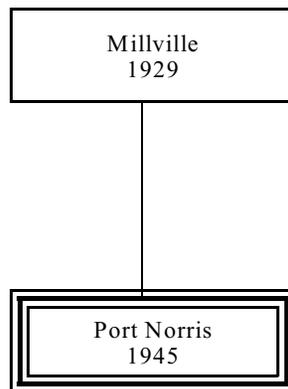


# Chapter 31

## Rotary Club of Port Norris, N.J.



Chartered	June 19, 1.945	Meets	Thursdays at 6:30 pm at
Re-Chartered	December 2, 1980		Millville Airport Restaurant
Sponsored By	Millville		Millville, NJ 08332

**Port Norris Rotary Club is Small in Numbers but Big in Spirit**

Although the Port Norris Rotary currently is the smallest of the clubs in District 764, it is proud to say "We're paying our way." And it has been that way since it was chartered, through the sponsorship of neighboring Millville Rotary, in 1945.

The primary forces behind the club's establishment were Dan Adams and Izzy Goldblatt of Port Norris, and Jim Steelman, a member of the Millville club. Through their untiring efforts and determination, the Port Norris Rotary started June 19, 1945, at the Seashell Restaurant on Main St. - a day when the temperature reached 98 and there was no air conditioning.

"Millville played a big part in our club being formed," says Lou Dagastine, "and they've been a good mother club to us ever since."

Of 25 charter members, Dagastine and Allen Warren are still senior active members today. Jessie T. Morie joined shortly thereafter and also is still active. They're all Paul Harris Fellows, as is clergy (retired) Rev. Clyde Phillips.

The Port Norris membership also includes Evalina Vidal, a member since 1988 and the first woman Rotarian in Cumberland County.

Veterans Port Norris Rotarians have had their dinner meetings in nine different area restaurants including the current location at Millville Airport. They recall paying \$1 per meeting, 75 cents for dinner, and 25 cents for club dues when the '45 meetings shifted to the Louis Mathis-operated Polimino Restaurant "and the meals were good, too."

Port Norris membership expanded rapidly to 30 members and then to an all-time high of 40. It remained in the 25 to 35 range for many years but recently has been in single digits.

In 1947, Port Norris started its annual October oyster dinners which were attended by Rotarians from throughout the district. The popular dinners continued for many years until oysters became scarce and too expensive and there were no restaurants large enough to accommodate the throngs.

Also in 1947, Port Norris began its eyeglasses program. The club provided free eyeglasses for senior citizens and youngsters who could not afford them.

Port Norris started its annual boat ride in 1950. The club chartered a large boat and invited members of other Rotaries and their wives to go on a moonlight ride on the Delaware Bay. With guests enjoying musical entertainment, they dined on corn on the cob, watermelon "and other goodies."

It was an event that lasted for 30 years, and was discontinued because the club could no longer get trip insurance.

In 1950, Goldblatt came up with what would become an historic idea - free telephone calls to Millville, Bridgeton and Vineland. The club worked successfully with the telephone company and over the last 40 years Cumberland County area residents have enjoyed free telephone service among the county's three largest cities.

Port Norris Rotarians sponsored and successfully operated its March of Dimes program from 1952 through 1964.

The club became active in the sponsorship of youth baseball teams in the '50s. First, it organized, outfitted and provided a playing field for a Little League team; the team remains a club project today. Then it organized a Babe Ruth League team, provided equipment, and also provided a playing field.

In 1955, the club had a busy year. It took on the project of naming all unnamed streets and purchasing and installing street signs in Port Norris, Dividing Creek and Mauricetown. That same year the Rotarians

provided, and installed, playground equipment at Port Norris School.

The club built and placed six school bus shelters for school children in Halyville, Mauricetown and Laurel Lake in 1956. But vandals destroyed the shelters within the next few years.

Writes Dagastine, "in 1957 when the oyster dinners died and things went bad, our club lost many members and it was a tough time for all. But during the '40s, '50s and '60s, our club made many contributions to worthwhile causes and collected clothing and distributed it to the needy. Our club was always ready and willing to heap out whenever and wherever there was a need."

Port Norris Rotary bought and installed park benches and planted trees in Mauricetown Senior River Park in 1975. In '80, it installed a ramp at the St. Anthony's Church Hall to allow the handicapped access to the facility.

Port Norris Rotary has participated in the RYLA program since the club was started and currently has a 50 percent participation in the Paul Harris Fellow program. It also has 100 percent participation in the Polio Plus program.

So it's easy to see why Port Norris Rotary, though small in numbers, continue-, to stand proudly in District 764 as it heads to a 50th anniversary celebration in 1995.