mail to that cause."

Tim Ruppel is the current Rotary Club president, with Jean Cummins scheduled to become the club's first woman president in July.