

COMMUNITY COLUMN

Kiwanis club turns 20 years old

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Contributing Writer

I have a favorite cartoon of a little girl asking her dad if Kiwanis means "pancakes"! To many in Ames, the annual Kiwanis Pancake Day is their defining moment of Kiwanis, the ambiance of the downtown First Methodist Church, the happy jesting of the Kiwanians, and the anticipation of those in line for good old pancakes and sausage. The pancake feed provides a significant part of the funds we return to the community, although each club also has its special fundraisers.

Ames has three Kiwanis clubs, and I have belonged to all three at one time or another. In fact, I have been a Kiwanian since first joining in Middleton, Wis., in 1969. It has been a part of my life. The oldest of the three is the Noon Kiwanis. The Town and Country Kiwanis meets Saturday for breakfast and the Golden K (for active retirees) meets Thursday mid-morning. I have graduated to the Golden K. Kiwanis also supports active student chapters at Ames High School and Iowa State University.

This month the Golden K turns 20. Not quite of age, but a significant time to exist and flourish. The club will celebrate its anniversary May 18, at their meeting place, the First Methodist Church.

Kiwanis began in 1914 in Detroit as a private organization that provided fellowship and insurance features. It was to be a fraternal organization for young businessmen. First called Benevolent Order of Brothers the members quickly changed their name to NunKeewan-is, an Indian phrase loosely translated as "We have a good time - we make noise." By 1915, the club went public, expanded their membership and sponsored a club in Cleveland. But more importantly, they changed their mission to "We Build" and began a service to youth that continues to this day.

Now Kiwanis International, has more than 8,400 clubs in 96 nations. Their slogan is "Serving the Children of the World." A major worldwide goal is to wipe out iodine deficiency disorders in the developing countries. Each club has projects aimed at local needs.

The Town and Country Club organized the Golden K

Kiwanis and by May 8, 1986, there were more than 25 members, which allowed the club to have a charter. The Town and Country Kiwanis Club acted as the sponsor until the club was functioning. During April 1987, the Golden K had its first service activity, selling daffodils and raising more than \$1,000 for the Cancer Society. They first participated in the pancake days in 1987. It has grown to about 90 members and more are added each year.

The Golden K is a very active group. Its weekly meetings include good old-fashioned fellowship and educational programs. Gene Pollmann provided me with a summary of our most important service projects. They include: Stash the Trash Day at Brookside Park, Adopt a Road trash removal, City Park Playground inspections and repairs, the Native American Overlook at Ada Hayden Park (organized by the Noon Kiwanians, especially Barbara Gurganus), volunteering at the Arrow Boy Scout Jamboree (2004) and the Iowa Special Olympics (2005 and upcoming 2006), the 2006 Odyssey of the Minds Conference and of course the Special Olympics

National Games. Add to this the Pancake Days, also coordinated by the Noon Kiwanis, activities at the Heartland Senior Center and individual unsung hero activities and it is easy to see that being a Kiwanian isn't something we take lightly.

Treasurer Levrene Seversike reports that we return \$5,000 to \$6,000 to the community each year helping to support the programs of groups such as Youth and Shelter Services, Ames and Bethesda Food Pantries, MICA, Access, Good Neighbor Assistance Program, Faces and Wilson-Beardshear.

President Fred Walker comments proudly that our Golden K'ers are the most dedicated group of people he knows. Merl Core, one of the charter members said, "The Golden K has, over the years, given me purpose, outstanding continuing education, fellowship and valued new friends."

The community is richer by far by the activities of all of the service clubs. I am biased, of course, but I think Kiwanis is the most enriching of all.