



Coldwater Rotary/Coldwater Noon Club

History as told by Craig Sebald

In February 1921 Frank Rowe came to Coldwater from South Bend. When living in South Bend he had been the guest of his manager at several Rotary meetings and became interested in Rotary. Frank learned no Rotary Club existed in Coldwater, and he quietly set about the possibility of organizing a club. By summer he felt pretty sure Coldwater would support a Rotary club and he set about canvassing businessmen who could support his effort. On October 6, 1921, Frank received the word from Rotary's headquarters to proceed on the work of organizing a Rotary club. Quickly he found men willing to join Rotary. The preparations were complete and on Thursday evening, November 10, 1921, it all began for the Coldwater Rotary Club.

The twenty-two Charter members who met at the Arlington Hotel in downtown Coldwater did not realize it was the beginning of Rotary in Coldwater which now spans 96 years. The sponsoring Hillsdale club sent a large number of its members. In honor of his tireless efforts to form this new Rotary club Frank Rowe became the first President. The club's Charter 1044 was presented to the members on January 5, 1922 by District Governor George Barnes. On January 17, 1922 Herbert Sebald became the club's 23rd member. His son Craig has been a member for 61 years.

In the 100 years the club has met in three locations. It began at St. Marks Parish Hall, then to the place of the beginning, Arlington Hotel, then the Elks Lodge. Its relationship with the Elks has lasted 63 years since the first meeting there on August 12, 1958.

In 1937 our club supported the newly formed clubs in Quincy and Bronson. These new clubs made a very convenient place to make-up. In 1986 our club sponsored the newly formed Coldwater Sunrise Club. The Sunrise Club received its Charter on October 28, 1986 when all the Branch County Rotary Clubs met for the evening event. Robert Seaman was the first president of Sunrise.

To name just a few of the untold numbers that the Coldwater club can be proud of in helping the community would include holding the 1994 District 6360 Annual Conference. In 1986 the club established the Coldwater Rotary Foundation and its objectives were to make the community a better place to live, work, and play. The club participates in Rotary International Humanitarian projects, Polio Plus and Clean Water. In the interest of promoting Rotary further in May 1991 the Interact Club of Coldwater High School was established sponsored by our club. Their members attend as guests at weekly club meetings during the school year. Interact members support the community throughout the year with fund raising activities.

During the club's 100+ years of support the community nothing can rival the annual fund raising Rotary Show. The 2024 show will be its 68th. The first show was held in 1935 and profits were used to aid the Crippled Children's Fund. In 1937 the next show was held for the purpose of funding high school band uniforms. It is not clear why, but not until 1956 was another show presented. This was the beginning of shows every year except 1960 and 1969. In 1969 the club sponsored the Wayne King band for two Saturday night performances. Both the 1 and 9 PM performances were sell-outs.



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Sixty-four of the shows have been held in the historic Tibbits Opera House in downtown Coldwater. Show directors come from within the club's membership. Our club asks potential recipients from profits to submit written requests explaining the need for funding. The Board of Directors has the task of selecting the most deserving. Some of the funding requests are for less than a thousand dollars, more often larger amounts. Major past recipients are Rotary Park, High School scoreboard, Dearth Community Center, Sheltered Women's Home, Little League diamonds, and youth soccer fields. Recent projects include Tibbits Opera House, Branch County Food Pantry, Coldwater Tennis Courts, and the Rotary Splash Park. For many years our International Project has been the support of the Haiti Nursing Foundation.

The Coldwater Noon Foundation was restarted in 2018 (as the Coldwater Rotary Foundation) when the board of directors of the Foundation was re-established. A small \$40,000 fund which was held at the Community Foundation was the seed money for the revitalized foundation. In 2023, due to a capital campaign and matching funds by Dr. David Rubley, the fund was over \$190,000 at the end of 2023.

The club celebrated its 50th Anniversary on December 1, 1971. Officers of other Branch County Rotary clubs were invited to join Coldwater Rotarians and wives. The evening of Tuesday, December 3, 1996 we celebrated our 75th Anniversary. Again, the county Rotary clubs were asked to attend. The 100th Anniversary was held as a community wide event in Downtown Coldwater with live music, a few skits, food trucks, and past shows on the screen at Tibbits.

In June of 2022, the difficult decision was made to part ways from Rotary International and re-brand the Club as the Coldwater Noon Club. In doing so, over \$10,000 in district and international dues are able to be kept in the Coldwater Community annually. The Coldwater Noon Club members follow the 3 Cs: Character / Community / Camaraderie.

Little did a group of service-minded businessmen in the fall of 1921 know their club would become a service-minded force in Coldwater as the city grew.

As told by Craig M. Sebald, December 30, 2004

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