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Grand Haven TRIBUNE

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Local Kiwanis Club calls it quits

BY MARK BROOKY

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After more than 60 years of community service work, the Kiwanis Club of Grand Haven is dissolving.

Former Kiwanian and Ottawa County Circuit Judge Ed Post noted that fewer and fewer businesses are paying the dues for its managers and employees to join service clubs.

"It's a sign of the times," said Jim Gurd, the treasurer for the Grand Haven Kiwanis Club. "It's a different lifestyle today (with) working parents. There's not the push to get involved with the community as it was 20 or 25 years ago."

The club made its demise public on Tuesday afternoon. It will hold its last official meeting on Jan. 28 before officially resigning its charter.

The news came exactly 88 years to the day that the first Kiwanis club was organized in Detroit.

The Grand Haven chapter of Kiwanis International was chartered with 38 members on May 13, 1941, at the Spring Lake Country Club. The club's first meetings were held at Keefer's Restaurant in downtown Grand Haven, then at the old Methodist church that was located at Washington Avenue and Fourth Street. Meetings were held at the Church of Dunes from 1961 to 1995, before shifting to the basement of the First Presbyterian Church, where its final gathering will take place next week.

At its peak, the local club boasted more than 120 members. But membership has dwindled over the years to its current roll of 13. Some monthly meetings would see only half a dozen mem-

bers.

Former Loutit Library Director Char Zoet became the Grand Haven club's first female member, and she was one of about two dozen former members who attended Tuesday's luncheon to announce the club's demise. Also in attendance were Gordon Van Beek, a now-retired Old Kent Bank official who recruited Zoet in 1988, and one of the club's first members, Edward Baas. Baas was a member for 58 years.

Van Beek, who was a member of Kiwanis for 27 years, said Zoet's husband and father-in-law were also Kiwanians at one time.

"They're personal friends of ours, and I thought it would be interesting to invite Char and have the first woman



Tribune photo/Mark Brooky

Bill Weitzel, left, is the regional Lt. Governor for Kiwanis International. He spoke at the Grand Haven chapter's meeting Tuesday when it was announced that the local service club was closing. In the center is club secretary Connie Farrell and at right is one of the club's first members, Ed Baas.

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member," Van Beek recalled. "I thought she would be a real asset to our club and give us some help."

Zoet said she joined to represent the library and felt no friction in being the only woman in the then all-male club.

"It's great fellowship with other professionals in the community," Zoet said of the benefits of being a Kiwanian. "And it was fun to work on projects. We worked on the children's parade for the Coast Guard Festival and sold peanuts to make money for the club."

The club today has several women members, including Grand Haven Township Assistant Manager Bette Boomgard and former Chamber of Commerce Director Connie Farrell.

Farrell read a long list of community service projects that the club had undertaken in its 61-plus years, which

included sponsoring a baseball league, manning the "Polio Plank" for March of Dimes in Grand Haven and Spring Lake, serving dinner to the local high school football team after home games, building a housing unit at a Boy Scout camp and trail marker signs at Duncan Woods, planning and marking bike trails at Hofma Park, ringing bells for the Salvation Army, and providing funds

and help for numerous organizations and needy families.

Bill Weitzel, the Lt. Gov. for Kiwanis clubs in West Michigan, suggested that the Grand Haven membership consider reorganizing later this year. He noted that Kiwanis clubs are growing in Hastings and Caledonia.

"Do you really think this community doesn't need a service club?" he asked the Grand Haven members and

former members.

Dave Deal, the Grand Haven chapter's current president, said the club's approximately \$50,000 fund will be dissolved by contributing \$22,350 each to the Tri-Cities Historical Museum and Loutit District Library. Another \$3,500 total will be contributed to Kiwanis International, the Kiwanis of Michigan Foundation and Junior Achievement of the Tri-Cities.

Museum Director Dennis Swartout said the contribution would be used at the museum's planned new location at 200 Washington Ave. for a hands-on activity center. Swartout also vowed to preserve the club's history, "because that's our business," he told the group.

Loutit District Library Director Sandra Knes said the contribution would be used in the children's section of the library's planned new building on Robbins Road.

In addition, the club's gavel and podium will be donated to the museum — with the stipulation that they would be returned if the club is revived.

Kiwanis origins

The first Kiwanis club was founded on Jan. 21, 1915, in Detroit by Allen S. Browne, a professional organizer of fraternal groups. Joe Prance, a tailor, was the first to sign up and became "the first Kiwanian."

Browne's proposed name for the group, the Benevolent Order Brothers, was rejected. As one of the charter members commented, "Who wants to belong to an organization called BOB?"

A committee consulted with a local historian, who told them about a phrase in the local Native American Indian language, "Nunc Kee-wanis," which means, approximately, "we get together" or "we trade." The club adopted an abbreviated version of this phrase, Kiwanis.



Charter Members — May 13, 1941

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Baltzar Bolling | Lewis Hodges |
| Ray Milliman | Ray Spring |
| John Casemier | Henry Hoebeke |
| John Mulder, Jr | R. S. Thomas |
| Alvin Cook | George Hoffer |
| S. P. Nelson | Charles Van Lente |
| Fred Den Herder | Jay Holmes |
| Maurice Overholt | Louis Van Schelven |
| Harold Dornbos | Paul Hostetter |
| Richard Prins | Martin Van Schelven |
| Lester Droppers | Charles Jacobson |
| Palmer Quackenbush | Herman Vanzantwick |
| Robert Dyksterhouse | Gilbert Jentz |
| Willard Rypkema | James Van Zylén |
| Rev. Arthur Ebeling | Russell Kamper |
| Ray Schaubel | John Vyn |
| Howard Fant | Rev. M. Kamper |
| Harvey Scholten | Gorden Walker |
| Nelson Fisher | James Ledinsky |
| Earl Secrist | Kenneth Wells |
| L.S. Ford | J. Welsey Lee |
| Marion Sherwood | Robert Wessel |
| Arthur Gieseeking | George Marshall |
| Ernie Smuk | Abraham Wessel |
| Maynard Heyboer | Stephen Mead |
| Jack Spangler Jr | Ivan Wickham |
| Edward Baas | |