



History of Variety – The Children’s Charity

Variety International

It began simply, as many stories do, and has become a source of inspiration and dedication for charitable men and women around the globe.

On October 10, 1927 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, eleven young men affiliated with show business met at the William Penn Hotel to form a social club. The gentlemen decided to name their group “The Variety Club” because they represented all the facets of this business. The men of the Variety Club helped their friends in show business and made contributions to many different civic organizations. After a year, the Variety Club hosted its first banquet on November 11, 1928, “under the big top” in the grand ballroom of the Will Penn Hotel complete with circus acts, sideshows, popcorn and cotton candy. The insignia for the affair was a mustached “barker” wearing a high silk hat. This enormously successful event was the beginning of Variety’s circus tradition: the Barker was the Club’s official logo, the Club was called a “Tent,” its members were “Barkers” or “the Crew,” the president, the “Chief Barker,” the treasurer, “Dough Boy” and the secretary, “Property Master.”

Variety’s focus on helping children began on Christmas Eve 1928, when the manager of the Sheridan Square Theatre in Pittsburgh found an infant abandoned in the theatre with a note saying:

“Please take care of my baby. Her name is Catherine. I can no longer take care of her. I have eight others. My husband is out of work. She was born on Thanksgiving Day. I have always heard of the goodness of show business people and I pray to God that you will look out for her.”

Taking Care of Catherine

A thorough search by the police with the help of the local media found no trace of the mother, so the Variety Club members agreed to act as her godfathers and underwrite her support and education. In honor of the Variety Club and the Sheridan Theatre, the baby was named “Catherine Variety Sheridan.” After five years they came to the conclusion that Catherine should have a permanent home with loving parents. After considering over 300 applications for adoption, Catherine was given to a couple living away from the Pittsburgh area, and her anonymity was preserved throughout the years.

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Variety – The Children’s Charity (Ontario)

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The publicity from her story, which was front-page news across the United States, motivated other men in show business to help the needy children in their communities and was responsible for the development of this small group into a multi-national children’s charity with 52 chapters in 14 countries around the world.

Today, Variety International is actively providing assistance to countless children of all ages regardless of race, creed or color in Australia, Barbados, Canada, Channel Islands, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States. With over 14,000 members and volunteers, Variety International has raised over US\$ 1.5 billion to benefit children.

Variety Comes to Ontario

Here in Ontario, the Variety Club, Tent 28, Toronto, came into being through the energetic enthusiasm of an American, the late John J. Fitzgibbons, who came to Canada as president of Famous Players Theatres. He brought the inspiring Variety story and, along with it, the strong sense of personal values for which it stood.

Ten men joined him to form an initial Toronto eleven similar to the Pittsburgh group. Their names: W.P. Covert, L.M. Delaney, B. Freedman, O.R. Hanson, G. Lightstone, H.L. Nathanson, P.L. Nathanson, B.D. Okun, E. Rawley, and N.A. Taylor.

Swift recognition of their fledging activities came when they received a charter from the Variety Clubs of America, recognizing an organizational date of July 11, 1945. This was followed by official sanctioning on September 5, 1945.