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Marty Baptist Memoir

Baptist, Marty

Interview and memoir
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SPRINGFIELD ROTARY CLUB PROJECT

Baptist, a member of the Springfield Rotary Club since 1970, recalls his reasons for joining, induction ceremony, social activities, fundraisers, and fellow members.

Interview by P.J. Waggaman, 1988

Marty Baptist Memoir

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Preface

This manuscript is the product of tape-recorded interviews conducted by P. J. Waggaman for the Oral History Office in the spring of 1988. Florence Hardin transcribed the tapes and Francie Staggs edited the transcript. Marty Baptist reviewed the transcript.

Marty Baptist, a Springfield builder, realtor and property manager, has been a member of the Springfield Rotary Club since March of 1970. He takes pride in keeping the club's membership up as well as the charitable work that the Rotary Club does for the Springfield community.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Marty Baptist, Springfield, Illinois, Spring, 1988.

P. J. Waggaman, Interviewer.

Q: What is your classification?

A: I believe I was a builder at that time, builder only.

Q: Builder only. Has that changed since you've been there?

A: Yes. Well, actually it changed a little bit before I got there. My job changed. I am also a realtor and property manager.

Q: When did you join the Rotary club?

A: I believe it was March of 1970.

Q: Were you previously in any other clubs?

A: Not any civic clubs.

Q: None at all? Who sponsored you in Springfield?

A: J. Fred Adams.

Q: Who is he?

A: Well, he was a Rotarian. We were partners for twenty-seven years.

Q: Marty, could you describe your reflections on the first meeting you attended? Do you remember? How long have you been a member now?

A: Eighteen years.

Q: Eighteen years. Do you remember back the first meeting you attended in 1970 and anything special that might have happened?

A: I guess the first thing I can reflect on was the introduction as a new member. I am not sure that I went to any meetings before that, but I remember my introduction. I'd been in the building business for twenty years and my partner introduced me as a bowler who had bowled seven hundred, and he didn't say anything about my background in the building business. (laughter)

Q: Did he talk about your golf game?

A: He didn't say much about the golf. Anyway, they put me on a bowling team right away and I bowled for Rotary for seventeen straight years, I guess.

Q: Do you still bowl with them now?

A: No, I dropped out this year. First year I didn't bowl.

Q: Do you remember your induction process? What was that like? As far as being inducted into the Rotary?

A: I think it is basically done the same way. Your first night it was an overview of Rotary by the president.

Q: So, was it similar to the way Bill does it now, when you come up and just give you the badge? I know Bill just hands it to you now because of the women.

A: Right. They used to always pin your pin on after a time, but I was pinned at the time. I was rather impressed. There was a lot of quality people in Rotary and I was impressed by the people.

Q: Marty, do you remember where the Springfield club met when you first joined the club?

A: I believe it was at the St. Nick Hotel.

Q: How long were they there?

A: Well, they were there when I joined and it seems like we stayed there for another five or six years. I think altogether it was probably in the neighborhood of ten years until the St. Nick closed and we left.

Q: Did you go to any other places other than that? Obviously, they did and they are in Maldaners now. Any other places in between?

A: Well, they tried several. I really can't remember all the places we've been. The Convention Center. There were several temporary places, such as Conn's, and catering services. I can't remember the other places, but we tried several.

Q: Why did you join the Rotary?

A: Well, I am not sure. I thought that I should have a civic duty to belong to some organization. I talked to Fred Adams a little bit about it and that was the club he belonged to. He was kind of my senior partner in our construction company, so I relied on Fred, and he seemed to think that Rotary was a good club, so I decided on Rotary.

Q: Besides Fred, were there any other members that you knew?

A: There were quite a few that I knew. Not really personal friends.

Q: How many people were in the club? What was the size of the club when you joined it?

A: It seems to me like there were about 180. We were always trying to reach 200. I don't believe we ever made it, probably around 180 somewhere.

Q: And it is only about 150 now, isn't it?

A: I believe so.

Q: Describe the atmosphere, the personality of the club when you joined? Along social lines.

A: I think the makeup of the club was generally an older group of people. When I joined I was probably one of the youngest members and it seemed like people kind of associated with the people they felt comfortable with. So, I ended up with the bowling team and with those who played golf, because I was a golfer and a bowler. I think our bowling team probably is a little more liberal than the club. We seemed to be a little more rowdy and had more fun.

Q: How old were you at the time?

A: Oh, forty.

Q: Do you think it's changed today, or do you think it is similar to what it was like when you went in?

A: I don't believe it has changed very much. I think it is a serious club and I think it's more of a dinner club, and businessmen getting the job done in whatever project they might take on. I don't think it is humorous, as much fun having their meetings and their outings as such. It is a serious club that does a good job.

Q: Do you remember what the major activities were at your initial year, when you first joined, you know, like citrus?

A: We sponsored the Harlem Globetrotters for about four years as our fundraiser. It started out and we were able to make a profit, but the fourth year came around and we actually lost money on it. So, we were struggling for a fundraiser. I don't remember really what the others are other than the Harlem Globetrotters.

Q: Well, did you guys get involved with the Globetrotters since you were sponsoring them?

A: We didn't. I suppose the committee that actually contacted with the Harlem Globetrotters got involved to some degree and possibly the president. I can remember we were involved with selling tickets, and promoting ticket sales.

Q: Besides the Globetrotters, were there any other projects you were involved in, or did you get involved with that one specifically?

A: I didn't get too involved. I went to the games, and I helped with ticket sales, and ushering, and things like that.

Q: Were you an officer, or director of the club, or chair committees? Things like that? Or significant responsibilities while you were there?

A: I think I only handled the golf outing. I kind of glanced at that. I think I have basically done it every year since 1974 with the exception of maybe one or two years.

Q: I remember you appreciated me for not going to the golf outing.

A: (chuckles)

Q: What do you enjoy most about the club, Marty?

A: Oh, I believe just the membership, and meeting the people, and meeting the new people that come into the club.

Q: Looking back over the eighteen years, what do you think are the one or two most significant events or activities of the Rotary during your membership, significant things, or happenings that come to mind?

A: Oh, I don't think I can think of anything in particular. I think one of the things that we can be the most proud of, I believe, is the citrus drive, simply because of the number of dollars that we paid for charity. To think that I am a small part of that, I guess, is probably the most significant thing.

Q: Oh, did you have a big part in that?

A: Oh, I haven't played a big part in it, but I worked on it every year they have had it.

Q: What did you do on the citrus drive?

A: I really haven't done much other than being a team captain.

Q: Is the club any different today than when you joined? Kind of repetitious of what we asked before, but do you feel a personality change or difference maybe because the time itself has changed?

A: I haven't noticed too much of a change. I think we struggle a little bit to get the younger people involved soon enough. I think historically the club has tried to get the people in management and ownership of businesses. I suppose some of the young people don't start out in those positions so it tends to get older people. I think we lose a little something by not having younger people in it. Not that the older people aren't fine or do a good job. I have joined their ranks now, and the older ones. (chuckles) I think the backbone of any organization is the membership, and you need the youngsters, and you need to help guide them.

Q: You think that was true of the club eighteen years ago? And still true of the club today?

A: Yes, I think we have attracted a few younger people. It seems to me like we have a little more difficult time holding membership in the club. Seems like the turnover is great and, of course, we realize it is going to be a lot of that because of transfers and retirement. Seems like we have lost a lot of members that did not transfer or retire. We are kind of bad about that. Once we have a person in Rotary, we haven't been able to keep them.

Q: Who in the club has had the most influence on you?

A: Oh, maybe Tom Kushak. He was vice president and then he stayed on the following year as president, so he was president for almost two years. I believe he is an excellent speaker and handled the meetings well. There have been so many excellent people it is hard to say.

Q: How about the most influence to the club itself? Who do you think in your opinion had the most influence on the club itself?

A: I am not sure I know that anyone has had tremendous influence on it. I think we have been fortunate to have some pretty good leadership and I think they have all done a good job. The reason we are having a little trouble now is that we have three Rotary Clubs in Springfield, and at one time we only had one. So, I think that is part of the problem, the three clubs. Springfield has grown quite a bit and it seems like we ought to be able to get our membership up a little bit more.

Q: Do you think the Springfield club has a lot of influence on the community and if so, how? In what way?

A: I guess it definitely has a fair amount of influence on Springfield. I take pride in keeping membership up, and increasing the numbers. I believe the charitable work that we do is good.

Q: Marty, do you recall the funniest thing that ever happened at the Rotary meetings, something unusual, or humorous that may have occurred? (inaudible)

A: I think that most of the presidents have decided that just a little dab of humor now and then is adequate. Some of the presidents say it is hard to get the correct mix.

Q: They want to maintain a pretty formal atmosphere, do you think?

A: I believe that is what they want to do.

Q: Did you ever attend any district or national conventions while you were a member?

A: No, I haven't.

Q: Do you recall appearances or memberships of any celebrities or historical figures in the Rotary during your eighteen years?

A: Nothing comes to my mind, probably a few politicians around.

Q: Marty, what has Rotary membership meant to you, to your life? Has it affected your life in any significant way?

A: I believe it has made me conscious of the value of having clubs like Rotary in Springfield.

Q: Is there anything else? This is the final question. Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't talked about?

A: I don't believe there is anything. I have enjoyed Rotary a lot. With bowling on Wednesday and Rotary on Monday, and I have gone two nights a week and that is why I ended up giving up bowling.

Q: Anything else?

A: No, I can't think of anything else. I have enjoyed it and it's a joy to get there every week with the guys.

End of Tape