



The Inaugural Address of  
International President  
James T. Coffey

**A Better World for Everyone:  
Assume the Responsibility!**

Immediate Past President Mehta, members of the International Board of Directors, distinguished past international presidents, my fellow Lions and guests—each and every one of you who belong to, and might I add, are so very privileged to share membership in the family of Lions Clubs International—I thank you sincerely for this honor. Indeed it is an honor to be afforded the opportunity to serve as chief executive officer of this, the world's largest service club association. Not only will it allow me to help Lions worldwide recognize their responsibilities as leaders in the voluntary sphere, it also enables me to represent, and represent proudly, more than 1.4 million men and women to whom "We Serve" is a global challenge that calls for unqualified acceptance.

Lions, the moment we put on our lapel pin we served notice that we recognized our personal responsibility to do all in our power to make this a better world for everyone—our neighbors, citizens of our own communities and countries, and those in need around the world. Yes, we do have responsibilities as members of this global family, because we will be carrying on a tradition that for three-quarters of a century has given concrete meaning to the concept of humanitarian service. I say "family," with greatest sincerity. I have always considered being a member of a family, participating as a member of a family, and sharing its joys, sorrows and values as among the highest callings we, as individuals, can possibly have.

I remember as a boy joining with my mother and father, my sister and brother, in clearing the land on our farm in Ohio, the hard work, the holidays and those wonderful fishing trips we took every year are memories I shall cherish always. Whatever I have achieved in life, including the

privilege of standing before you today as president of Lions Clubs International, I owe to so very many people who have been parts of my family-or should I say families.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents who instilled in me a respect for hard work and a sense of responsibility. I wish my father could have been here to share this day with me. Ironically, he passed away in 1974 when I was attending the International Convention in San Francisco. He was my best friend and his influence molded my life and prepared me for the challenges that lay before me.

I was also blessed with having the most compassionate and caring mother a son could want. She is here today and I'd like to say "Thanks, Mom, for all you have given to our family-I love you!" My sister and brother are also here and I want to thank them for their guidance and influence in my life.

You know, it takes a very special and might I say, patient and understanding, person to be married to a Lion. Betty and I have been married for 37 years, and for 32 of those years I have been a Lions club member. She has been at my side all these years-at meetings and conventions, and traveling thousands of miles with me on behalf of the association. She's been exhausted on several occasions I know and once was so ill that it was life threatening. Still, she has never regretted fulfilling her commitment in supporting my every responsibility as a member of Lions Clubs International. And, she's also a loving mother and tremendous homemaker. Betty often reminds me that there are only two women in the world who could have lived with me: herself and my mother, and on a few occasions she considered giving me back to my mother. Betty: Thank you-I love you.

I'm not the only Lion in my family. My son, Jim, is attending his 16th International Convention and mere words cannot really express my feelings. Being a Lion and especially an officer at the district and international levels has meant that I was away quite a bit. Many times I wished I could really have been home fulfilling my responsibilities as a father. But Jim never hesitated to encourage me to continue honoring my commitments as a Lion, even if it interfered with also being a father. Jim's married now and he and his wife, Linda, have blessed Betty and me with a fine grandson, James Thomas Coffey II. Jim, I love you and I'm proud of you. Thanks for being the most understanding son a father could have.

There's another family to which I belong, of course, perhaps of a somewhat different sort, but one which has given a special meaning to my life. I'm sure it has a special meaning to you, also, for we all belong to it. This is the family of Lions. It's the family I found in my Toronto club, in

District 13-G and throughout Ohio. The close friendship of its members, along with their encouragement and their confidence in me has helped me to realize the lengths to which I could go in service to this association. To you, the Lions of my great Toronto club and to all the Lions of Multiple District 13, thank you most sincerely for providing a very exceptional example of close family ties.

In fact, I like to think of our entire association-more than 1.4 million members around the world, as representing a family, one that seeks not personal reward for their endeavors, but a family dedicated to the cause of humanity, to enhancing the quality of life everywhere.

In the years ahead, our international family will need to quicken its pace in demonstrating what Lions mean when they state "We Serve." Many challenges await us as we approach the 21st Century, and what challenges they will be! My fellow Lions, if I may borrow three important words you've been hearing quite a bit these past three years, it will be our responsibility to make a **commitment**, to be personally **involved** and to take every **opportunity** in answering each challenge that confronts us. This is why we take privilege in calling ourselves "Lions." This is why for more than 75 years, Lions Clubs International has established an unparalleled record of community and humanitarian service.

Quite obviously, the greatest challenge facing us is our goal to conquer blindness. SightFirst has already given strong evidence that Lions can and will provide the leadership to eliminate preventable and reversible blindness-and this year we are launching the final chapter in our commitment to finance this monumental program. The Year of Campaign SightFirst will, I am confident, demonstrate that Lions worldwide recognize their individual responsibility in helping this campaign reach its target. I look forward to that moment next year at our international convention in Phoenix when it can be announced officially that, yes, we did **raise** US\$130 million, in fact, in excess of that amount. That, Lions, will be one of the greatest moments in the proud history of this association.

The successful conclusion of the Year of Campaign SightFirst will show why ours is the world's leading service club organization. To further emphasize its importance. I would like to read to you a portion of a resolution passed by the Board of Trustees of the Lions Clubs International Foundation. It first recognizes the association's traditional commitment to sight preservation and the inspiration Lions have drawn, for decades, from the words of Helen Keller. It also observes the fact that of the more than 40 million cases of blindness in the world today. 80 percent could have been avoided. The resolution concludes with these words:

"Be it therefore resolved that this board calls upon all Lions and friends of Lionism to unite in a single worldwide humanitarian effort-to eradicate preventable and reversible blindness-through Campaign SightFirst.

"Be it further resolved that the year beginning on July 1, 1993, and ending June 30, 1994, be declared the Year of Campaign SightFirst, and that Campaign SightFirst should be given the **highest priority** in the fundraising activities of all Lions clubs and that the attention of the entire association be focused upon this historic effort."

Earlier at this convention, you heard campaign leaders from the seven constitutional areas of Lions Clubs International announce, and do so enthusiastically I might add, what the fundraising goals are in their areas. A while later, we applauded the newest Lead Gift donors. Inspirational? Yes! Outstanding? Beyond any doubt! But this is only the beginning; our work has only just started. We have a long way to go before we reach our goal.

To get there, a time must come during this year of Campaign SightFirst when every member must ask some very personal questions:

- Do I, as a member of Lions Clubs International, have a special responsibility to assure the success of my association's greatest challenge ever?
- Can I, united with 1.4 million fellow Lions, truly make a difference?
- Should I take that extra step, go that extra mile, to bring this extraordinary campaign that much closer to success?
- Will I help hasten the day when there shall be no more needless blindness?

On Wednesday, we in this hall answered a collective and resounding "Yes!" May that same conviction resonate worldwide when we return to our homes to begin our intensive fundraising efforts.

We have more than 41,000 Lions clubs and 1.4 million members. If all recognize their responsibility to be directly involved in this effort, our \$130 million goal will not only be reached, but surpassed. It **will** happen, when our membership realizes fully that adequate funding must be available for Lions to carry out one of the most praiseworthy humanitarian ventures in the history of mankind.

In addition to Campaign SightFirst, may I emphasize how critical it is to strengthen the total operational capacity of the Lions Clubs International Foundation. A short time ago, we welcomed the 75,000th Melvin Jones Fellow, an accomplishment which symbolizes the manner in which Lions have come to understand LCIF's crucial role in the association's entire humanitarian mission.

LCIF is **our** foundation, whether we support it for Campaign SightFirst or to meet its other responsibilities around the world. Our generosity will enable it to fund the service projects of Lions everywhere, activities that give further substance to the meaning of **We Serve**. Again, it is important for all Lions to understand that funds sent to LCIF this year designated for the campaign are **in addition to** their normal support of the foundation. Critical human needs will continue to exist and LCIF is obligated to be in a position to respond immediately when requested by Lions. It is the responsibility of the Lions of the world to ensure this response will be forthcoming.

SightFirst-Campaign SightFirst-LCIF: All are vital components of our international program this year. There is yet another area I wish to emphasize and emphasize with the greatest urgency. That is membership!

Indeed, we are the world's largest service club organization and our numbers are impressive. But let us all recognize that we are not bringing in new members at the rate we should be; that, given our programs and potential, our net growth figures should be larger. We cannot remain where we are. Progress has never been achieved by standing still, and our membership needs to grow to keep pace with our service commitments. I have, therefore, made membership a priority goal during my year.

Let us agree on this-that being a Lion is an honor and a privilege. We were invited to join our clubs because we were perceived as individuals who could give of our time and talents in service to our communities, and upon becoming Lions we recognized how fortunate we were to be members of the world's largest service club organization-a family that stretched around the world. And through this extended family of Lions Clubs International, we learned of opportunities to serve not only locally, but globally.

Considering all that we have gained from our membership: the satisfaction of serving the needs of others, the solid friendships we have made and the degree to which our leadership skills have been improved. I believe we should consider it a personal responsibility to invite others to share this privilege, this honor of being a Lion.

When we do extend invitations to these men and women whom we are certain will make quality Lions, we must, of course, stress how our club and Lions in 180 lands are answering human needs. Indeed, tell of our association's involvement in voluntary service for 75 years and of our vision of still further achievements on behalf of mankind.

But-and this is exceedingly important-we must not overlook the need to emphasize the personal benefits of being a Lion. Let's not be shy about it.

We each have enriched our lives through membership. We have been able to associate with other community leaders and have ourselves become more

visible in the community. There's nothing wrong with telling potential Lions about this. Stress that this association, this networking, with others who will represent all facets of community life, spurs us on to recognize our total responsibility to the well-being of the area in which we reside. It is a formula that has been working for three-quarters of a century. And, I assure you, it is one that will continue to make Lion membership ideally suited for individuals who seek to participate in all segments of community life.

This, however, brings up another point, the significance of which I cannot over-emphasize. Lions Clubs International has a proud tradition that has witnessed decades of selfless commitment to the ideal of voluntary service. It's a tradition that has, for 75 years, strengthened communities and resulted in healthier, more productive and better lives for millions of people around the world.

But let us be able to recognize the difference between tradition and habit. Every club must be certain that its method of operation does, in fact, reflect our traditional values and attract prospective Lions who **want** to become members.

The most obvious example in emphasizing our standing as a service club is to invite women to become members. Although the number of female Lions now number well in excess of 68,000, many clubs still have no women members. Women in every community possess the individual skills and enthusiasm to make the local Lions clubs still more effective in meeting their service obligations. They're doing it now! By the thousands! Lions clubs with women on their rolls demonstrate quite clearly that it's more important to be successful than exclusive. We must not be exclusive! Lions, I ask that you make every effort to ensure that your meeting schedules, dress codes, the manner in which meetings are conducted and skill in publicizing your club's accomplishments result in a positive image, one that will easily attract new members.

Growth in membership and enhancing our image-both are crucial and they are the responsibility of every member in this association.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Lions drug awareness program. It is a responsibility to our young people I would hope Lions never relinquish. As community leaders, we must study the most effective ways we can help young people meet the many challenges to their own growth and futures. Toward this end, the Lions-Quest initiatives have drawn the praise of parents, teachers and school administrators for enabling young people to gain the confidence and self-esteem necessary to avoid surrendering to substance abuse.

Combined, *Skills for Adolescence* and *Skills for Growing* are now taught in 33,000 schools in 27 nations and, over the years, hundreds of thousands of youngsters and their families have benefitted. Excellent totals. Lions are participating in other drug prevention programs as well, each individual effort proof of our enduring dedication in helping our young people to grow and mature in a drug-free environment.

Lions clubs not yet involved in some mode of drug prevention in their communities might well celebrate the association's tenth anniversary of fighting drug abuse by embarking on a program. Upon seeing the results, you'll be glad you did.

On Wednesday, the flag ceremony at this convention emphasized once again that, given the will and determination, people of varying cultures and languages and ethnic backgrounds can live in peace and harmony. In fact, every international convention is a case study in how citizens of the world can, once the opportunity presents itself, extend hands of friendship and understanding among one another.

It's a triumph of global goodwill that has been a continuing success story for years. Yes, we do recognize our responsibilities to SightFirst, Campaign SightFirst and to so many other activities that heal and help. But in conjunction with our service programs, Lions Clubs International has established a marvelous record of promoting **and achieving** harmony and cooperation among people of nationalities spanning the globe. Lions Day with the United Nations, for example, is drawing hundreds and hundreds of Lions together, not only at U.N. headquarters in New York City, but in cities around the world, to discuss how best to join our forces in promoting lasting international peace. Hundreds of thousands of young people have participated in our peace poster contest over the past five years and the growth of our youth exchange and youth camp programs is still further evidence of the seriousness in which Lions view their responsibilities in bringing the people of the world together. And I am positive we can all appreciate the early accomplishments of SightFirst and untiring efforts of Campaign SightFirst in emphasizing the global humanitarian objectives of this association.

Lions, each of our endeavors, each of the programs upon which we embark in our own communities or with Lions in other lands demonstrates in some manner our willingness to assume the responsibilities for bringing about good will and enduring peace. True, it is an imposing responsibility, but, as leaders in the voluntary sphere, it is one we simply must recognize as our solemn duty to embrace.

Oh, yes, there are those who would insist that the condition of the world today is so shocking that it is beyond, help and beyond hope. What can any of us do in the face of the headlines and news reports that greet us every day? Yes, I agree the challenge to bring about a better world is imposing. But Lions Clubs International has a long and magnificent record of accepting challenges to build, to improve, to elevate.

We have been accorded the, privilege of being Lions, of having known success in our private lives and of living in lands where we may exercise our rights of freedom of expression and of assembly. And we have the priceless love of our families. My fellow Lions, we have so very much, so very much for which to be thankful.

It has often been observed, "To whom much is given, much is expected." As leaders, as Lions, we understand what is expected of us. We realize fully the magnitude of our responsibilities to make this a healthier, happier, more peaceful world.

Lions, it is indeed, an idealistic goal, one that may be expressed in many ways...in words, in action...and in song.

Yes, it is truly our responsibility to reach out and touch someone's hand to make this a better world.

(Song)

What a fine expression of our feelings, of our goals. Let us extend our most sincere appreciation to Tina Fusco, daughter of Past International Director Ted Fusco, of Furlong, Pennsylvania, United States of America, for her wonderful presentation.

Lions, our year together has begun. Let us each assume our responsibilities as members of the world's greatest service club organization during this very special year. As International President, it is my honor and privilege to officially launch the Year of Campaign SightFirst.

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Re-typed by Lion Bill Keller