

Bernard (Bernie) Lorino



OK. Here's the math: We are celebrating Bernie Lorino's attainment of seventy years of perfect attendance, and he joined the Rotary Club of Houston (RCH) when he was 23 years old. Each of us can only hope to live as long and as well as he has. As the lady in a movie once said, "I want some of whatever he's having!"

Bernie joined the RCH at the suggestion of his father (a Rotarian himself) "to see what else was going on in the world besides work." The RCH was the only choice in Houston at the time. Bernie said that at his first meeting in the Rice Hotel (meal ticket: 50 cents), the program was a horse that performed tricks on the stage! Some years later, Bernie took on the job of updating the Club's member roster. He said that proved to be a big project that ruffled some feathers. Seems he suggested to some members that their roster pictures needed to be updated..

Early in Bernie's Rotary years, his young son developed asthma, and the doctor recommended a change of climate for him. So began Bernie's life in Colorado Springs, CO. The family spent summers there in rented houses for a few years, then built a home of their own. Bernie has continued to this day spending from early May to late October of each year in Colorado Springs. Would you be surprised to learn that he has many years of perfect attendance in **two** Rotary clubs in Colorado Springs? In fact, someone determined that he has more years of attendance than anyone else in any of the three Clubs he attends.

Bernie was born in 1914 in Matagorda, Texas. He and his family moved to Houston when he was 4 years old. His father was a very enterprising business man, at one time operating fifteen businesses. When Bernie was 6 years old, his father began taking him work in his various businesses. Bernie recalls that his father had a printing business that he operated out of the family garage. On Saturdays, Bernie and his older brother turned out printing projects for his father. One Saturday, his father paid Bernie and his brother \$20 each for their day's work! You can imagine how rich that made two boys feel.

Before Bernie's last year in high school (San Jacinto High School) his father, who was suffering from ill health, told Bernie that he was going to have to shut down his business if Bernie didn't take over the business. So, while spending one more year in high school, Bernie took over the business and eventually turned it into a multi-million dollar company. What was the nature of the business? "Institutional frozen foods" The idea of freezing foods to preserve them during shipment was very new. Bernie's father brought the first rail car of codfish from the East Coast to Houston, and was the first to freeze shrimp. The company's customers were hotels, hospitals, schools, etc. Later the company expanded into other types of frozen foods and opened a fresh meat packing plant. Bernie took over the company at an incredibly young age during the midst of the Great Depression, and the company not only survived, but thrived and grew.

In 1973, the company merged with a competitor to become part of Sysco Corporation, and Bernie retired. He said it took him "about 10 minutes" to adjust to retirement... And what has he done with 35 years since then? In Bernie's words, "I've stayed busy doing nothing." A little more digging reveals that "doing nothing" involves managing his investments, traveling,

visits with friends, (going to Rotary meetings), and spending time with his son and daughter and his six grand children and twelve great grand children. And this whole tribe lives in Houston.

Between the RCH and the two Clubs in Colorado Springs, Bernie has attended approximately 5,000 Rotary meetings (and consumed 5,000 remarkably similar Rotary lunches.) Obviously, he's seen incredible changes in Houston in his life. Ask him about living out in the country - on the property now occupied by the Junior League building. In 1951 he served on the then one and only Harris County grand jury, and later served on a Federal grand jury. He was a founder of the Texas Seafood Institute. And talk about a memory: He said that his father took him to the 1928 Democratic Party Convention, held in a building downtown built by Jesse Jones and others for the express purpose of hosting that convention. The nominee? Al Smith. Bernie's age at the time? 14.

So, what is the essence of this man who's lived almost a century? First, he is in remarkably good health. His memory is sharp as a tack. He is fully engaged in the flow of life and business around him and in the world. He's most comfortable walking with a cane when out of the house, and with a walker in his home – but otherwise his body is suffering very little from his decades of living. Second, and perhaps most important, he truly is a happy man whose greatest delight in life has been the company of other people. He appreciates the good fortune he's had in living a full and successful life. And his agenda now? To live his days in good health and to enjoy the company of his family and friends – and to keep on enjoying those Rotary meals.

Invite him to join you in conversation, and you will be delighted by the gentle, kind man that you uncover.