

Senior Men's Club of Birmingham

History of the Club

The Origin. In 1956, Mr. R. S. Gregory visited The Community House, having just moved to Birmingham from Plainfield, New Jersey, where he had been a member of a club called "The Old Guard". He described the club and inquired if there was a similar club in Birmingham. His information was interesting to The Community House people who related it to the Birmingham Department of Parks & Recreation.

A committee was formed and a survey found 68 men who were interested in forming such a club, encouraging further action. A meeting of those interested was held on January 11, 1957. In April, Club officers were elected and membership dues were set at a \$1.00 a year. A committee was appointed to formulate a Constitution and By-laws which were adopted on December 6, 1957.

The Early Years. Parks & Recreation was most supportive and got the City to finance the building of shuffleboard courts on Community House property. The courts have since disappeared due to the expansion of The Community House.

In the early days, meetings were held twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays, with hostesses serving sandwiches and cake for lunch at a price of \$0.60. Through the years, Friday lunches have been served by a staff of dedicated volunteer hostesses. Two of these volunteers, Carol Hollingshead and Elaine Dobson have been honored by the Club for their long and continuous service. They were made honorary members of the SMCB in 2001 and 2006 respectively. At Christmastime each year, the Club honors the hostesses as guests while Club members serve them that day.

In 1957, The Community House was closed for the month of August, so the Men's Club suspended its meetings. Although The Community House is now open year round, the Club still holds no regular meetings in August and has opted for a picnic instead. The first picnic was held at Springdale Park on August 15, 1957. In 1958, the location was changed to the Pontiac Yacht Club, where it was held annually through 2003. In 2004, the location shifted to the Beverly Hills Park. The first Christmas party was held in a private home in 1957. That event later moved to The Community House Ballroom where it remained through 2005. This popular holiday event is now held at the San Marino Club in Troy which has the capacity to accommodate all those who wish to attend.

Club membership, capped at 325 in the early years, has risen to 450 in steps over the years. The Club's weekly Friday meetings now draw an average of 230 attendees. A certificate of thanks is the sole reward extended to each speaker.

The Discussion Group held its first meeting on August 7, 1958. Games are popular and include golf, bowling, and contract and duplicate bridge. Reports for these activities are given at the weekly Friday meetings and announcements of forthcoming events are published in *The Reminder*, the monthly Club bulletin. In 1959, the practice of awarding Life Memberships to members over 90 years old was initiated. In 1968, this became age 85 and ten years of SMC membership.

The Club Today. The Community House provides the Club a variety of services and support including the use of the Ballroom for the regular Friday meetings, and other rooms for the Discussion Group meetings, Executive Board meetings, Associate Member orientations, bridge games, Computer Group and Investment Study Group meetings and others. In turn, Club members and associates are strong supporters of the annual Community House fund drive.

In 2004, the life experiences of 86 Club members in World War II and Korea were recorded in a 216 page book entitled "The Wars of our Generation." Conceived, planned and published entirely by SMC members, more than 1200 copies were sold. An added photo album entitled "The Way We Were" includes an address on the history of World War II by Rabbi Sherwin Wine on CD.

In 2005, three initiatives broadened the Club's appeal to members and prospects. Before February 2005, Club members were drawn solely from Birmingham and the surrounding area. With the expansion of its geographic boundaries, Club membership was opened to men within convenient reach of The Community House. Periodic associate orientation meetings were added to welcome new associates and provide a comprehensive overview of the Club's history, activities and opportunities. Reading groups also were added that year.

The Club celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2007 with a variety of outstanding events and accomplishments. A DVD history of the Club was produced under the direction of member Al Eicher. The Club's Constitution and By-laws were given major updates. Applicants were granted Associate Member status upon acceptance of their applications, an elevated stature that better reflects the value the Club places on its future members. A newly-created SMC Endowment Fund for support of The Community House -- originally targeted at \$50,000 for the 50th Anniversary -- exceeded \$60,000 at year-end. Finally, a Classic Movie Group was added to the varied roster of Club activities.

In Summary. What then, is the Senior Men's Club of Birmingham today? Member Alvie Smith added luster to the Club's year-long anniversary celebration with his response: "We are a Club of 750 retired men that, for over 50 years, has proven that we can extend the enjoyment of life and service to our community by cooperating in programs that nurture friendships, stimulate the mind and challenge us to stay abreast of changing times." Yes, indeed, Alvie.

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