



The History of Altrusa

Altrusa International was founded in Nashville, Tennessee in 1917, originally as Altrusa Institute. During that time, a record number of women were going to work during World War I, and there was a need for women's civic organizations. Dr. Alfred Durham, a member of Kiwanis, began organizing clubs throughout Nashville, TN, Louisville, KY, and Dayton, OH, before he moved on to Indianapolis, IN, where he met Mamie L. Bass.

Mamie L. Bass had served as the Superintendent of the Women's Division of the United States Employment Services, and was a partner in her brother's architecture firm. She also assisted him in organizing a Rotary chapter in Indianapolis. While she admired Dr. Durham's Institute, Bass felt that Altrusa could serve a higher purpose. In June 1918, when Altrusa held its first convention in Indianapolis, Mamie L. Bass's vision became reality. The Altrusa Institute became a classified service organization for women.

Later, the Altrusa Institute was renamed as the National Association of Altrusa Clubs and adopted By-Laws that laid the groundwork for today's Altrusans. Soon after, Mamie L. Bass created the Principles of Altrusa which defined Altrusa as "a builder of women" and an organization based on merit and accomplishment. The Principles were officially adopted in 1921 along with a major club building effort. By 1922, Altrusa had 20 clubs.

In 1935, Altrusa became international when the first club in Mexico was organized. Since that first step over US borders in 1935, Altrusa moved into Puerto Rico, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, India, Korea, Russia, Ukraine, Ireland, Great Britain, Bermuda, Canada, and New Zealand. In 1946, Altrusa sent its first representative to the United Nations.

In 1962, Altrusa International established the Altrusa International Foundation, which is dedicated to improving economic well-being and quality of life through a commitment to community services and literacy. In 1966, the organization began to look to America's youth as the future of Altrusa and established ASTRA service clubs. ASTRA encourages young people, ages 13 to 21, to participate in community service. Expanding on its commitment to youth, Altrusa adopted literacy as on-going area of service in 1977.

The eighties and nineties brought many exciting changes to Altrusa. With the end of Communism, the former Soviet Union saw its first Altrusa clubs. Increasing its global outlook, Altrusa expanded projects beyond literacy and education by adopting a resolution to promote environmental concerns in 1989.

The new millennium continues to bring new ideas and opportunities for Altrusa. In 2011, the association launched a new branding and marketing campaign with the purpose of increasing Altrusa's image in the communities, and reaching out to an evolving membership.