



Lions born in Sri Lanka in 1958

by Lion Harry de Sayrah & Lion Pamela Ann Ferdinand

The first Lions Club was established in Sri Lanka in 1958, and many clubs have been chartered there since that date. Lions Clubs foster the spirit of the Lions motto “We Serve”. Serving through volunteerism, members help to make better the lives of those they help. The hard work behind the many projects of Clubs is often not seen by the public, because service is done quietly without personal gain and publicity. Many times members donate humbly not just their time but their own resources for needed projects.

This is the Spirit of Lionism. Meetings are held in different places, perhaps at a restaurant or hall, but quite often at a member’s home. Many long-lasting friendships have developed through the camaraderie of Lions work.

Lions Clubs International

The Lions Organisation (which will turn 100 years old in June 2017) was founded by American businessman Melvin Jones (1879-1961). His goal was to involve business in community projects, and his leadership gave Lions Clubs the prestige needed to attract service-oriented business members. Melvin Jones, a 38-year-old Chicago business leader, put forth his idea as this: “What if these men, who are successful because of their drive, intelligence and ambition, were to put their talents to work improving their communities?” Jones invited delegates from men’s clubs to Chicago, Illinois, USA to form such an organisation and Lions Clubs International (LCI) headquarters was established there on 7 June 1917. Headquarters charters and supervises Lions Clubs worldwide. The organisation sets ethical and administrative standards for clubs and members and promotes a mutual understanding among people of the world through community service, friendship, fellowship, good governance and solid citizenship.

The challenge to prevent blindness was inspired by Helen Keller, a woman blind and deaf since the age of 19 months, when she spoke at the 1925 International Lions Convention in Cedar Point, Ohio, USA. Speaking as Ambassador for the American Foundation for the Blind, she urged Lions to be “knights of the blind in this crusade against darkness”.

In 1945, Melvin Jones was honoured to represent LCI as a consultant in San Francisco, California, USA at the organisational meeting of the United Nations (UN). International cooperation has continued through the years with Lions appointed to serve as representatives to various UN organisations

and with the annual Lions Day at the UN headquarters in New York City. Lions from around the world celebrate United Nations Day on 24 October. This coincides with World Sight Day also celebrated during October. In 2008, Lions International President Mahendra Amarasuriya sought additional ways for Lions to serve developing countries, and at UN headquarters in New York, he signed a letter of intent representing LCI’s commitment to help meet the eight Millennium Development Goals. In the spirit of the UN, young people from 11-13 years of age are encouraged to express their visions of peace through art in the Lions International Peace Poster Contest. Lions Clubs around the world sponsor the contest in local schools and youth groups.

Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF) supplements the fundraising work done by local clubs. To date, grants worth more than US\$941 million have been provided for large scale humanitarian projects. Sources of funding include other foundations, corporations, governments and non-Lions, but the majority of funding is from Lions Clubs and individual members. People in need both locally and globally benefit in four main areas: youth, disaster relief and humanitarian effort grants. ¹

The Melvin Jones Fellowship (MJF) was established in 1973 as a way to raise money for LCIF by recognising individual Lions for outstanding humanitarian service. This award is the highest award in Lions and is awarded to a member who has done outstanding service in their Club.

Clubs submit applications along with donations of US\$1,000. According to LCIF, there are more than 386,804 Melvin Jones Fellows worldwide, and the Fellowship “is the backbone of LCIF, providing 75 per cent of the foundation’s revenue”. ²

Life Membership is another prestigious award in Lions Club International for outstanding service. The award of Life Membership is recommended by a Club for those who have served 15 years or more of membership and meet certain criteria. A critically ill member may also be eligible.

Lions Club membership

Today, Lions Clubs comprise the world’s largest service organisation. According to LCI as of August 2016, Lions Clubs have grown internationally to 46,000 clubs in 210 countries and geographic areas, with over 1.4 million members.³ Clubs are unique but all with the same purpose. Without personal financial rewards, Lions volunteer to raise funds for projects to help people with sight, health, disaster, youth,

community and environment. Clubs also do activities in many other areas to raise funds for a variety of projects. Although membership was originally open only to men, membership is now open to both men and women. Many clubs sponsor Leo Clubs as the stepping stone for young people to Lions Club membership, with their focus on mentoring youth to serve their community both in Leo and Lions projects.

Each Lions Club is part of a District, and annually the newly elected District Governor has the opportunity to organize district clubs into zones and (optionally) to organize the zones into regions. After the clubs have been assigned to their zones and the zones to their regions, the next step is to appoint the zone and region chairpersons. Individual membership is transferable both locally and internationally. For example, a member from Sri Lanka who moves to Australia can transfer their membership to a club in Australia.

Members from clubs worldwide gather annually at a different global venue for the International Lions Convention, as well as for conventions at the local level. LCI President and other international officials are elected at the global convention. 2017 marks the Centennial of the founding of the Lions organisation. The annual convention will be held in Chicago USA, the founding city of Lions.

Lions Clubs in Sri Lanka

Lions Clubs have been in existence since the 1st of April 1958 when a club extension from the South Indian District of 304 was established in Ceylon. This



• ***Lions of Panadura hosted a Pre-School Project in Panadura to provide medical and eye screenings and uniforms.***

“Mother Club”, now known as the Lions Club of Colombo Host (LCCH), still leads the way with many projects and a diverse and caring membership serving Sri Lankan communities in many ways. From this club, the number of clubs in Sri Lanka has now grown to 505 as of August 2016, and the total number of Lions in Sri Lanka as of August is 13,003.

With additional clubs, District 306 was created under the leadership of Sri Lanka’s first District Governor—the late Lion K. Satchithananda. With the growing number of clubs, in 1978 District 306 with 82 Clubs and 2592 Lions was divided into two sub-districts, 306A and 306B. In 1998, District

306C was formed and then in 2005, Multiple Districts 306 A, B and C were further sub-divided as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. ⁴ LCCH belongs to District 306A1 in Sri Lanka.

The Multiple District has had four Past International Directors and an International President. Sri Lankan Lions were honoured in the year 2007 when one of their own was voted in as LCI President. Lion Mahendra Amarasuriya, from the Lions Club of Galle, was installed as the 90th President of Lions Clubs International at the International Convention held in Chicago, USA. It was symbolic that this took place in Chicago, the birthplace of Lions Clubs.



• ***On 14 November 2011, Polonnaruwa North Central Lions hosted an Awareness & Screening Program on World Diabetic Day in Hingurakgoda.***

The Leo Club program was officially adopted by LCI in 1967. LCI reports as of August 2016 that Leos now constitute an international network of over 6,500 clubs in over 140 countries. ⁵

Leos find the transition to Lions Club membership an easier step after serving as a Leo. Leos serve the community, can make lasting friendships, work closely with their own and other Lions and Leo clubs and gain leadership skills. Leo Clubs are supported by many Lions Clubs in SL and the Ratmalana club uniquely supports a Leo Club for the visually handicapped. Leo Multiple District 306 Council is the governing body of 6 Leo Districts in Sri Lanka. It was founded in 1969. LCCH actively hosts their own Leo Club and members take part in their own initiatives as well as in joint activities with Lions Club members.

Lions Club of Colombo Host (LCCH)

Since 1958, the Lions Club of Colombo Host (LCCH), District 306A1, Region 1 - Zone 1, the pioneering Lions Club in Sri Lanka, has conducted thousands of projects, to the benefit of many people. The Club continues to be a beacon of service to the community



• **The annual beach clean up project of the Leo Club of Mahanama College, District 306C2 held on 26th April 2015 at Mattakuliya Crow Island.**

and has a diverse and dedicated membership, from professions such as the medical, legal and business fields. The Club has won many awards and produced several Lions District Governors, while the Leo Club of LCCH won the ‘Most Outstanding Leo Club in the World’ award, presented by the Lions International ‘Challenge to Change’ awards Programme in June 2008, at the 91st Annual Lions Clubs International Convention in Bangkok, Thailand (Daily Mirror, Sri Lanka, 21st November 2015). LCCH was proud of their first woman president when Lion Nirupa Mohan became President for the 2014-2015 Lionistic year.

LCCH good works

Over the decades, work of LCCH has included awareness campaigns, projects and fundraisers. Early projects include: *White Cane Day* is celebrated annually on 15th October when Sri Lanka joins clubs around the world in an awareness campaign for sighted persons to recognize that the user of a white cane is visually impaired. In Sri Lanka, “The first project successfully completed by this pioneering club [LCCH] was the introduction of the White Cane to assist the Blind with 500 White Canes being distributed to the sight-impaired. More importantly, the club successfully lobbied for the enactment of legislation to make it an offence for motor traffic not to permit the safe passage of any person using a White Cane. The legislation was finally enacted on 13 February 1959 as part of the Motor Traffic Act No. 14 of 1951. The first *Eye Bank* in Sri Lanka was gifted to the National Eye Hospital in 1962. It was later supplemented by the Eye Bank of the Eye Donation Society organised by the late Lion Dr. Hudson Silva and developed into an internationally renowned Cornea Resource. Other early projects were the inauguration of a weekly *Medical Clinic* staffed by the doctor members of the Club, assisted by lay members. Another project mentioned is the Lions “*Gift of Sight Hospital*” Golden Anniversary project which was our flagship project in which we completed 300+ Free Cataract Eye Surgeries complete with intra-ocular lens implants on patients representing the poorest of the

poor. The target for the project is 1000 cataract surgeries valued nationally at Rs.40,000,000 compared at the current private sector rates. The surgeries are performed mainly at the state-of-the-art, dedicated Lions Eye Surgery Hospital in Panadura, which is managed and maintained by the Lions”.

More recent projects include: *Camilla School*. This school, located on 11 acres in Mattegoda south of Colombo, is for mentally and physically challenged children and is a project of Lions Districts 306 A1/A2. It is managed by a legally constituted Trust consisting of Lions and Lion Ladies. Since 1983, the facility has provided a home-like environment for those with special needs.

Three residents live in one of 14 chalets, each with a 24 hour caregiver. Both a resident nurse and visiting matron are available at the facility. There is a gymnasium and playground for recreation and therapy. Regular medical and dental check-ups as well as eye-care are provided with visits to specialists when needed. Teachers provide educational and vocational Training.

Health Camps

Health Camps are held annually at different venues to provide much needed services to people who often only see a doctor at these camps. Besides vision screenings and eye glass distribution, blood pressure and blood sugar testing are done under the supervision of qualified doctors. Prescription drugs may also be distributed by pharmacists. Dental Services are also provided too. Services provided free, with incidental costs borne by the Club. Health camps are provided in Colombo and in rural areas, often in collaboration with other Lions Clubs, in such locations as Kuliyaipitiya, Pannila, Aluthgama and St. Benedict’s School in Colombo.

Disaster Assistance

Lions are known worldwide to assist when disaster strikes. Lions in Sri Lanka sprang into action to assist



• **Lions Club of Minuwangoda Circle donated a house for a needy family.**

people in areas devastated by the Tsunami of 26 December 2004, triggered by an earthquake under the Indian Ocean near the west coast of Sumatra in Indonesia. Along with many other aid organisations, LCCH and other District 306 Lions Clubs in Sri Lanka launched a massive campaign to supply rations and clothing, provide shelter, build houses, facilitate healthcare and whatever else was needed to the many displaced. LCCH assisted with recent floods in May 2016 spurring the collection of clothes, cleaning supplies, water, dry rations, tinned food and condiments - curry, chillie & pepper powder, turmeric, salt etc. Supplies were taken to help families in Biyagama and Kolonnawa.

Car Boot Sale

Lion Ladies of the LCCH organise an annual fund raiser. The most recent was 'The Great Colombo Car Boot Sale' to benefit Lions Gift of Sight Programme to eradicate blindness. The event was held at the Women's International Club, Colombo 07 (next to the Lionel Wendt Theatre). Tables were rented to selling at bargain prices a wide range of items from clothes and jewellery to plants. Also, there was a raffle, fun games, prizes and surprises!

Sewing

LCCH supports the Lions Sewing School, which has provided free vocational education for girls in sewing skills for 28 years.

Outside donors

These examples are not only typical of the work done by LCCH, they also reflect similar work done by other Lions Clubs in Sri Lanka. Clubs and donors outside of Sri Lanka also often contribute to projects in Sri Lanka, such as in 2015 when LCCH provided drinking water to Pannila Arachchigoda funded by a foreign donor. Another example is Rs. 1 million donated by the Lions of Bankstown, District 201N5 Australia to build an 8 bed ward at the Eye Surgery Hospital in Panadura at the request of Past International President Lion Mahendran Amarasuriya. One of the authors of this article, Lion Harry de Sayrah had the pleasure to declare the ward open.

Samples of other Lions Clubs projects in Sri Lanka

- The annual beach clean up project of the Leo Club of Mahanama College, District 306C2 held on 26 April 2015 at Mattakuliya Crow Island. Lions of Panadura hosted a Pre-School Project in Panadura to provide medical and eye screenings and uniforms.
- On 14 November 2011, Polonnaruwa North Central Lions hosted an Awareness & Screening Programme on World Diabetic Day in Hingurakgoda. Lions club of Minuwangoda Circle donated a house for a needy family.
- Batticaloa Ladies Lions Club Cancer Awareness Programme 2014
- Lions Club of Aluvihare, District 306C1, Mattress donation to Matala

- Hospital 2015
- Lions Club of Galle has a unique project. Each poya day, gifts are made for babies born during that particular month. Baby clothes are distributed at local hospitals to those in need. They collect powdered milk, diapers, and other nursery items for poya day visits with mothers and their newborns.

End Notes:

<http://www.lcif.org/EN/apply-for-a-grant/index.php>

<http://www.lcif.org/EN/support-our-work/melvin-jones-fellowship.php>

<http://www.lionsclubs.org/EN/index.php>

<http://lionsmd306.org/100/index.php/2016-07-28-09-28-31/lionism-in-sri-lanka>

<http://members.lionsclubs.org/EN/leos/about-leos.php>

https://www.facebook.com/colombohostlions/about/?entry_point=page_nav_about_item&tab=page_info

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Some trivialities

1. What covers most of Finland?
2. What did William and Catherine Booth found?
3. The fingertips represent which five letters in sign language?
4. How many hearts does an octopus have?
5. How many pairs of ribs does a human have?
6. Which animal has the longest pregnancy?

ANSWERS

(a) Trees (b) The Salvation Army (c) Vowels (d) Three (e) 12 (f) Elephants are pregnant for 2 years.