

Rotary Club of Gilroy – A Century of Service in South County

In 1925, Gilroy was the heart of a thriving South County agricultural community. With a population of just 2,800, our town was bustling with the activity of packing plants, canneries, and a steady rail connection along Monterey Road to San Jose. The strong economic and personal ties between Gilroy and San Jose made it natural for the Rotary Club of San Jose to sponsor a new club here, creating what would become the Rotary Club of Gilroy.

Our founding members were the early movers and shakers of Gilroy—bankers, insurance brokers, ranchers, landowners, physicians, and politicians. They were individuals of influence, but more importantly, of vision and service. One of the club’s earliest projects still stands as a living legacy: the planting of Cypress trees along Hecker Pass, initiated by Gilroy Rotarians and planted by local Boy Scouts. Nearly a century later, many of those trees remain, a testament to the lasting impact of service.

Over the decades, the Rotary Club of Gilroy has grown to more than 100 members. Women have stepped into leadership roles, and our membership now reflects the full fabric of the community—business leaders, educators, government officials, artists, retirees, and more. One thing, however, has never changed: our commitment to serving youth and honoring senior citizens.

Since its inception, the club and its endowment have awarded over \$1 million in scholarships to graduating seniors and provided \$1.2 million in community grants, all benefiting local youth. Many of those scholarship recipients have gone on to lead productive and rewarding lives, often returning to give back to the very community that invested in them.

In 2025, our 100th anniversary inspired us to launch a centennial legacy project—Trees to Read Under. This initiative is planting 100 shade trees at Gilroy schools, installing benches beneath them with personalized plaques, and providing new books to each of Gilroy’s 14 school libraries. Already, the project has raised over \$70,000 in contributions and pledges. In August 2025, 40 trees were planted at Christopher High School and Gilroy High School with help from Rotary volunteers, Boy Scouts, and local businesses like Alpine Landscaping and Red Roots Landscape Company. Thanks to a grant from Amazon Web Services, 680 new books were purchased and delivered to school libraries in July 2025, with more on the way.

As 2025–2026 Club President Karen Aitken-Bernosky notes, “The Rotary Club of Gilroy has history and roots in our community. So many of the youth we have supported with grants and scholarships are now in rewarding professions and leading productive lives. Every element of *Trees to Read Under* fulfills our commitment to our youth—now and into the future.”

From our beginnings in 1925 to our centennial celebration in 2025, the Rotary Club of Gilroy’s story is one of deep roots, enduring service, and a vision for a better tomorrow. We remain committed to “Service Above Self” and look forward to the next hundred years of making a positive impact in South County and beyond.