



## ESTABLISHING KEY CLUBS

### THE BEGINNING

The Key Club concept was introduced to Kiwanians by Frank C. Vincent in the February 1925 issue of The *KIWANIS* Magazine: *“The Key Club is a new type of service which was instituted by the Sacramento Kiwanis Club; and, having proved its worth is being adopted by other California clubs. It is a junior service club composed of high school boys who are the key boys of the school. Banded together in the same spirit of service that bands men of industry and the professions into groups called Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, etc... close supervision over the Key Club is maintained by the Kiwanis Club.”*

The initial development came from school administrators, whether Kiwanians or not, who saw value in the idea. Kiwanis International offered its assistance. The General Office developed a bulletin describing the Key Club plan, which provided structure information. One unusual concept of Key Club was that a Key Club was not a junior Kiwanis club and was not to be a training and recruiting ground for future Kiwanians. Yet it involved school administrators, whether Kiwanians, Rotarians, Lions, or members of other service clubs, who could accept and support the Key Club idea because of its goals and objectives.

By 1939, Florida had enough clubs to conduct a state convention and form an association of Key Clubs, which started the first Key Club district. In 1943, other districts, which had since formed, traveled to Florida for the first Key Club International Convention. Prior to the Constitution and Bylaws being adopted, Malcolm Lewis, from West Palm Beach, Florida, was elected the first President of Key Club.

In 1946, Key Club experienced a banner year. The official publication of Key Club International, the *KEYNOTER*, was first published. The *KEYNOTER* magazine continues to be the main method of communication to every member, and it is produced by the Magazine Department of Kiwanis International. In October of 1946, Key Club spread to Canada with the formation of the Key Club of Riverside Continuation School of Riverside, Ontario, sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Windsor, Ontario. This colorful chartering of the 173rd Key Club was another great milestone in the development of Key Club during the 1940s. Because of its fine growth and service, and the intense interest of an increasing number of Kiwanians, the Kiwanis International Board officially recognized Key Club International. The Key Club International Constitution and Bylaws were adopted at the convention in New Orleans, and Kiwanis President Hamilton Holt proudly announced that the first President of Key Club International under its new status was from Holt's hometown, Macon, Georgia. His name was Hartley Hall.

The number of Key Club members continued to expand. By 1981, there were more than 100,000 members. Additional clubs are built each year, and some losses are recouped through reactivation.

Districts were developing their own goals with coordination being furnished by district administrators. Membership for Key Clubs eventually opened to both males and females by a Constitutional change in 1977. Since that year, the female membership has grown to between 65 to 70 percent of the total. The admission of girls caused concern in some areas of the organization, but the growth in total membership and the magnitude of

local service programs attest to the fact that clubs are stronger. With membership growth came increased income, and Key Club was approaching the position of being financially self-sufficient in the late 1980s. The organization was on much firmer ground. As a reserve fund developed, it became the responsibility of the Key Club Board to determine when and if any such funds should be expended for the benefit of the total organization.

## THE STRUCTURE

Today, Key Club International is composed of three organizational levels: International, district, and the local club. Elected officers who serve on all three levels are high school students. The International and district organizations exist mainly to support and strengthen the local clubs. The following is a brief description of the three levels and how they work:

**International.** The International Board consists of 14 Trustees, the Vice President, and the President, who is the spokesperson for Key Club International. The International Board sets policy, develops major emphasis programs, represents the opinions of its counseled districts, and provides all the necessary materials and services to districts and clubs. These officers are elected at the annual Key Club International convention in July.

**District.** Districts comprise all the clubs within a geographical area, usually determined by state or region of the country. Districts exist to maintain and expand Key Club service within that area. Each district is subdivided into divisions. These divisions elect a lieutenant governor responsible for the clubs within that division. Other district officers include a treasurer, secretary, and governor, who serves as the spokesperson for the district. Some districts elect officers to other positions as well.

**Local Club.** There is no doubt that the club is the most important level of Key Club International. This is where the actual Key Club service takes place. Each club conducts meetings, social functions, and service projects to improve the school and community. Club officers include treasurer, secretary, vice-president, and president, who serves as the spokesperson and leader of the club. The club also elects a board of directors, which includes a representative from each grade level.

## HOW DOES KIWANIS RELATE TO KEY CLUBS?

Each Key Club is sponsored by a Kiwanis club. This sponsorship is part of the Kiwanis program to strengthen today's youth. It is very important for the success of both clubs for the Key Club officers to work closely with their Kiwanians during the year.

Two Key Club members should attend each weekly or bi-weekly Kiwanis meeting, and likewise, at least two Kiwanis members should sit in on the Key Club meetings. The sponsoring Kiwanis club will appoint a committee and advisor to help guide and counsel the Key Club. Though it is important to have good, strong Kiwanis support, it should be remembered that Kiwanians are there only to guide and counsel. Key Clubbers are expected to manage their own affairs and determine their own service direction. It is through such hands-on experience that the full leadership potential is developed. Not only is there local Kiwanis support for Key Club, but there are also International and district committees dedicated to assisting Key Club.

The challenge to build new clubs remains, and the need for responsible sponsorship of both new clubs and established clubs always must receive top priority in Kiwanis clubs. Both Key Club and Kiwanis leadership should give prime attention to the need for new techniques in new club building with a 10-year development plan.

Key Club is very positive about its future, and it is not resting on its laurels. This attitude has persisted over the years and is even stronger as the organization proceeds into the 21st century. This is why there are many Kiwanians, even excluding those closely related to the Key Club program, who have said that if Kiwanis had done nothing more than develop and promote the Key Club concept, its existence would be justified. Today, Key Club is the largest high school service organization in the world. It has become *the* high school service club.

Source: *Dimensions of Service, The Kiwanis Story* by L.A. "Larry" Hapgood.