

Lions 70th Anniversary Address Oct. 1, 2008 by Lion Lee Buffin

Mayor Travale, Counselor Wells, Governor Al Beamer, District Officers, Head Table Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and Lions All.

Good Evening. I am a proud member of the Port Dover Lions Club. I am very pleased and excited to be talking with you about the early days of Lions in Port Dover. My information is from three sources: The Port Dover Maple Leaf, a motivational talk by Port Dover Lions Past President, Elmer Lewis and an essay titled "A History of Lions in Port Dover" by Charter Member Jim Goodall.

In October 1938, 250 Lions from around the area, gathered at the Port Dover Town Hall, now the Lighthouse Theatre, for the Charter Night of the Lions Club of Port Dover. The Simcoe Lions Club was our sponsor and even today we are in awe of our older sibling. The eighteen Charter Members included a farmer, a doctor, two bankers, a haberdasher, a butcher, a tradesperson, three members of the fishing community, a school principal and a further assortment of merchants and manufacturers. That sounds like the mix of today's club except, not one of those people was retired!

Some time in mid-December, the club performed its first community service. They provided five town Children with glasses. Lions International were known as the Knights of the Blind and Port Dover wasted little time in carrying on that area of service.

The first fundraiser to help pay for the glasses was a Dance at the Nicoll's Hall on Market Street. The net profit on the event was \$25.00. A second dance was held. The tickets were one dollar, per couple and the profit was \$70.00.

In late November of 1939 World War II was under way. The club canvassed the town's citizens and asked them to donate 25 cents per person toward the purchase of a wristwatch for each of the local warriors leaving for the over sea's battlefields. The populace was very responsive.

The charter group of Lions and today's group did the same things. The differences are those of scale.

Remember the One-dollar per couple dance and the \$70.00 profit. Four years ago we invited the community to attend a Gala dinner and dance in support of Norfolk General Hospital. The patrons paid \$100.00 per person and bid extravagantly during the silent auction. Thanks to the generosity of the diners and dancers that night, the Lions Club, with the help of the Lioness and Leos, was able to pay down \$9000.00 of its hospital pledge.

In 1947, the club did something rare for a service organization. They initiated a project that took a year of planning, a full day of Lions' labour and intentionally lost money. The Lions spent \$500.00 to provide a party for the town on the 1st of July. That losing tradition has continued. This year we spent \$4000.00 to celebrate Canada's Birthday.

The first major project for the Dover Lions involved the purchase of the fairground property. In 1945, the club purchased 9.5 acres, for \$3000.00. The vender, Mr. Liddy, was the former Principal of the High School. Upon closing, he returned to the club \$1000.00 of the purchase price. Who said school principals were mean! Today, that property hosts the current High School, the arena, the community centre, a play park, the medical centre, and until recently, land that was devoted to bowling greens, Tennis courts and a meeting place.

Before the current structures were constructed the property held a baseball diamond. The Ball Park opened in 1947 and according to the newspaper, and I like the way this reads, "...as the strains

of GOD SAVE THE KING were fading came the umpire's raucous cry of **Play Ball**".

Those first Dover Lions were risk takers. They saw the potential, bought the land with money they did not have, raised the money from the people of the community and returned the money, in different forms, to make life more pleasant in Port Dover.

But, even though they mostly succeeded, they did not always get it quite right.

A large part of the Fairground property was swampland. The club members took it upon themselves to provide the labour and with expert direction, they tiled the land. The following spring the property was now a tiled swamp and when the ground thawed and the rains came, the tile did its job. It redirected the spring water down First and Second Avenues towards the lake. I understand the people with basements on First and Second Avenue heatedly discussed the Lions Club that spring. But in true Port Dover fashion, by the end of April the debt on the land had been paid.

The community supported us even when we got it wrong.

Over the years moral and financial support of Port Dover citizens has allowed this club to provide not only buildings and parks for the community but also assistance with social aspects.

In 1949, the Lions club hosted the town's children on Halloween. For the next 56 years, the club tried to keep the kids off the street by providing movies or skating parties. They handed out prizes for costumes and always were generous with gifts and food. In 2006, the Leo club took over that task.

In 1952, the Lions entered the world of bricks and mortar when they financed artificial ice for the arena. The opening game on

the new ice was against the archrival Simcoe. Happy day, Dover skated to a 10-3 Victory.

Since 1952 we have been responsible for or been a part of the funding for The Gorley Campbell School in Simcoe, the elementary and secondary Schools, the library, the medical centre, the Community Center, Harry Misner Park, the arena and our current ongoing project, Silver Lake Park. At Silver Lake we provide a soccer field, camping area for special events, a regular Saturday morning market (the coffee is free) barns for our equipment, a meeting area, storage for medical equipment and the rowing club, and a large utility room for other clubs or public members to use.

That is enough about buildings. Lions also invest in people. Our Port Dover Club has four committees devoted to people. We provide scholarships and bursaries to the local schools. We have assisted with the purchase of materials and teacher training in some curriculum initiatives. We sponsor minor sports such as baseball, hockey, soccer and rowing. We sponsor exchange visits. We offer guidance and supervision to the dynamic young people that form part of our family through the Leos. We provide some health needs to people who need help. Sometimes our investment is steep. Sometimes it is as simple as a telephone call or a Christmas visit with a Poinsettia.

Overall, we as Port Dover Lions are proud of our record and feel we live up to the Lions International motto, WE SERVE.

We serve our community and we serve our district. During the past 70 years ten of our members have put time and energy into district office. Our Charter President, Harry Misner, became the first Deputy District Governor from Port Dover in 1942. He was followed into that role by Karl Kolbe, Jim Goodall, Allan Wicker, Parker Leney, Gord Johnson and John Wells. Dick Esseltine and Stewart Brown each served as zone chairmen and the current zone chair is our own immediate past president Jim Fekete.

One of our members, **Jack Maytham**, somehow found time to serve as Deputy District Governor, Governor and Chair of the Governors' Council.

We are proud of them and thank them for the hours of work they dedicated to Lions on our behalf.

Our club has had many memorable members. Lions such as **Doc McQueen**, who was not a doctor and **Doc Struthers** who was a doctor. We claim **Don Ivey**, the white suited host at the Summer Gardens dance hall. Young hockey players used to believe if **Howard Guiler** sharpened their skates they would soon be in the NHL. Two of our Past Presidents have been in Lions since the 50's; **Gord Johnson** and **Sonny Lowe**. **Walter Long** joined our club in 1949. He is our longest serving Past President. For the last 47 years he has been one of those we turned to for advice. And next year he will receive his 60 year service pin.

Walter, Gord and Sonny: you should take a bow.

Now, instead of finishing in the past I will look ahead. Earl Warren sometimes ended his radio program with a statement that reflected this sentiment.

We should cherish the past and we should embrace the present, BUT we should live for the future.

Port Dover Lions, We do recognize and appreciate our History, we are about to continue a good time in the present but we must live as Lions for the future because if we don't live for the future, when it comes time for our 100th, **Who will there be to remember us?**

Lee Buffin