

THOUGHTS OF A FIRST TIMER TO MD105SW CONVENTION

LION ALAN KING of Lions Club of Okehampton

Lions International District 105SW – Convention 2009 Plymouth

Given that this was my first Lions Convention, Lion Mike and Lion Ian thought it would be a good idea if I wrote the report for the Club!

Fancy Dress Evening – Friday 6th March

This year theme was "Wish You Were Here". Way before Convention Ian told me that I should think outside the box for an idea. By the time our idea took shape you couldn't see the box. For starters we changed the wording slightly so our theme was "Wish Ewe Were Here" and we had a ram in a pen (Mike), 3 ewes (Ann, Pat and Benita) frolicking around the pen, a dog (me) and the trusty (?) farmer (Ian). Other clubs came up with a variety of entries from Caribbean holidays, postcards, bathing costume silhouettes and Lion Air. The fact that everyone gave it a go and laughed as a collective made it a great night. The photographs will prove I gave it my best shot in the role of the dog despite taking a certain amount of ridicule from my fellow farmyard colleagues. Anyway we won the fancy dress event on behalf of the club so the ridicule was worth it. Just for the record the food was good, the disco was excellent and the dog went home with a ewe!

Business Meeting – Saturday 7th March

First I ought to get the election results out of the way with regards the District hierarchy for 2009/10 and they are given below:

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| District Governor | - Lion Christine Rowe (Launceston) |
| 1 st Vice District Governor | - Lion Neil Rutter (Seaton) |
| 2 nd Vice District Governor | - Lion Clifton Cane (Babbacombe and St Marychurch) |

The respective officers provided written reports for Convention and I ask members to borrow Mike's, Ian's or my Convention pack if you want to find out what they said. The most useful part of the morning for me came right at the start where Convention was reminded about the purposes of Lionism and the code of ethics by which we undertake our duties as Lions. Personally I had forgotten most of what was mentioned and felt duly guilty that I had done so. Maybe we need to revisit these at meetings every so often to make sure members are reminded what Lionism is about?

The afternoon session was much more interesting with the various reports from the respective sections of Lionism in our district i.e. Youth, Membership, Welfare and Advisory and Communications. I never knew our district did so much! It was heartening to hear about some of the community activists within Lions across the district and how various clubs have responded to the needs of their community. I know that each club interprets what Lionism means to themselves but I found myself somewhat in awe of other clubs who really do serve their community through service.

Convention's guest speaker this year was Past International Director Ron Luxton. During the lunch break run around I was lucky enough to talk with Lion Ron about his family roots. Apparently his great, great grandfather left England from Plymouth for New Zealand but more coincidentally lived in cottages between Northlew and Okehampton! Lion Ron's address was both interesting and challenging. He talked about Lionism in New Zealand, Lions International and what it means to him about being a Lion. Personally I found the whole speech inspirational and left me wanting more. Mixed in among the serious messages were numerous jokes and witty observations and I can't remember any!

On a lighter note, first timers at Convention now compete for a trophy during the lunch break. That of course included me! The task was to collect as many signatures from as many Lions as you could. The higher the level of Lion the more points you scored. With Mike and Ian pointing me in several directions at the same time I have to say that I felt more like a dog at this point than I did the night before! The cup for first timer who collected the most signatures was presented at the Gala Dinner (I'll tell you how I got on later).

Gala Dinner – Saturday 7th March

Fantastic! Food was great, band (Edison Lighthouse) was excellent and the camaraderie amongst the assembled Lions and partners was exceptional. Particularly worthy of mention are Lions Brenda and John Wood and District Governor Graham Lang and his wife Heather. They went out of their way to make us all very welcome and shared many a glass/bottle of wine along the way, particularly Brenda!

Thanks to Farmer Snell and “have you seen so and so” Chastey I managed to win the cup for the first timer with the most signatures. My embarrassment at having to go and collect the trophy was tempered by the warmth shown by all in attendance once we got into the social part of the evening. It would be difficult for me to identify who didn't come up to congratulate me for winning the cup. They were equally delighted that Okehampton had won the fancy dress cup and many commented the warmth afforded them by our club when they visit Okehampton.

Question and Answer – Sunday 8th March

Fronted by District Governor Graham Lang and Past International Director Ron Luxton this was a really informative session. A list, by no means exhaustive, of what was discussed is highlighted below:

- The role of PR Officers and the difference between PR and Marketing (number of resources available within the District and training for the respective Club Officers as well – contact Lion Mike Hacker)
- Lionism in New Zealand
- Developing links with secondary school curriculum i.e. PHSEE/Citizenship, telling young people about Lionism and service etc
- Finding a balance between service and fundraising. Lions motto is “we serve” not “we fundraise” and many think that some clubs lose their focus by concentrating on one to the detriment of the other
- Lions Clubs Undertaking self-assessment to identify whether it is growing or shrinking both in terms of membership and what services it provides for the community it serves
- Developing international relations i.e. do clubs twin with other clubs in other countries or visit clubs in other countries
- Training for Lions members i.e. Emerging Lions for members who have been in Lions for 5 years or more, specific role training available at Forum or Incoming Officers
- Charter Nights are they sustainable for an organisation which promotes equality for all i.e. increasing costs for attending Charter Nights may prevent some members or potential members from going along or even joining Lions. Should Charter Dinners be reserved for special birthdays only i.e. 10 years, 25 years etc as in New Zealand

There was much more and the session lived up to Lion Mike's pre-Convention assessment that you get a lot from it.

Final Thoughts

I found the whole Convention uplifting and exhilarating and it reminded me why I joined the Lions. There are lots of things to think about and many ideas to discuss with other Lions both within our club and across the district. It really is good to see and hear what other clubs are doing. I am determined to visit other clubs in the District and would be more than delighted if any member wishes to join me on my travels. Benita and I are determined that we will go again next year and the year after etc. Next years Convention will be held at the Durant House Hotel in Bideford. Book your place now!

Finally, I would like to thank Mike and Ann and Ian and Pat for the warmth, generosity, care and friendship towards two Convention virgins. The esteem and warmth that the district has for both Mike and Ann and Ian and Pat was obvious from our arrival and Benita and I were privileged enough to share and benefit from that real sense of comradeship and hospitality.