

Zonta Club of Washington, D.C.
“History in Brief”

Inspired by the Zonta Club of Buffalo, N.Y., the Zonta Club of Washington, D.C. was chartered March 24, 1922.

In early March 1922, Alice Buchanan, a publicity manager in a local store, arranged a dinner presentation by invited members of the Zonta Club of Buffalo to a group of business and professional women in Washington. Following the presentation, “Almost every woman signed the application for membership and an organization committee was formed.” The visiting Buffalo Zontians assisted the organization committee led by Edith Salisbury with the task of identifying the eligible members from the application for membership list. In April 1922 an organizational dinner meeting was held at the Dodge Hotel and the Zonta Club of Washington, D.C. was organized with fifteen charter members. Edith Salisbury, an agent for the New York Life Insurance Company, was elected as the first president of the club.

By the end of the first year before the annual meeting, the club had 25 members. The club continued to grow during the ensuing years with membership peaking in 1970-72 at 120 members. Membership remained in the 100s through the 1970s and began to fluctuate in the 1980s-1990s holding in the high 80s. In the new millennium, membership began to decline and today stands at 63. As times have changed since 1922, the club meeting formats have gone from weekly luncheon meetings to once a month dinner meetings held on the first Wednesday of the month with the exception of August. In August, the Club hosts a social event for members, family, and guests.

The first service project of the Club was a financial gift at Christmas time in 1922 to the Neighborhood House of Washington. A scholarship program was initiated in January, 1924, awarding three scholarships, which began the club’s long history and strong commitment of supporting women’s education. During 1924-25 the scholarship project was expanded and turned into a permanent club project which extended small loans to young women to further their education and prepare them for business and professional careers. Funds to support the scholarships were provided by a yearly affixed assessment from members plus contributions from other sources. Eventually the club “loans” turned into the Zonta Club of Washington, D.C. Undergraduate Scholarship program “To support undergraduate women pursuing or planning to pursue a degree in areas such as but not limited to business, engineering, healthcare, education, technology, mathematics, or the sciences (social or basic).” Through member’s bequests, the club later was able to expand its scholarship program and award scholarships to medical students and to nursing graduate students as well as the undergraduate scholarships; The Edith Seville Coale Medical Scholarships were established in 1965 and the Virginia Longest Nursing Scholarship in 2003. Since the inception of the program, approximately \$1,400,000 has been awarded to local university undergraduate and medical and nursing graduate students.

In addition to scholarships, the club has supported local and international service projects through direct funding or hands-on support. Some of the more recent service projects include N Street Village, My Sisters Place, Mom’s n Tots, Alive Shelter, Bethany Women’s Center, CASA DC, Stanton School in Anacostia, Girls Inc., Rachael’s Women Center, Our Place, Girls on the Run, The Advocacy Project, and Kakenya’s Center for Excellence, as well as service projects undertaken by District 3 and Zonta International service programs. In the 1970’s, the Zonta Club of Washington, D.C. established a Legal Committee to undertake formation of the Zonta Club of Washington Foundation “to engage in works of charity and community services of every description....” Since its incorporation April 27, 1981, the Zonta Club of Washington Foundation has annually provided program funding to support scholarships

and local community and International service projects through fundraisers, gifts from the Zonta Club of Washington, D.C., member donations, and public donations.

As the oldest Zonta Club in District 3, the Club has provided leadership at both the District level (Six Governors, Secretary, Parliamentarian, Nominating Committee) and International level (Nominating Committee, Membership, Long Range Planning, Service Committee Chairmanships, Co-Chairman Capital Campaign, Director International Foundation Board). Member Marguerite Rawalt was Zonta International Second Vice President from 1962-1964 and two members served as Zonta International Presidents, Mary Moyers McElroy in 1940-1942 and Mary Ellen Bittner from 2004 to 2006. The club hosted the Zonta International Conventions in 1927 and 1980 and has hosted a number of District 3 Conferences beginning in 1927 and most recently in 2009. Additionally, the Zonta Club of Washington, D.C. over the years actively organized Zonta clubs, the first being the Zonta Club of Philadelphia in 1928 and subsequently many other clubs.

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Sources: ZCWDC Archives, Published 50 and 75 Year Club Histories

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