



2009-2010 International President
Encourages Lions to “Move to Grow”

Every Lion has a story to tell. Eberhard Wirfs could write a book. As a 17-year-old in Germany, he met Elvis, the most famous GI in the world at the time at a Gasthaus (a tavern/restaurant). When Elvis picked up a guitar to strum a soft German folk song, Wirfs accompanied him on piano. “One day I’ll sing a song from Germany for the world,” Elvis assured Wirfs. The King made good on his promise by singing Wooden Heart, based on a German folksong, in the 1961 film G.I. Blues.

As a young man, after an internship at a U.S. food company that was years ahead of its overseas counterparts in marketing – and only a few miles from Oak Brook – Wirfs took over his father’s small food company in Germany and pioneered a food industry segment in Europe. “We transferred the frozen food concept to Europe and you will find our company wherever people like to eat well out of the home such as at restaurants, airplanes and railway stations,” he proudly explains.

An Historical Presidency

Wirfs is making history in another way as the first German president of Lions Clubs International. The Frankfurt area-native – who learned English in school because he wanted to travel and meet people from other cultures – now leads the service association that prides itself on its international character and worldwide appeal.

Our new president relishes his membership because hands-on service stirs his soul. “As a Lion you are asked for help. As a Lion you are needed. If somebody is needed, he is able to contribute,” he says. “This enriches our life. Sometimes with only a little money, but much more with your hands, you give the help that is needed. It’s not only satisfying, it’s important. It’s important as a citizen to have this kind of responsibility in the world.”

Early Hardship

A Lions pin was the linchpin for Wirfs' becoming a Lion. In 1985, he met with a friend. "And he always wears his pin. And one day I ask him what is this? I did not know," recounts Wirfs. The friend invited him to the Hofheim AM Taunus Lions Club and Wirfs soon was wearing his own pin.

Wirfs' club took a special interest in those with multiple sclerosis. Lions provided a van for them and treated them to a daylong boat trip on the shimmering Rhein River. "It was like Christmas for them. They were so happy to be out on a beautiful day," recalls Wirfs. Being around those with a disability deepened his appreciation for the tenacity of the human spirit.

Wirfs was born in 1942. His father was a medical officer. Evacuating Frankfurt during the war, Wirf's mother took her three young children to a farm. "It was a very bad time – hungry and just barely able to get by," he says. "My mother was alone, with her three children. She worked very hard just to get her kids out of hunger."

In his travels today, Wirfs can't bear to pass by hungry children. "If Eberhard has no food or drink to give him, he maybe touches his hand. We heard it's not a good idea to give a child money. It's better to give him love," says Margit, his wife.

A Lions Leader

As a Lion, Wirfs was a quick learner. In a short span, he progressed to become a Lions leader in Germany and then worldwide. He served as club president, zone and region chairperson, district governor and council chairperson before being elected in 2002 in Osaka, Japan, for a two-year term as an international director.

One of Wirfs' major achievements was helping implement Lions Quest in Germany. "It's an anti-drug program," says Wirfs. "It's also a program to learn to say no. To say no to drugs. To say no to bad behavior. To say no to negative influence. And Lions Quest is to be seen from my point of view as a core program of Lions Clubs International in the future."

Move to Grow

The overarching theme of Wirfs presidency will be "move to grow." Lions need momentum, or movement, to grow and progress. Nothing that remains motionless moves forward. Progress grows from purposeful movement.

Lions are poised to serve as no other organization can. "There are many things you can't do with money. You need manpower. That's what we have," says Wirfs. "We are really good at getting results."