All About Lions

1. Understanding the history, organization, service, and membership of Lions Clubs International is important for all Lions. Embracing these fundamentals of our organization is what will ensure our future as the largest humanitarian service organization in the world for many years to come.
2. Let’s start by taking a trip back in time to review some of Lions Clubs International’s historical highlights.
3. Lions Clubs International began as the dream of Melvin Jones, an American businessman who belonged to a club named the Business Circle of Chicago.

Melvin Jones believed that local business clubs should expand from purely professional concerns to focus on working for the betterment of their communities.

In **1917**, he contacted members of similar independent organizations around the country and invited them to a meeting. Most agreed to merge as one association of clubs, and they took the name of the largest group, the Indiana-based Association of Lions Clubs.

The first convention was held in October of that year in Dallas, Texas, USA, where the constitution was adopted and the first president, Dr. W.P. Woods, was elected. Jones was elected secretary, beginning a 44-year career with the organization.

Melvin Jones explained his reasoning for the concept of service to the community with the saying, “You can’t get very far until you start doing something for someone else.”

For over 100 years Lions around the world have proven Jones’ saying to be true by serving local, national, and global communities.

1. In 1920, the Association of Lions Clubs was established internationally when the first club in Canada was chartered in Windsor, Ontario.

Today, Lions Clubs International has over 1.4 million members in over 200 countries and geographical areas around world.

1. Helen Keller was an American author and lecturer, who overcame considerable physical handicaps and served as an inspiration for other disabled people. When she was 19 months old, she was stricken with an acute illness that left her deaf and blind. She overcame these setbacks to earn a college degree with honors. An early milestone in Lions’ history occurred in **1925** when Helen Keller addressed the organization at the International Convention in Ohio, USA. She challenged Lions to become "knights of the blind in the crusade against darkness”. Since this historic event in 1925, Lions Clubs International has been committed to ridding the world of preventable and reversible blindness and providing services for people who are already blind or visually impaired.
2. As you know, our organization's motto is “We Serve.” At the International Convention in **1954**, this simple phrase, submitted by Lion D.A. Stevenson, was chosen from more than 6,000 suggested mottos. It symbolizes Lions’ spirit: to help others and to tear away the shrouds of ignorance and distrust that separate one human being from another.

As a dominant Lions’ theme for more than sixty years, “We Serve” is translated daily from words into reality on every continent.

1. On December 5, 1957 the Glenside Lions Club in Pennsylvania, USA chartered the first Leo club. The concept of junior service clubs gained popularity and, in October 1967, the board of directors of Lions Clubs International adopted the Leo Club Program as an official program of the association. Open to young people ages 12-30, the objective of the Leo Club Program is:

"...to provide the youth of the world (with) an opportunity for development and contribution, individually and collectively, as responsible members of the local, national and international community. "The term Leo stands for Leadership, Experience, Opportunity. Leadership because Leo members acquire skills as project organizers and motivators of their peers. Experience because they discover how teamwork and cooperation can bring about change in their community and the world. Opportunity because Leos develop positive character traits and receive recognition for their contributions.

1. Today, the Leo Club Program is stronger than ever and community service remains the cornerstone of the program. There are nearly 7,000 Leo clubs in more than 140 countries and geographic areas. A Leo club is a sponsored affiliate of a Lions club. These sponsoring Lions helps guide, mentor, and develop young leaders through service. The program is divided into two tracks. Alpha Leo clubs are designed for youth between 12 and 18 years old and focus on the individual and social development of teens. Omega Leo clubs are for young people between the ages of 18 and 30 and focus on the personal and professional development of young adults. Leo clubs can be either based in schools or based in communities.

Sponsoring a Leo club provides a way for Lions to mentor future community leaders and encourage a commitment to community service. Through involvement with a Leo club, Lions can energize and inspire members and even increase the sponsoring club's community exposure, attracting potential members such as young professionals, students, parents and families. Through Leo clubs, Lions have a positive influence on today's youth and young adults, helping them become global citizens and leaders for life.

1. The Lions Clubs International Foundation was established in **1968** with the purpose of funding large-scale Lions humanitarian projects for sight, youth, disability, health, and disaster relief.

Since LCIF began in 1968, it has awarded over US$1 billion in grants to improve the lives of people worldwide. Every dollar donated to LCIF goes toward a grant.

1. In **1973,** LCIF created the Melvin Jones Fellowship. This donor recognition award is the Foundation’s highest honor. The Melvin Jones Fellowship is the backbone of LCIF, providing 70 percent of its revenues. A recognition of humanitarian work, a Melvin Jones Fellowship is given to those who give US$1,000 to LCIF or to people for whom a donation was made by others.
2. Also in 1973, Lions International welcomes its one millionth member.
3. Another historical highlight in the history of Lions Clubs International is the inclusion of women as members in **1987**.

Today, women are the fastest growing segment of the association and bring a wealth of ideas, energy, and skills to our organization. In 2018, Lions elected the first female International President, Gudrun Yngvadottir.

1. In **1988**, the International Peace Poster Contest was established for young people around the world to express their artistic visions of peace. Each year, Lions Clubs around the world sponsor the contest in their communities.
2. The Carter Center and Lions Clubs International Foundation partnership, called the Lions-Carter Center SightFirst Initiative, was established in 1999. In 2014, former United States President Jimmy Carter spoke at a ceremony to announce an expansion of the initiative:

“For 20 years, the partnership with Lions Clubs International Foundation has been instrumental in supporting the Carter Center’s leadership in the fight against neglected diseases,” said President Carter. “The Lions’ continued financial support will help The Carter Center, local Lions clubs, and other national partners defeat preventable blindness in some of the most affected communities in the world.”

1. In **2005**, the Lions Clubs International Foundation launched Campaign SightFirst II, it’s second major fundraising effort to provide sight services for people around the world. At the 2008 International Convention, it was announced that the campaign had raised US$205 million dollars.

18. For nearly 100 years, Lions served their communities and impacted millions of people around the world. In celebration of our 100th anniversary, we asked Lions around the world to help reach our Centennial Service Challenge goal of serving 100 million people by June 30th, 2018. Not only did we achieve our goal, we more than doubled it, serving over 246 million people!

19. In 2017-18, Lions International embarked on a journey to focus on five Global Causes: diabetes, environment, hunger relief, childhood cancer and vision. Lions will continue to focus their service activities on what their community needs; however, Lions International will provide more robust support for these five Global Causes.

20. In June 2017, Lions International celebrated 100 years of service in Chicago, Illinois, USA where the association was founded. Lions traveled from all over the world to commemorate this momentous occasion.

31. The international board of directors are elected from seven constitutional areas:

U.S. and Affiliates, Bermuda and Bahamas

Canada

South America, Central America, Caribbean and Mexico,

Europe

Orient and Southeast Asia (OSEAL)

India, South Asia, Africa and Middle East (ISAAME)

Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Islands of the South Pacific Ocean

32. The final component of Lions Clubs International structure is Lions Clubs International Headquarters located in Oak Brook, Illinois, USA, where nearly 300 employees provide resources and support to the 1.45 million Lions club members. There are also two regional offices serving Lions in the OSEAL and ISAAME areas.