

# 97<sup>th</sup> International Lions Convention Toronto Canada

By Lion Rhett Hair

Our trip to Toronto began 8 months ago. Melody and I have never been to an International Convention, and this one was close. We found out we would need passports so it was a scramble to find our birth certificates. I had mine but we had to get Melody's from Atlanta. We filled out her forms online, it was

located and verified. So we ordered 2 Copies and they were delivered within 7 days for a fee. We located the passport Web site on line, filled out our forms, and some of the info was a challenge. We went to the Winnsboro post office and made an appointment to have our pictures taken and to file our applications. Amazingly we received our passports 10 days later and they even returned our Birth Certificates.

We preregistered with Lions International and got discounts for early registration. They also asked about our Hotel preference, and since our SC Delegation had been assigned to the Marriot Renaissance Hotel, that is where we decided to stay. We made reservations for 5 nights. We arrived the day of the convention and departed the day after. Lions International communicated with us regularly via Snail mail and E-mail.

After reviewing transportation options we decided to drive. It would be a 13 hour trip. Our kids live in Pittsburgh Pa., 4.5 hours south of Toronto so that would be our pit stop coming and going.

We departed SC, passed through customs at Buffalo NY. No problems with customs, just a lot of traffic. Arrived at our hotel and there were Lions everywhere. We find out that there were approximately 17,000 Lions registered.

We get in the hotel and then to the Convention Center to get registered there. We also went to Credentials to get registered as voting delegates. The credentials booth was located on the main floor of the Convention Center with all of the Vendors. We see Lions Joe Pitts and Gene Spiess. They were working the Credentials Booths. There were vendors from all over the world including our own SC Broom man, Lion Lanny Ballentine. We stopped by the Lions Store and they had many things we liked.

We visit with the Lions International Leadership and Membership Divisions and picked up a lot of great information and visited with old friends from Oak Brook, Illinois.



Everyone we came in contact with was kind, courteous and very helpful. As we tour and visit inside the Convention Center we realize that there was going to be some competition in the election for 2<sup>nd</sup> International Vice president. We took pictures with different Lions and Candidates.

This is the first day which is the fourth of July and it is also our wedding anniversary. We went out to eat with Lions Joe and Dianne Pitts at the Loose Moose. Great food, we will return. While we are walking through the city there was a lot of construction, but the city was very clean and well maintained. Good job Toronto!

On Saturday the 5<sup>th</sup> of July we got ready for the International Parade. We met in the Lobby of the Hotel and took buses to the Parade Route. We were told that 140 of the 208 countries and jurisdictions that Lions are in were represented that day.

We lined up in our assigned area with the following in sight: Oklahoma, Romania,

Republic of the Philippines, Spain and Taiwan. For as far as you could see there were Lions of all kinds and most in their native dress. While we waited many Lions from



different countries came by for group photos. During this time the pin trading began. Everyone has one and wants one; it did not take long before I ran out. Next time I will bring more pins.



When the parade starts the Taiwanese start up with their drums and cymbals. They have a couple of dancing Characters and a Dragon. And we have our very own Sweet Tater, Lion Eddie Marshall. As we are walking we are waving our American flags and I had the opportunity to trade flags with several different countries.

The parade was great with many sights and people, with all of the bystanders waving and greeting us, and many smiling faces making all feel welcome.

The Plenary sessions were held at the Air Canada Center, home of the Toronto Maple Leafs. It was a great venue, easy access and walking distance from the hotel. We were entertained by Neil Sedaka, Olivia Newton John, and many dance troupes. All of the sessions were informative and entertaining.

We heard from our Lion Leadership and had many pep talks about Lions and what we have accomplished. Plans were discussed for next year and the next three years getting ready for our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The enthusiasm flows in buckets and recharges our batteries for a new Lions year.

During a pause of events The Joanna Lions book a tour to Niagara Falls. Melody and I, Lions Paul and Bobbie Dove and Lion Rick Pressly, load up in our Truck and go to Niagara By the Lake, and then down to Niagara Falls. We see the falls up close on the Tour Boat Hornblower. The Maid of the Mist is now on the US side only. This is the highlight of the trip.

Melody and I receive invitations to the Scandinavian Lions Reception; we drive to the Event with Lions Joe and Dianne Pitts. The host Lions are in their native dress. They laid out a spread of their native foods and beverages. Oh, watch out for the liquor called Black Death. It is a Licorice drink. It went straight to my toes without any resistance.

We met on the 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 in the morning for the Southeastern States Lions Breakfast and we heard many Lions make their pitch for office for the upcoming elections. The breakfast was good, but the fellowship was great. Melody got to meet one of her childhood friends from Georgia, Lion Leslie Chapman Miller. Their fathers had been Lions together in Jasper, Ga. Both gentlemen had been presidents of their club. This year Lion Melody is President of the Blythewood Lions Club and Lion Leslie is 2<sup>nd</sup> VDG in her district. 2<sup>nd</sup> generation lions at work.

The elections are held, I and five other SC Lions assist with the elections. It was amazing how well the process went, and I watched over 4,000 Lions vote in three hours. I assisted with a booth that handled 8 languages and appeared to me that English, French and Spanish are the major languages of Lions.

During the last Plenary Session the results of the Election were announced. The President and 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President and the International Directors appeared to be a shoe in. But there is a Delay for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice president and takes time for the results, keeping



everyone on the edge of their seats. Presidents Palmer and Preston were on stage dancing and singing to keep the crowd entertained. The results arrived and they were announced. Lion Bob Corlew won the election for 2<sup>nd</sup> International Vice President. It was great to get to meet, know and assist someone like Lion Bob along the way. This is the highlight of the convention.

The last event of the Convention was the International Officers Reception; there were many Lions at the Fairmount Royal Hotel. We met with many Lions from around the world and our International Lions Leadership.

As we came to the end of our first International convention, and after attending a USA/Canada Lions Leadership Forum last year, I have come to realize that the forums are for Lions to work and learn, and the Conventions are for fun and pleasure. Both work at recharging our Service Batteries through different means.

We would like to congratulate our Council of Governors on their completion of District Governor school. We wish them much success in 2014-2015 as they lead our Multiple District.

This Convention has been a great experience for our Lions' Careers and we are making plans to attend the next one in Honolulu, Hawaii-- See you there!

