



Rota-Briefs



Rotary Club of Cohoes - A Subsidiary of Rotary International

April 29, 2009

Passing of Robert T. Van Alstine

The April 29, 2009 weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Cohoes was cancelled due the death of Robert T. Van Alstine. Rather, a luncheon in honor of his life held at the Century House.

"Bob was our good friend, mentor and Rotary Elder. He was the epitome of the gentleman Rotarian. Bob lived the "Four Way Test", leaving an enduring legacy for all Rotarians to live up to. He meant so much to all of us, and he will be remembered as a model Rotarian, and human being, for the rest of our lives. We will miss his guidance and his company, but his Spirit remains in The Rotary Club of Cohoes." – Colin DeMers, President

As many of you know, during the last few years, Robert T. Van Alstine recorded memories about his life, including Rotary. The last recording he made was on August 25, 2007 at the age of 97. He spoke about his memories of the Rotary Club of Cohoes.

Bob Van Alstine's Memories of The Rotary Club of Cohoes

I joined the Rotary Club the first Wednesday of July 1953 (7/1/1953). My sponsor was Bill Colburn. Bill at that time was also president of the Cohoes Rotary Club.

Back in those early days, after becoming a member of Rotary, they were quite strict on attendance. If you missed four meetings in a row, you were automatically dropped from the membership list. At that meeting one of our members who had missed four meetings in a row came to the meeting. He was told by President Bill Coburn that he was no longer a member of the club. As a result, of course he left. As of my knowledge he never became a member again.

Our meetings were held at the Cohoes Golf Club over on the Island in Cohoes. We met each Wednesday at 12:15 pm. The meetings ended at 1:30 pm. As I recall, back in 1957/ 58 when I became president of Cohoes Rotary, the Watervliet Club sponsored the Latham Club as a new organization in our district.

We were fortunate enough to have J. C. Penney as our speaker at that meeting. It so happened that one of the original members of the Latham Club was the manager of the Latham store. He was able to get Mr. Penney to come and speak to us. He gave a very informal talk that was exceedingly interesting. At the conclusion of this talk, of course we all went up and thanked him and shook his hand. He was a very interesting man to talk to.

Doc Falcone was a dentist. He was a member of our club. Ed Barna was the Vice President for Bill Coburn and succeeded Bill Colburn the following year. C. T. Wright was our Secretary; he was Director of the Chamber of Commerce of in Cohoes.

Rotary International did a lot of good work around the world through the different programs that they sponsored. One time they initiated a program for the eradication of polio, particularly in

Africa and some of the third world countries. They initially started to raise around one million dollars to start the thing off, and wound up raising two or three million. Then they sent teams of doctors and nurses from the United States over to Africa, and started to inoculate as many of the young people as they could. As a result they cut down the increase in polio.

My third year in Rotary I was the Sergeant at Arms. The following year I became Vice President, and succeeded on to the Presidency. The year that I became Vice President, the president of our club was Clyde Miller. He was the manager of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in Cohoes. In November of that year he was transferred to Ithaca, NY. Since he was no longer a member of our club, I succeeded him as President of the club.

During that year, Jack Smith who was one of our members was appointed chairman to raise sufficient money to build Cohoes Hospital. He approached me and asked if we could do something to help raise funds for the new hospital. I said yes we would. So I took it up with the board of directors, and they decided to buy a boat, motor and a trailer for the boat and raffle it off. The boat, motor and a trailer cost something in the neighborhood of a couple of thousand dollars. Of course we had to raise two thousand to pay off that! Over an above that I think that we raised about five or six thousand dollars to help raise the funds for the new hospital.

In succeeding years, when George Trahan became President (1961/2) they decided at that time to raise more money for the Cohoes Hospital. While George was President, each month he headed a dance at the Cohoes Elks Club for the members of our club and any outside people who wanted to come in order to raise some money. The amount of money raised was considerable. In-fact, they did so well the first year that they decided to do it again the next year. George was asked to serve as president a second year in a row (1962/3) so they could continue on raising funds for the hospital.

We raised money for the Cohoes Senior Citizens Center, the Cohoes Community Center, the Cohoes Public Library, and then we had numerous small projects where we raised money to help those in need.

Each of the Rotary clubs was involved to some extent in the programs that Rotary International held. I thought that each President of Rotary International did an outstanding job in most cases. We were involved each year with the program that the International President held. We tried to do our best along with other clubs to help them succeed.

The dress code at Rotary when I first went in was a coat and tie. If you didn't, you were fined. In the summer time (June, July and August) you could dress informally without a tie or a coat because of the warm weather.

One of the fellows that did a great deal in our club was Bill Dillon. He was secretary for some 12 or 15 years. He did a tremendous job. The only one that could come close to what Dillon did was our secretary today, Linda Tremblay. Linda follows along the same path as Bill, doing a great deal for the club. In addition to being the secretary for so long, Bill Dillon was also president of our club in the early 1970's (1972/3). He did the same type of job he did as secretary, a very good one.

One of the things that Rotary used to stress quite a bit was The Four Way Test. The Four Way Test consists of four parts:

- Number one - Is it the truth?
- Number two - Is it fair to all concerned?
- Number three - Will it build good will and better friendships?
- Number four - Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

The Four Way Test always meant a lot to me. It's all in simple English language and you can apply it to your self as an individual, or you can apply it to your married life, or whatever type of business you are in .You can apply it to almost anything. If you follow the Four Way Test, it is pretty hard to go wrong.

I have been a member of the Cohoes Rotary Club since 1953. So at the present time (Aug 2007) I have been a member 54 years. I can't remember any other member that has been in the club since it has been organized back in 1927 that has been a member that long. At the present time I am 97 years old. The only other one that I can recall that was close to that age was Doctor Hebert. Doctor Hebert was 96 when he died. I have surpassed him by one year, so far anyway.