



### **The History of the Rotary Club of Shades Valley and the Birmingham Botanical Gardens**

The Rotary Club of Shades Valley was established in 1963 with 28 charter members. Presently the Club has 164 business and professional men and women members, and these Rotarians strive to live up to the motto: "Service Above Self." Our service area is generally the Shades Valley area, including Homewood and Mountain Brook, but our service projects are both community wide and international through the Rotary Foundation. One long-standing project is providing financial assistance to local high school seniors each year. Last year, \$50,000 of scholarship money was awarded to 16 local seniors.



Shades Valley Rotary has a long and mutually beneficial relationship with the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. In the early 1970s, the club sponsored the construction of the Rotary Friendship Circle Walk in the Japanese Gardens and presented the Gardens with authentic items obtained from Rotary Clubs in Japan. In the late 1970s, the club lost its meeting place at the old Kings Inn Motel due to the demolition of the property. Shades Valley Rotary began looking for a new home. Fortunately the Botanical Gardens had space in their exhibition hall, and the club began meeting there each Monday for a catered lunch and program.

At the time, the exhibition hall was rather austere, so the Club launched a renovation project which carried an \$18,000 price tag. With the help of the Botanical Society and the Park and Recreation Board, the work was done, providing much improved space for the many and varied activities held there. In 1987-88, the Gardens undertook a major renovation of the building, and Shades Valley Rotary contributed \$20,000 toward the renovation and returned to a new and more attractive meeting space.

The new Japanese Friendship Bell and belfry in the Hulsey Woods is a most interesting story. Rotary International celebrated its 100 year anniversary in 2005. Shades Valley Rotary was extremely proud to have member Glenn Estess serve as the Centennial President of Rotary International. While serving as presidential nominee, Glenn had made friends with many Rotarians worldwide, including Morio Yokohama and others of Osaka Central Rotary Club. This friendship led to multiple visits by a contingent of Japanese Rotarians to Birmingham and the Gardens. The Osaka Central Rotarians made a gracious offer to furnish an authentic Japanese bell, cast in Japan and shipped to the Gardens as a symbol of the friendship between the two clubs.



Shades Valley Rotary had a belfry constructed to authentic Japanese standards. The Hulsey and Elmore families provided the surrounding platform. This beautiful authentic Japanese Friendship Bell, with a deep reverberating sound, is available for visitors to view and ring when they visit the Garden.

More recently, two years ago, the Club approached the Gardens Director about supporting a project that might be on his wish list. Discussions led to Shades Valley Rotary sponsoring a summer intern at the Gardens. Former interns Meghan McDonald and Steve Kennedy made favorable impressions on both Shades Valley Rotarians and the Garden staff. The Club has decided to again sponsor an intern in 2010, and our April 9 Botanical Bash is the fund raiser to support the BBG intern program.