

Zonta International History

Beginnings

In the early 1900s, while working in a prominent role at the Buffalo Express newspaper at a time when women rarely held leadership positions, playwright and journalist Marian de Forest conceived the idea of a strong network of women in executive positions who would work to take their rightful place in the professions next to men.

By March of 1919, five women organized to achieve this mission and chartered the first Zonta club in Buffalo, New York, USA. Membership grew rapidly. A confederation of nine Zonta clubs formed with 600 members. These members were among the first generation of college-educated women, the first generation of North American women to vote, and a part of the growing legion of women entering the workforce.

On 8 November 1919, the Confederation drafted and adopted Bylaws and a Constitution, and



[Marian de Forest Biography](#)



Zonta Club Members
[Access](#) Historic Photos.

Story of the Zonta Emblem



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selected the name Zhonta - a word meaning honest and trustworthy, derived from the Lakhota (Teton Dakota) language of the Native-American Sioux peoples. Later changed to Zonta, the word's meaning was incorporated into the Zonta Emblem, which was officially authorized, along with the Zonta colors of mahogany and gold, at the first executive session of the Confederation's officers in 1920.

The Confederation became Zonta International upon organizing the first European club, the Zonta Club of Vienna, Austria in 1930. In September of that year, Zonta International was incorporated in the State of Illinois, USA.

Growing

While Zonta shared a common vision with hundreds of women's clubs in the first part of the 20th century - encouraging women's teamwork, courage, risk-taking, and self-reliance - it also represented something of a departure.

Zonta's strict business and classification system required its members to be employed at least 50 percent of the time at executive or decision-making levels. In addition, each club was allowed just one member per business classification, a requirement that ensured clubs could offer their communities and the world optimum service, backed by a broad range of understanding and insight. Early members were keenly aware of the

challenges of carving a place for themselves in what was still a predominantly male domain. Many Zonta Clubs actively pursued gender equity in employment opportunities.

With membership multiplying Zonta started stretching its service wings, supporting relief efforts around the world. **In 1923**, Zonta contributed financially to the care of 115,000 orphan children in Turkey. As technology made the world a smaller place and Zonta clubs sprang up around the globe, International Service projects, initially dedicated to world peace and women's role in attaining it, increased. Action for World Peace expressed support for the fledgling United Nations (UN) and was adopted at the 1946 Convention.

Zonta International continues to promote justice and universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms through the UN and other non-governmental organizations, improving the lives of millions of women.

[Read More about our International Service History and our current International Service Projects.](#)

In 1928, girls equal education became an organizational priority with the adoption of the Vocational Education for Girls Project, Zonta's first US service program. The project asked Zontians to provide information on their job descriptions, work conditions, compensation, and training requirements, for a centralized job bank available to high school libraries, universities and colleges.

In 1938, Zonta launched the Amelia Earhart Fellowship Program, commemorating groundbreaking aviator and Zontian Amelia Earhart. Then Zonta President Ellen Parks, remembered, "At that time few women considered a career in aerospace engineering, yet not one voice of doubt was raised as to the success of such a scholarship." *[Read More about Amelia Earhart.](#)*

During the 1930s, Zonta grew to 130 clubs in six countries spanning three continents, and continued to push for gender equity in employment. After the United States passed

the "Married Persons Law," which predominantly affected wives by prohibiting more than one family member from working for the government, Zonta adopted a resolution to demand repeal of the law. **And in 1944**, delegates to the Zonta International Convention endorsed the elimination of gender discrimination in job opportunities and rates of pay. The organization also expressed support for women's reserves to the military service. Zonta Clubs around the globe continue to advocate for equal rights.

Today, Zonta International continues to be on the front lines of the fight for women's equal rights through local and global projects that promote economic self-sufficiency, political equality, access to education and health, and the prevention of violence against women. Each year, Zontians dedicate hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours and millions of dollars.