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ABSTRACT

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MAKING “WE SERVE” AN INCLUSIVE MISSION: HOW THE FARGO LIONS CLUB INTEGRATED WOMEN INTO FULL MEMBERSHIP

In May 1987 the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Board of Directors, Rotary International v. Rotary Club of Duarte* that exclusion of women in large clubs such as Rotary was not protected under their Constitutional right to freedom of expression. The ruling ultimately opened the doors of traditionally-male service clubs to women. Through a case study of the Fargo Lions Club (Fargo, North Dakota), I sought to understand what happened in the first years of women’s membership in the association. These women are almost totally overlooked in the small body of literature that currently exists on service clubs and understanding this redefinition of associational freedom within the nonprofit sector is a unique contribution to philanthropic studies. A retrospective tracer methodology reconstructs the sequence of events and decisions made by the Fargo Lions Club in response to the Supreme Court ruling. How the club accepted and included women is traced through personal interviews with key members, contemporary news reports and archival records.

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