2012-13 International President
An American Classic

Wayne A. Madden was born in Auburn, Indiana, USA, which today is a sleepy and typically American town of 13,000 people. Early in the twentieth century, it produced classic automobiles, including the famous Duesenberg, the Cord and the Auburn, that were far ahead of their time with power steering and front wheel drive.

Madden’s parents were hard workers who stressed education for their only son and two daughters. Madden played Little League baseball on a field built by the Auburn Lions. He also played high school basketball. He knew everyone in town and everyone knew him.

Madden first met Linda, the woman who would become his wife, halfway through his senior year of high school, when Linda was a junior. They both attended Manchester College and married shortly after Wayne graduated. “She had a very bubbly personality–easy to talk to, easy to get along with,” says Madden. Linda was struck by their shared values. “I knew almost instantly that family was important to him. And it didn’t make any difference if it was my family or his,” she says.

At Manchester, Madden began to see the world outside of Auburn, to realize that the needs of the wider world dwarfed the everyday problems of a small Indiana town. In the spring of 1968, when Madden was a senior, Martin Luther King Jr. came to campus to give a speech. Auburn had no African Americans students and Madden had no direct experience with the civil rights movement. Reverend King talked of his dreams and of “being free at last.” A month later he was dead.

Listening to Martin Luther King helped stir Madden’s conscience. “Some of the great things that came out of that era were not only for the benefit of African Americans. As Lions we know that everybody is entitled to an education. No one should suffer from preventable blindness. All children should be able to sit in a classroom and see the blackboard. If they have a vision problem and if their parents can’t fix it, we as Lions have to step in,” he says.

Madden taught high school for five years and earned a master’s degree in education. Then he joined Prudential as an insurance agent. He sold insurance for 11 years before buying an insurance agency in Auburn.

The Maddens stressed education. Linda taught second grade. Older daughter Jennifer and younger daughter Julie earned good grades in school, marched in the band and won awards in speech contests. When Jennifer, then in college, secured an internship in Washington, D.C., Madden, who was in Pennsylvania on business, surprised her. “When I got off the plane in D.C. there was my dad. I was never so happy to see him in my life. I really needed that little transition of getting safely to where I was going to be,” she says.

Madden wanted to give back to his community. Linda’s father had been president of the Lions club in nearby Waterloo. So in 1984, when a letter from the Auburn Lions came in the mail asking him to join, Madden quickly joined.

“I had seen Lions working projects at the fair or selling fruit on the street. I knew they had a scholarship program for high school students every year. That was the extent of my knowledge,” says Madden.

A defining moment for Madden as a Lion was an eyeglass mission trip to Honduras in 1995, a decade after he became a Lion. A young man with a disability slowly made his way to the eyeglass tent. “He asked if I had a pair of sunglasses. He tried on a pair of sunglasses and got a big smile on his face. When you see service actually do something for somebody is when you really become a Lion,” he says. Another highlight of his Lions service for Madden was bringing Operation Kid Sight to Indiana.

Hearkening back to the sense of community Madden developed in Auburn, the fiery compassion for others espoused by a slain civil rights leader and the desire of a small-town Lions club to give back to their community, as international president Madden will keep service in the forefront. “In a world of service, no child should go to bed hungry. No one should suffer from preventable blindness. In a world of service that should never happen. We have babies in Africa suffering from being born to HIV mothers. Those babies should be taken care of,” says Madden.