

The History of The Links, Incorporated

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The Links, Incorporated is an international women's service organization with 273 chapters in the United States, Germany, South Africa and the Bahamas. It was co-founded in 1946 by Margaret Roselle Hawkins and Sarah Strickland Scott in Philadelphia, two friends with the vision of creating a "link" that would bring friends willing to serve the community by sharing their talents, abilities, and resources. All this would be accomplished by creating a "link" between friends willing to serve. From its inception, the organization's members were required to be "active and conscientious about club duties," as laid out in the organization's first constitution. Then and now, community service has as been the corner stone of the organization's outreach.

The Links never took for granted the opportunities afforded them because of their education, economic status or personal professional gains. Its membership still holds to the original mission of the organization: to create civic, educational and cultural experience designed to meet the needs and interests of their communities.

Many of the women who first joined the organizations were friends of the founding members. Through personal contacts, early clubs (as they were called) were established. Just four months after the Philadelphia club was formed, the second club, just a short drive from Philadelphia, was formed in Atlantic City, followed by the third club in Washington, D.C. By the end of 1949, there were fourteen clubs established. Raleigh, North Carolina was the last club organized before the nationalization of the organization – which took place in June of 1949, when members of The Links met in Philadelphia. At this meeting, representatives from the clubs consummated the creation of The Links as a national organization; with that, each "club" would now be called a

"chapter" and operate under the Philadelphia Club's original constitution. Sarah Scott was elected the first National President.

The growth of the organization stretched coast-to-coast by 1950. In an effort to foster closer relationships among members and their respective chapters, The Links, Incorporated was divided into four geographical areas – Central, Eastern, Southern and Western. This step necessitated the creation of duly elected Area officers, and created emphasis on program goals across the country. Areas began to meet biennially to develop and promote the national programs in their regions.

By 1990 The Links, Incorporated was active in thirty-nine states and two foreign countries.

The organization's National Assemblies are the legally constituted meetings and have been held since the first meeting in Philadelphia in 1949. Each chapter is responsible for sending a delegate and alternate to these meetings where the governing business is executed. The first assembly was small and somewhat informal; fast forward to 2006 in Philadelphia; the 35th National Assembly marked the organization's 60th Anniversary and hosted delegates from 273 chapters and approximately 5000 attendees.

Programs have been the mainstay of the organization, and are often referred to as the "heart of Linkdom." Every element of the three-fold purpose of The Links, Inc. (educational, civic, and intercultural) is equated with one or more of the program facets; Services to Youth, the Arts, International Trends and Services and National Trends and Services.



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Some programs have been developed and funded at the national level and others at the area level; but all programs are broad and sufficiently inclusive, therefore allowing chapter local flexibility.

Programs which best meet the needs of the community are developed at the chapter level. Chapters have program committees and work to create programs for each of the facets within the guiding philosophy and organizational directions for implementation. Early in the 1980's the National Program Committee recommended chapters begin combining two or more facets of the national program with emphasis concentrated on one facet. This became known as "Umbrella Programming" and is encouraged because its concept often strengthens the overall impact of facet programs and community outreach.

The Links, Incorporated also has The Links Foundation, Incorporated. The Foundation is the philanthropic arm of The Links, Inc. It is a non-profit corporation operated exclusively for charitable and educational purposes within the meaning of Section 501(C)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, as amended. Under Foundation guidelines, grants are made to support the four program facets of the Links, Incorporated.

The Foundation was established in 1979 with the mission of seeking proposals in need of funding or partnerships with a non-profit organization to provide creative responses to changing needs in the fields of health, education, social services, cultural and international affairs that are beneficial to communities of African descent.

The National Headquarters of The Links, Incorporated is located in Washington, D.C. on Massachusetts Avenue. During the 1974 National Assembly, a motion was approved to work toward establishment of a headquarters site for the organization; and the first national office opened later that year. The move to the current three story building happened in 1985.

The Links, Incorporated marked its 60th year of community service in 2006. Membership has grown to more than 12,000 members. The Links, Incorporated and The Links Foundation, Incorporated are currently under the leadership of the 14th National President, Dr. Gwendolyn B. Lee.

