



1950s

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After running Awana as a weekly local-church program for children and youth at the North Side Gospel Center in Chicago, Art Rorheim and Lance "Doc" Latham establish the Awana Youth Association. Art is executive director. Lance is president.



Awana creates kids' uniforms from gray shirts sewn for the Chicago Police Department.

1951

Rich Wager is hired as the first Awana employee. Art and Rich share a desk under a stairwell in the North Side Gospel Center.



The first Awana curriculum handbooks are printed.

Leader manuals are printed on a press purchased with funds earned by Awana clubbers conducting paper drives. Art and Rich operate the press.

1952

Midwest Bible Church becomes the second church to start Awana.

1954

Camp Awana for Awana students in Fredonia, Wisconsin.

1955

The first Awana Olympics (now AwanaGames™) is held in the basement of the North Side Gospel Center. Kids from four churches participate. Today AwanaGames competitions take place around the world.

The first Awana award is given (the Timothy Award).

The first Awana Leaders Training Conference (now Awana Ministry Conference) takes place. Three hundred leaders attend. Today hundreds of conferences run across the U.S.

Art Rorheim travels to Venezuela to shoot a film for New Tribes Mission Founder Paul Fleming. In a rural village, God gives Art the idea to start Awana programs overseas after teaching Awana games to kids using bamboo sticks for batons and carving a game circle in the dirt.



1956

The first Awana Olympics for girls is organized.

1957

A film titled "Hitting the Mark" is produced to explain the Awana ministry to interested churches.

The first Bible Quizzing competition debuts in Chicago. Quiz meets now take place worldwide.



1958

Awana office space expands into a kitchen and baptismal dressing room at the North Side Gospel Center.

1959

Six employees now work for Awana.



1960s

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The first Awana headquarters is established on Belmont Avenue in Chicago.

1962

Leo Spencer becomes the first Awana layman missionary. Art Rorheim and Spencer convince churches in the East to start Awana clubs.

The Shipmates high-school program is introduced.

The first issue of Awana Signal magazine is published for local-church Awana leaders.

1963

The Awana Theme Song is introduced.

1965

More than 800 volunteers attend the Midwest Awana Leadership Conference.

1966

Don Bunge becomes the first full-time Awana missionary.

1967

300 church teams compete in the Awana Olympics.

Awana employs 13 full-time staff members.

1968

Leo and Edna Spencer become the second and third full-time missionaries for Awana.

Windsor Bible Baptist Church becomes the 500th church to start the Awana ministry.

1969

Awana holds its first Missionary Training Conference.

Nearly 52,000 Awana handbooks are sold.





1970s

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Awana headquarters moves to Algonquin Road in Rolling Meadows, Illinois.

1971

Over 900 Awana programs are active in 44 states.

Awana sells 131,861 entrance booklets for clubs

Awana buys its first computer to handle orders operating on single-disk memory.

1972

Churches in 46 states now have Awana.

The first international Awana club begins in Bolivia.

One thousand churches now operate Awana.

Awana debuts in Canada.

The first Scholarship Camp summer program is held at Silver Birch Ranch in Wisconsin.

1973

Awana employs 24 headquarters staff and features 10 Awana missionaries.

Twenty Awana Leadership Training Conferences are held around the U.S.

1974

Awana debuts in Australia.

1975

Awana holds the first National Awana Month in March.





1976

Sparks® Club launches for kindergarten through second-grade boys and girls.

Awana now serves 2,000 U.S. churches.

Awana Youth Association of Canada is established.

1977

The first Awana international missionary begins serving in Liberia and West Africa.

More than 80 Awana Olympics meets take place around North America.

Awana prints handbooks in Portuguese for clubs in Brazil.

1978

The first Sparks-a-Rama™ takes place. Sparks-a-Rama is an outreach event that pits Sparks clubbers from various churches in friendly competition. God's plan of salvation is presented to spectators at intermission.

Churches begin running Awana in Costa Rica, the Bahamas, Ireland and West Germany.

1979

Over 3,000 churches now operate Awana programs.

A church in Spain starts Awana.





1980s

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Awana Grand Prix, a Pinewood Derby-style outreach event, is introduced.

Awana appoints its 32nd missionary.

1981

Awana headquarters moves to Tollview Avenue in Rolling Meadows.

Awana Grand Prix becomes an international program.

The Cubbies® program launches for preschool-age boys and girls.

An eight-circle, 128-team Awana Olympics meet takes place in suburban Chicago.

1982

The number of Awana full-time missionaries reaches 44.

A total of 250 Awana clubs now minister to kids overseas.

1983

The Friends program debuts for youth with mental disabilities.

More than 5,000 U.S. churches now run Awana programs.

Awana materials are printed in French.

Awana launches Adopt-a-Club® to provide support for needy children overseas to attend Awana clubs.

Awana begins in Japan.

1984

The JV program is established for seventh- and eighth-grade youth.

Awana materials are translated into Spanish.

120 Leadership Training Conferences are held around the world.

Awana programs spring up in Bangladesh, Ghana, Spain, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Guam.





1985

Awana Co-Founder Lance "Doc" Latham passes away.

Awana begins stocking handbooks in Braille.

Awana headquarters now has 70 employees.

Awana starts clubs in Trinidad, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Zambia, Belize, St. Lucia, Paraguay, Kuwait, New Zealand, France and India.

1986

Awana holds the first National Bible Bowl and Olympics.

The Awana Youth Association renames itself Awana® Clubs International™ to reflect its worldwide focus.

Awana plants clubs in Bolivia, Puerto Rico, England, Togo, the Philippines, South Africa, Chile, U.S. Virgin Islands and Swaziland.

1987

650 sponsors financially support needy Awana clubs overseas.

Awana materials are translated into Arabic.

Awana clubs begin in Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya and Colombia.

1988

Awana clubs start in the Bahamas, Cote D'Ivoire, Ecuador, Italy and the Netherlands.

1989

Awana builds a 117,000-square-foot headquarters facility on nine acres of land in suburban Streamwood, Illinois.

Art Rorheim receives an honorary doctorate of theology degree from Liberty University.

A total of 49 missionary couples in the U.S., six in Canada and 15 internationally serve Awana.

Awana clubs start in Jamaica, Scotland, Dominica, Nigeria, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

The new Missionary-in-Training (MIT) program begins giving teens practical ministry experience on short-term mission trips worldwide.

Awana begins taking orders by fax machine.





1990s

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Awana celebrates its 40th anniversary.

Awana hosts 21 Scholarship Camp summer programs for children and youth across the U.S. and Canada.

Awana clubs now minister to kids in Indonesia, Portugal and Cameroon.



1991

Awana has translated materials into 17 languages.

250 Sparkies and their leaders hold a Carol-a-Rama on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

The Soviet Union falls.

Larry Fowler and Jack Eggar visit the USSR to lay the groundwork for Awana to begin clubs there.

1992

Awana clubs operate in more than 60 countries.

Redesigned Pioneer and Guard handbooks are published for fifth and sixth grade.

Awana clubs begin in Romania, Ukraine and Kazakhstan.



1993

Olympic decathlete Dave Johnson, Los Angeles Lakers forward A.C. Green, Los Angeles Raiders quarterback Jay Schroeder speak to 3,400 children at an Awana Olympics (AwanaGames) competition in L.A.

Awana starts clubs in Fiji, Hungary, Sri Lanka, El Salvador and Mozambique.

1994

Awana adds its 10,000th registered church.

The CrossTrainers™ ministry is created for kids in urban areas.

More than 1,500 individuals, families and clubs sponsor needy Awana clubs through Adopt-a-Club.

Awana ministers through 1,172 churches in 66 countries outside of the U.S.

The Bible Memory Association merges with Awana.



1995

Discover Awana is established as a five-day event to introduce Awana leaders and pastors to our full Awana ministry.

Awana clubs begin in Croatia, Russia, Jordan, Benin, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan and Iraq.

Over 40,000 Awana leaders attend 140 Leadership Training Conferences in the U.S. and Canada.



1996

A total of 7,860 churches run Awana programs in 75 countries, including the U.S.

Awana clubs start in Siberia, St. Vincent, Slovakia and Netherlands Antilles.

1997

More than 150 Leaders Training Conferences throughout North America draw 50,000 Awana leaders.

Over 230 AwanaGames™ competitions attract more than 150,000 boys and girls across the U.S. and Canada.

The official Awana Web site (www.awana.org) launches.

1998

Volunteers put in more than 175,000 hours annually to help keep down Awana production costs.

Virginia Latham, Doc Latham's wife, passes away.

Five Christian colleges begin giving scholarships to earners of the Citation Award, the highest achievement in Awana.

1999

Awana appoints Jack Eggar as President/CEO. Art Rorheim is named President Emeritus.

The Cubbies preschool program is redesigned.





2000s

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Awana brings in missionaries and staff from the U.S. and around the world to celebrate our 50th anniversary.

The book *Awana: God's Miracle* is published to commemorate 50 years of ministry.



2001

More than 10,000 churches run Awana ministries worldwide.

2002

The Truth & Training® (T&T) program debuts for third- through sixth-grade students.

Awana unveils 24-7 Ministries™ as our new youth ministry.

2003

The Journey™ high-school program debuts.

More than 13,000 churches run Awana globally.

2004

The Awana® Lifeline™ prison ministry launches at Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola.

Awana hosts the first Returning Hearts Celebration™, a one-day event reuniting Christian inmates at Angola Prison with their children.



2005

More than 1,000 high-school students descend on St. Louis, Mo., for Summit, the annual event of 24-7 Ministries, the youth ministry of Awana.

2006

The Trek middle-school program debuts.

Awana translates materials into 30 languages.

Awana begins ministry in China selling Christian children's books to families.



2007

Awana introduces the Puggles® program for 2- and 3-year-old children. Awana now features integrated weekly programs for ages 2 to 18.

Leader-Based Strategy begins starting clubs and training leaders internationally in Zambia.



2008

The new Awana logo debuts.

Rollout begins for a new version of the Sparks program for kindergarten to second grade.

The Modern-Day Joseph™ initiative debuts. The book *Raising a Modern-Day Joseph* releases by Larry Fowler.

India starts its 1,000th Awana club. It is now the largest Awana national ministry outside of the U.S.

Awana celebrates Art Rorheim's 90th birthday with a party at headquarters.

Art Rorheim visits Awana missionaries and churches in Japan and South Korea. He has traveled to more than 50 countries on behalf of Awana.



2009

The Awana at Home® ministry launches for parents and churches.

T&T fifth- and sixth-grade materials are updated.

David C. Cook and Awana publish *How to Raise a Modern-Day Joseph*, the follow-up book to *Raising a Modern-Day Joseph*, by Linda Massey Weddle.

2010

60th anniversary: Awana celebrates generation after generation of lasting faith in Christ

More than 19,000 churches worldwide are now using Awana to minister to 1.5 million children and youth in 100 countries in a given week.