

International President Joe Preston's Visit to Sydney

On 3-7 September, District N5 had the distinct honour of hosting a visit of International President Joe Preston and his wife Lion Joni. They arrived at Sydney International Airport in the late afternoon on 3 September and left in the early afternoon on 7 September. After the visit, I received a card from them saying, "Thank you for a beautiful time here in Sydney. Your planning and care were excellent..."

During their stay, we organised a number of visits and activities for them. I provide a brief account of these below.

Before I do so, I'd like to first answer an often asked question: "How come IP Joe has chosen to visit N5 after a brief trip to New Zealand following the ANZI Pacific Forum in Adelaide?" My standard reply has always been "Oh, we've just been lucky".

Yes, we have been lucky in a sense that N5 is the home District of IPIP Barry Palmer. Since Lion Joe was inducted as an Associate Member of Sydney Chinese (my home Club) in Busan in 2012, I had been trying to invite him to attend the N5 Convention in 2014 when he became International President. In June 2013, Lion Palmer came to our assistance, writing, "It is customary for the International President to visit the convention of the Immediate Past President. If you would like Joe Preston to attend your convention can you let me know the date and venue so he can keep his diary clear for that?" After rounds of correspondence, it was apparent that the N5 Convention 2014 dates were unsuitable as these would clash with the Orient and Southeast Asia Forum dates. Subsequently, on 17 July 2013, I received the following email from Lion Joe, "Let's put our efforts into my attending in September of 2014. Perhaps the best three days are September 4-6, with me leaving early on the 7th." He went on to provide me with a "wish list" and asked if it would

be possible to attend a function of Barry's home club, attend a district function such as a dinner, visit

local projects and attend the [Lions Skills Sharing] Expo. Equipped with this green light, I then went on preparing for this important visit of our honoured guests. Between then and last month, I regularly provided Lion Barry and Lion Joe with periodical updates on the progress of the preparations.

When organising IP Joe's itinerary, I had to strike a balance between his wish list, the relevance of the visits/activities and always bearing in mind not to overtire them in the process.

So the big day arrived. Joined by Council Chairman Warren and Lion Marilyn, Emma and I went to meet them at the airport. Lion John Luo was also there at my request to help with the luggage. When they came out from Customs, Marilyn presented Joni with a rose bouquet. Then we went straight to the hotel. After checking in, the six of us had a quiet dinner together, then we retired for the night.



On Thursday morning, we visited the Sydney Eye Hospital. I am grateful to Lion Prof Frank Billson for arranging the visit and acting as our Guide throughout. It is gratifying to see the many facilities donated to the Hospital by Lions. The Preston's even had their photos taken at the Lions NSW Eye Bank, a major sight saving facility set up with the help of Lions. It was pleasing to learn that eye research conducted at the Hospital is among the front runners in the field worldwide - for exam-



International President Joe Preston's Visit to Sydney (contd)

ple, with the help of laser technology, they are now able to dissect a cornea into six different parts for six different purposes. The Eye Hospital is situated in one of the older buildings on Macquarie Street. Taking the hour's tour involved climbing up and down flights of staircases, apparently playing havoc with some of us who have sore backs or sore knees!



Anyway, after the visit, we had lunch at a restaurant in the Botanic Gardens and returned to the hotel for a rest before we set off again in the early evening for a visit to Hornsby Lions, the home Club of IPIP Barry. Due to official duties, Lion Barry was in Japan that evening and could not be there at the meeting. Club President Graham Hosking and



members collectively played hosts to their International guests. The setting of the meeting was a function room inside the Events Cinema at Hornsby Westfield with a maximum capacity of 48. Considering the occasion and limitations on the capacity, I believe Lion Graham did a great job. In addition to the official party, all the Club members who were in Sydney were there. On top of that, Matt Dean MP and Zone Chairman David Erskine, guests and representatives from neighbouring Clubs in the Zone were also in attendance. Some suggested a venue holding more people would be required, but I needed to point out that this was a Club function and the wishes of the Club executives had to be respected and supported.

The evening's proceedings went smoothly. These just panned out in exactly the same manner as Lion Graham and I have meticulously planned. It was a delight to witness Maija Pelham being inducted as a new Lion by IP Joe.

Of the three full days that IP Joe was with us, Thursday was the lightest in terms of activities loading.

On Friday morning shortly before 11 am, we arrived at the outskirts of the Headquarters of the Australian Red Cross (NSW). Lion President Jason and a number of Directors of Sydney Chinese Lions, together with several reporters from the Chinese press were there waiting for us. They were to accompany us to attend a special Cheque Presentation and Plaque Unveiling Ceremony held by the Red Cross.

When we entered the Red Cross premises, Ms Jody



International President Joe Preston's Visit to Sydney (contd)

Broun, Executive Officer of Red Cross was there with her full team of staff including a National Board Director and two NSW Board Directors. We were given a warm welcome and started with a mingling and photo session in the form of a morning tea party. When the big moment arrived, after a few speeches, IP Joe and President Jason presented Red Cross with a \$30,000 cheque, being net proceeds of the Club's Charity Ball 2014. President Jason remarked, "Since 2006, Sydney Chinese Lions have now donated in excess of \$100,000 to Australian Red Cross, a fitting donation to help celebrate Red Cross' 100 years of humanitarian service in Australia." - a point echoed by IP Joe in fervour.

The Cheque Presentation was followed by a Plaque Unveiling Ceremony by IP Joe and Jody. The plaque



is now permanently mounted at the Red Cross HQ and it recognises the contribution of Lions and Sydney Chinese Lions in particular over the past decade.



Many of us are aware that several years back, an MOU was signed between Lions Clubs International and Red Cross in Geneva promoting cooperation between these two major Service organisations. The Ceremony that IP Joe co-officiated at the Australian Red Cross (NSW) Headquarters could be seen as an extension of the spirit of that cooperation.

After the Ceremony at Red Cross, we headed to the New South Wales Parliament House for an official luncheon. The luncheon was hosted by the Hon Don Harwin MLC, President of the Legislative Council of the NSW Parliament. The arrangement was done through the office of Stephen Bromhead MP, President of the NSW Parliamentary Lions. Don is no stranger to me as he had regularly attended functions, including the Charity Balls, hosted by Sydney Chinese Lions. The setting of the luncheon was in the President's Dining Room, a place that her Majesty once used when the Regal last visited NSW some years back. According to Don, we now seem to have a tradition - for three years in a row, we've had three International Presidents as Guests of Honour in his Dining Room. We had Lion Wayne Madden in 2012, Lion Barry Palmer in 2013 and Lion Joe Preston this year. Perhaps we should keep up



with this tradition in future years. At the luncheon, IP Joe was also introduced to key members of the N5 Cabinet. Around 20 of us were there that day.

There was to be a visit to the Maternity Ward at Manly Hospital in the afternoon. After lunch, we went for a stroll around the Opera House and Circular Quay before we caught a ferry to Manly. The Prestons were pretty relaxed by then. The ferry ride was uneventful, but for Lion Joni who was visiting Sydney for the first time, it would have been a

International President Joe Preston's Visit to Sydney (contd)

rather pleasant experience. It had been raining a fair bit those few days, but I prayed for good weather during the ferry ride and thankfully my prayers were heard. The Prestons were seated towards the starboard bow of the boat and had a pretty good view of the Opera House from the harbour. It was smooth sailing, so to speak, until we reached the stretch of water between the two Heads, then it got pretty choppy. Thank goodness it was not a stormy day, two or three minutes of choppy waters didn't cause too much of a problem. I was advised to warn the Prestons beforehand about this, but had decided against it, lest it would spoil the fun. On this occasion, it proved that I made the right choice.

When we were at the Manly Hospital, we were shown a Panda baby warmer and foetal monitor that Manly, Balgowlah, Frenchs Forest and Pittwater Lions have donated. We even met up with a new born baby Nelson and his parents Gayle and Duncan. Coincidentally, young Nelson had received treatment



from the baby warmer the night before. His parents were so appreciative of Lions' work that Duncan is now seriously considering of becoming a Lion himself.

Friday's activities were reasonably light but the heavy duty was yet to come.

On Saturday, we left the hotel and set off for Castle Hill RSL Club at around 8 am. Starting from 9 am until 6:15 pm we had a full day's Lions Skills Sharing Expo. Apart from the two Plenary sessions, one given by IP Joe in the morning and another given by me in the afternoon, there were a number of break out sessions. Participants could choose from one of the two strands - a skills sharing strand and a health awareness strand. There were 9 presenters for the former strand and 8 for the latter, making a total of 17. Details of the presenters and their topics can be found on the District N5 website - www.lionsclubssydney.org.au.

The Expo is a new initiative that I've introduced as District Governor. Over the past years, I witnessed Lions coming together at District training sessions. Ever so often the topics evolved around key Membership and Leadership issues and the sessions delivered by a handful of senior Lions. While I recognise these are important bread and butter issues that we need to constantly address, I feel that we should also make room for the less senior Lions so that they have a platform to come forward to share with others their skills and knowledge on various topics. If done properly, this helps us as a District at two key levels: leadership - we could encourage less senior Lions to come out from the wood work and be identified as future leaders; membership - Lions who get involved in the Expo may feel they have ownership of the event, thereby increasing their interest in the organisation and instilling a sense of belonging in them. So I set about organising and promoting this inaugural Skills Expo. As an innovative attempt, the outcome was satisfactory.



International President Joe Preston's Visit to Sydney (contd)

We had the varied topics and presenters as stated above and we had over 100 Lions attending various sessions throughout the day. IP Joe attended a good number of sessions and felt that we had good quality presentations.

The final session of the Expo was an inaugural District PR Forum. I have appointed four District PR Coordinators this year under the leadership of Lion Derek Margerison. With the help of Zone Chairpersons, I have now assembled a team of PR experts/enthusiasts. To date, we have over 15 on the team and I'm hoping it will reach 20 by 2015. The Forum was well attended with many Lions voicing and sharing their views on the topic. Those who were there would agree that the PR side of things in N5 is moving along quite nicely - we are determined to squash the myth - that Lions are the world's best kept secret!

The Gala Dinner in the evening organised in honour of the Prestons was a fitting finale to the visit of our distinguished International guests. IP Joe, CC Warren and I, without previous arrangements, all put on IP Joe's Presidential Tie coincidentally for the Dinner. As for me, I purposely saved the tie for the Dinner and when I made this remark to the International President, I received a nod and a big grin of approval. At my table, we were honoured to have the Prestons, the Lathams, DG Ian Warren and wife Marilyn from N4 as well as PCC Lou Onley and wife Kaye.

At the dinner, not only did we celebrate the success of the inaugural Lions Skills Sharing Expo, we also



celebrated the induction of seven new Leos, 14 new Lions and two Charter presentations - Lions Club of Sydney Ancho Sudan and Lions Club of New South Wales Campus, both chartered in early August. (Does sound a bit like *the 12 days of Christmas*, doesn't it?) Guess who did the inductions and Charter presentations? If you don't know by now, I'm not going to tell you! What a high privilege and distinct honour it was for those who were inducted that evening! Congratulations!

All these activities were done on stage in an orderly manner, one group after another - starting with the new Leos, the new Lions and then the two new Clubs. When these were over, I invited all new members of the Lions family to come forward to the dance floor again for a "family" picture. One might imagine that with over 70 individuals involved, it would have been quite chaotic. Do take a look at the group photo and decide for yourself if it had been chaotic at all. Can you spot where IP Joe is? Certainly not at the back! Certainly not standing either!

When the group photos were done, I then brought about a planned mayhem. I asked the new members



International President Joe Preston's Visit to Sydney (contd)

to stay put and invited all the Lions seated to come forward to shake their hands and welcome them. Boy, you don't have to be there to imagine the noise and bustle that followed! After a good several minutes, I had to settle them down to bring in the next segment which required everyone to pay attention. I was holding a wireless microphone and I thought I may have to repeat myself six or seven times before I can regain control of the situation. But we did have a well disciplined mob and only after four attempts of "Lions, could I invite you to be seated to start the next segment?", all were seated and silent.

IP Joe's theme is "Strengthen the Pride". Many of us are aware by now that he actually composed the song, wrote the lyrics and recorded the theme song himself. When the whole house became silent, I announced that IP Joe was going to sing his theme song to us in person. What a treat it was for those who have never heard him singing before! Mid way through the song, he invited Joni to join him. We had a double treat! (photo 16)

I must commend Galaxy and Aaron who worked in the audio visual studio for us that evening. They played the backing music at the exact moment that

I wanted it played. I remember looking up to where the AV studio was, raised my arm and pronounced the word "Music!" As soon as the last syllable was uttered, there was music!

Of course, IP Joe's performance brought the house down. At that moment, I suddenly felt an urge to sing him a song in reply. I had a well wishing song "*May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You*" which I learnt at my Primary School graduation ceremony. To reciprocate, I sang it in the best manner I could. According to one of my senior Cabinet colleagues, "...he [Anthony] gave a sincere rendition of a song he had learnt in his childhood. The applause was deafening."

The moment I finished singing the song, IP Joe rushed out to the dance floor and gave me a big bear hug. I said quietly to myself then, "Mate, it's all worth it!"

The night concluded with exchange of bannerettes and gifts. I was given permission to announce Lion Joni's induction into Sydney Chinese Lions as one of the Club's star studded line up of Associate Members. By doing so, Lion Joni was actually following her husband's footsteps in Busan two years ago.

Lions in N5 are extremely grateful for the opportunity to play hosts to IP Joe and Lion Joni. We are both honored and privileged. The Preston's visit has helped us to re-invigorate ourselves and our determination to Serve the less fortunate. They have spent much time with us and left us with numerous memorable moments. We will cherish these for years to come. We wish Lions Joe and Joni well and hope that they will continue to have a productive and pleasant journey ahead leading the global Lions family to Strengthen the Pride.

By DG Anthony Cheung

