When the 19 members of the Rotary Club of Suva sat down for their charter dinner in July 1936, few of those present could have foreseen the profound changes that would take place in Suva, Fiji, in the South Pacific, and throughout the world.

The world was emerging from the Great Depression, Nazism was raising its ugly head, and the island nations of the South Pacific, as well as Australia and New Zealand, were still regarded as sleepy appendages of the Crown in the antipodes.

Rotary in the region, Fiji Rotary in particular, has also changed. In 1936, the Suva Club’s 19 charter members were all Caucasian, predominantly of English descent. The 300-odd Rotarians in the eight Fiji clubs are now Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Chinese, Fijians, Japanese, North Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, Rotumans, South Americans, Englishmen, Scotsmen and many others.

As the Fiji economy grew and towns outside Suva expanded during the colonial and post-independent period, Rotary also extended its influence.


The expansion took Rotary into the heart of the major towns and cities in Fiji, enabling those citizens imbued with the ideal of ‘service above self’ to make significant contributions to the communities in which they live.

A brief examination of some of the clubs’ main projects is evidence of Rotary’s contribution to the nation.

The Suva East club staged an annual bed race. This became a highlight for Suva citizens and raised approximately $6,000 annually. The winners travelled overseas to international bed races, with funds distributed to the Red Cross.

The Labasa Club, with its limited membership, embarked on highly ambitious and successful projects. One was the Annual Queen of the North Contest.

The Nadi Club has always been the ‘Gateway Club’ and has hosted numerous students coming to, or leaving Fiji after participating in Rotary Youth schemes.

The Lautoka Hospital has been one of the main beneficiaries of the Lautoka Club’s efforts which, over the years, have given a variety of equipment and furniture to the hospital, including hypodermic needles, a hydrotherapy pool,
wheelchairs, a projector and a camera. The Lautoka Club has joined with Labasa and the three Suva clubs in supporting the magnificent interplast project, through which plastic surgeons are brought to Fiji to carry out surgery on hundreds of needy patients, free of charge. Perhaps the Lautoka Club’s most worthy project has been the ‘Rota Home,’ which provides a simple structure for disaster affected people. Funds have come from Fiji and overseas. This is an excellent example of world community service at work within the Pacific.

The Ba Club’s proud efforts over the years were recognised by Rotary International’s Meritorious Service Award in 1983. This was in acknowledgement of the Ba Club’s presentation of a $10,000 X-ray unit to the Ba Methodist Hospital.

It is said that Rotary Clubs should run projects that can be completed within the Rotary year. However, the needs of Fiji are often so great that this is impossible. The Suva North Club recognised this and embarked on an enormous task of completing an $800,000 school for the intellectually handicapped. The Suva North Club runs an annual casino night and supports needy charitable organisations in Suva.

The Sigatoka Club has played host to many visiting Rotarians staying at the Coral Coast hotels, actively supported town council projects, and helped rural schools and families following natural disasters.

The Suva Club’s contributions to the nation are far too numerous to list. When the Club began, even radio was a new invention in the islands. The Suva Club’s first project was to install a radio receiving system for patients at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital.

There is no doubt that, in all the areas where Rotary Clubs are established, people are better off. Many organisations, such as the Fiji Society for the Blind, the Fiji Crippled Children Society, and so on, might not exist had it not been for Rotary.