

To determine where you want to go, you must first understand where you came from. In order to truly understand what it means to be a Circle K you need to know how Circle K transformed into the organization it is today. Circle K has a rich and exciting history—read on to find out more!

## CIRCLE K: THE BEGINNING

In 1936 **Jay N. Emerson**, a member of the Pullman Washington Kiwanis Club, presented a plan to his club proposing that they purchase a house that could be rented to young men in need of assistance to attend the local college. The plan became a reality as the Kiwanians established the "Circle K House" at **Washington State College**. For ten years the "Circle K House" was affiliated with a Greek letter organization, although it continued to be sponsored by the Pullman Kiwanis Club.

Eleven years later in 1947, Donald T. Forsythe, Trustee of Kiwanis, aided in transitioning Circle K from a **fraternity to a service-oriented organization**. That year, during September, the first Circle K club similar to our present day organization, was chartered at **Carthage College** in Carthage, Illinois. (The college moved to its present-day location of Kenosha, Wisconsin in 1962.)

Circle K began as one man's dream to enable the success of local collegians and continued to grow as others began to believe in the concepts of Circle K and in the men who belonged to Circle K.

## CIRCLE K: TRANSITIONING FROM A FRATERNITY

For two years, the Carthage College Circle K Club existed alone. But on March 26, 1949, the University of Western Ontario became the second Circle K Club to charter and they were soon joined by the Louisiana Polytechnic Institute on May 13, 1949. Circle K gained momentum and grew rapidly throughout the United States; sixteen more clubs chartered in 1950.

By 1953, Circle K clubs were located at 57 different (upper level) institutions with a total membership of 1,425. During this time, discussion over the possible formation of an International Circle K organization began to increase.

Twenty-five Circle K members, representing fifteen clubs along with several Kiwanis International Board members met June 22-24, 1953. At the end of the meeting, Kenneth B. Creasy from Ohio Wesleyan University emerged as the **first President of Circle K**. A full board, consisting of a Vice President, Executive Secretary/Treasurer, and eleven Trustees, was also elected to serve as the temporary officers of Circle K.

Although the organization was moving closer to attaining International status, Circle K primarily remained a local Kiwanis activity at the urging of **J. Frank McCabe**, the Director of Key Club International. His conservative stance allowed Circle K to develop a definite sense of direction and contributed greatly to a strong base of support from Kiwanis before becoming an International organization.

At the Kiwanis International Convention, during May of 1954, an attempt was made by the Kiwanis Special Committee on Circle K Clubs to help Circle K gain recognition as an International organization; the attempt failed. However, a temporary Circle K organization was established as members prepared themselves for their **first annual convention**, held October 17-19, 1954 at Carthage College.

One-hundred and fourteen members representing 35 Circle K Clubs attended the convention. After the elections, Eugene C. Alford, Jr., from Georgia Institute of Technology, was elected the second President of Circle K.

Under **President Alford**, Circle K had the first meeting of an International Board. In addition, Circle K experienced unbelievable growth under Alford's leadership.

In February of 1955, Circle K President Alford met with the President of Kiwanis International, Donald E. Engdahl. The result of this meeting became public March 9, 1955.

*"At a recent meeting of the International Board of Trustees, held in Washington, D.C., on February 18th and 19th, the following recommendation of the Board Committee on Kiwanis Youth Organizations was unanimously accepted:*

***Voted:** That the present organization of Circle K Clubs receive International recognition and a charter from Kiwanis International at the Cleveland Convention, June of 1955, provided the International dues be \$4.00 per member per year, and that a Constitution and Bylaws which have the approval of Kiwanis International be adopted."*

Soon after the second annual Circle K Convention ballots were sent to the 140 Circle K Clubs. The Clubs were to vote as to whether to accept or reject the proposed Constitution, Bylaws, and an International membership due. The results of the ballots were as follows: 52 voted "yes", 27 voted "no", and 61 clubs abstained. With these results, the Board of Trustees of Kiwanis **voted to grant official international recognition to Circle K** on October 23, 1955. The dream ~ Circle K International ~ had finally come true. The first club to officially affiliate with Circle K International was **Emory University** in Atlanta, Georgia, on November 14, 1955.

## CIRCLE K: THE LARGEST COLLEGIATE SERVICE ORGANIZATION

As Circle K International began to award charters to individual clubs, plans to form **Circle K Districts** began. By the summer of 1956 there were four unofficial Circle K Districts: California-Nevada-Hawaii, Michigan, Texas-Oklahoma, and Missouri-Arkansas.

The Kiwanis Board of Trustees accepted a proposal to allow the establishment of Circle K Districts on February 22, 1957. The very first Circle K District to be officially recognized was the **Texas-Oklahoma District**; six more Districts were added in the 1957-58 administrative year.

Growth continued at a slow, steady pace until 1961, at which time there was a **"New Club Rush"** and 75 clubs and 6 Districts were issued new charters. The rapid rate of expansion continued through the 1962 administrative year as 88 new clubs were built and 6 new Districts chartered, including the **Carolinas District**. By May of 1962, Circle K had a membership of 7,700 and 402 clubs throughout the United States and Canada.

By 1964, Circle K had become the **largest collegiate service organization** on American and Canadian college campuses; membership had topped the 10,000 member mark. Another milestone in Circle K history was also reached as Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, became home to the **500th Circle K Club** to be chartered by Circle K. In addition to being the largest, Circle K became the **fastest growing collegiate service organization** on the North American continent with a membership of over 12,000 in 600 clubs during the 1964-65 administrative year.

The tremendous growth that Circle K had experienced during the first ten years began to slow. Unfortunately, by the end of December, 1965, 178 charters of the 954 charters issued had been revoked over the years and many more would soon meet the same fate.

## CIRCLE K: MILESTONES OF PROGRESS

In 1971 the first steps for making dramatic changes in the membership composition of Circle K International began. It was at the 1971 International Convention that the Circle K House of Delegates voted overwhelmingly to **allow women to join** Circle K. After long and careful consideration, nearly two years later the Kiwanis Board of Trustees approved the resolution for the acceptance of female members into Circle K on a local option basis.

While the Kiwanis Board of Trustees was considering the amendment to allow females to join Circle K, the 1972 Convention saw the **restructuring** of the International Board. The original Board structure consisted of a president, two vice presidents, a secretary and twelve trustees; this structure was replaced by a Board of Officers consisting of a president and **six vice presidents**.

With a new International Board structure, Circle K experienced several **milestones**. The first event of great significance since the admission of female members was the 1973 election of the **first female Governor**, Dorothy Mihalick of the Pennsylvania District. In 1984, Susan E. McClernon

of the College of St. Scholastica in Minnesota was elected the **first female President** of Circle K International. In 1975, Gregory Faulkner of the New York District was elected to the position of International President. To date, Faulkner was the first and **only African-American International President**. Faulkner's election and the admission of female members was symbolic of the new level of maturity and responsibility Circle K had assumed over 20 years of service, growth and development.

Once again the topic of organizational structure arose in 1986, when the House of Delegates voted in favor of changing the names of International Vice Presidents to **International Trustees**.

The 1994 House of Delegates will be most remembered by the **"Harvard Issue."** For nearly two years prior to the 1994 House of Delegates, interested students at Harvard University worked to establish a Circle K club. Unfortunately, the university prohibits the establishment of organizations affiliated with a national or local program. The House of Delegates voted overwhelmingly to add a clause to the Constitution that would allow students who attend an educational institution that prohibits the chartering of a Circle K club to be elected to active membership in another local Circle K club as long as this is permitted by the institution in which the Circle K club exists.

During the 2006 House of Delegates the International Trustee system was replaced with **International Representatives**; the first Representatives were elected during the 2007 Convention. Due to the new Representative system, Districts were broken down into **Sub-Regions** by geographical location. A Representative is elected from each Sub-Region (A-G) and must be from a district within their respective Sub-Region to hold the position.

## **CIRCLE K: SERVICE**

The debate has continued over the years of whether Circle K is a service organization or leadership development organization. Clearly the answer is that it is both a community service and leadership development organization.

Through the years, Circle K has recognized the significance of emphasizing certain programs toward which club-level community service efforts could be targeted. In Circle K's early years these programs, known as **Theme and Emphasis programs**, changed annually. In 1982-83, to maximize resources and impact, the Board decided to change the International Theme and Emphasis Program every other year, rather than every year. Ten years later, the name of the organization's service focus was changed from Theme and Emphasis Program to **Service Initiative** to more accurately reflect the intent of the program—community service.

The 1993-95 Service Initiative, ***Focusing on the Future: Children***, asks members to become involved with projects to benefit children ages 6-13. One year later, the 1993-94 Circle K International Board decided to make *Focusing on the Future: Children* the organization's Service Initiative for an indefinite period of time since it fostered significant interest by the membership.

In 2007 Circle K and UNICEF partnered up to implement an International Fundraiser, **Saving Lives: The Six Cents Initiative**. More than 2.6 billion people lack even the most basic sanitation facilities and safe drinking water sources. At a cost of only 6 cents, a mixture of sugar and salt called oral rehydration salts (ORS) offers the most effective and cheapest way to save lives during dehydration. CKI's Six Cents Initiative with UNICEF is designed to help children get the rehydrating salts they need to survive dehydration spells.

## **CIRCLE K: A LOOK AT INTERNATIONALIZATION**

The first Circle K Club outside of the North American continent was organized in January of 1970 at the American College of **Switzerland** in Leysin, Switzerland. The sponsoring Kiwanis Club was the Alcoa, Tennessee Kiwanis Club. A club was also established in Monterrey, Mexico, during 1971. Unfortunately, neither of these clubs received official charters, nor were they incorporated into an existing District of Circle K.

The first club to be officially chartered outside of the United States and Canada was the **College of the Bahamas** on April 25, 1977. The nations of Jamaica, Suriname, Mexico, Barbados, Ghana and the Philippines followed in 1977-1985.

## **CONCLUSION**

Over the years Circle K has grown into the largest collegiate service organization in North America, and still is today; Circle K boasts a membership of more than 11,000 collegians on more than 500 campuses worldwide. Circle K has **grown tremendously** over the past 40 years, sometimes in spirit, sometimes in members, and still other times in service to the community. Though history provides a good foundation from which to view achievements and obstacles, Circle K must connect the organization's mission with tomorrow's college students to envision the possibilities for the organization and **realize its dream** of creating a better world in which to live.