

Speech given by long term SI Adelaide member, Pat Ellis, in Veale Gardens South Tce Adelaide on Friday October 8th 2021, as part of the 100 year celebration of Soroptimist International.

A tree was planted by SI Adelaide members, in the park opposite NCW House, 95 South Tce Adelaide, where SI Adelaide has met, since 1950s. A plaque to commemorate this event, was unveiled on a seat adjacent.

We are here today to celebrate 100 years of Soroptimist International. The first Soroptimist Club , the Alameda County Soroptimist Club in California, was presented with its charter on 3 October, 1921. A man named Stuart Morrow, who was a professional organiser of men's service clubs, saw the need for a service club for professional women, similar to Rotary, and he organised the formation of the Alameda County club. The club met weekly, debating service projects and hearing speakers on various worldwide issues that would broaden members' horizons. Their first project was to 'Save the Redwoods', the great ancient trees which were being felled and the Club lobbied the legislature, taking on powerful lumber companies and winning public support. This resulted in a major portion of the forest being set aside as protected land, that still exists today.

In 1923, the Greater London Club was formed in the United Kingdom and in 1924 Dr Suzanne Noel, a prominent French cosmetic surgeon, was the founding president of the Soroptimist Club in Paris.

Soroptimism was introduced to Australia in 1937 by Edith Glanville JP. On a trip to the US she learned of Soroptimism and was impressed by the international aspects of the organisation. She had already initiated a Quota Club in Sydney, which was an American club, and at a meeting of that club two thirds of the members agreed to return their charter to the US and apply to the Federation of Great Britain and Ireland for registration as a Soroptimist Club. The War interrupted Soroptimism's expansion so the next club didn't form until 1948 due to the efforts of Florence Rutter, who was the founder president of the Soroptimist Club of Central London, and visited Australia with her daughter. Due to her groundwork a number of clubs were formed in 1948 and 1949.

Florence Rutter arrived in Adelaide from Sydney on 24 May 1949. She had been warned that she would have little success in starting a Soroptimist Club in Adelaide but she worked every day spreading the word about Soroptimism and on the 3 June she forwarded the petition for a charter with 21 names of leading professional and business women. Ten days after arriving here!

The charter dinner was arranged for 27 June but ironically, because of power restrictions due to a strike, the dinner had to be cancelled and so the Adelaide Club was launched at the Bohemian Tea Rooms, owned by a member, on 24 June 1949.

At the first meeting there was a resolution that 'all members should call each other by their Christian names'. This wasn't regarded very favourably by some members and at a later meeting it was unanimously carried 'that there be no enforced use of Christian names in the Club'

In 1950 the Adelaide Club affiliated with the National Council of Women and supported this organisation in its advocacy for women. In 1952 the Soroptimists aided the Council in its fight against a proposed reduction of the basic wage for women from 75% to 60% of men's wage. In 1951 the Club supported the League of Women Voters in their effort to have women permitted to serve on juries and in 1958 it gave support to women being on committees and boards.

Since the founding of the first Soroptimist Club, Soroptimists have sought to bring about change to the lives of women and girls worldwide. Through its global network of four Federations and dedicated volunteer membership of over 75,000, Soroptimists are driven by the mission of transforming lives through education, empowerment and by enabling opportunities.

We are looking at a bright past and a brilliant future.

