

**July 2008**

### **2008-2009 International President Knows Who the Heroes Are**

New International President Al Brandel is down to earth. But his life has been cinematic. As a police officer, he rushed to help a child run over by a car. Years later, he played a part in responding to the September 11 attacks.

Turn the lens on his childhood, and a Frank Capra movie breaks out. Brandel spent his boyhood in a green-lawned neighborhood, with a hardworking World War II vet father, a mother always ready with dinner, and four siblings. And he was the slugger on a baseball team enshrined in the Little League Hall of Fame.

Movies are an apt reference for Brandel. His presidential year will contain drama, heroes, and miracles. And by the final reel, he wants Lions to understand that they are the real stars of the show.

### **Membership Has its Rewards**

Brandel's highlights as a Lion include the time he and his wife Maureen worked on a Lions-Habitat for Humanity home. A young girl who was to live in the house showed them her new room. "It was very emotional," he says. "It's not just writing a check that makes you a Lion. It's when you're painting the walls in a house you've just built. And you see the people – that it will be their house."

Brandel joined the West Hempstead Lions Club in 1975 while he was a police officer for Nassau County. A friend, Frank Anzalone, was a hemophiliac. Anzalone was a Lion, and the club put together a blood drive. "The first year Frank asked me to give blood at the drive, and I did," says Brandel. "The second year he asked me to work on the blood drive, and I did. The third year he asked me to work on the blood drive, and to become a Lion."

Brandel helped revive the club as its president in 1977. His goal was to launch a signature project – and the club agreed to provide a "jaws of life" rescue tool for the community. Lions members loaned the club \$5,400 to pay for it. Brandel figured it would take three or four years to raise funds to repay members. But it only took one year. "My most rewarding year as a Lion was when I was club president," he says. "You see the immediate effect of what you do."

### **Raised to Serve**

Volunteering ran in Brandel's family. Despite working two jobs, his father "had time for the community," says Brandel. In college, a friend convinced Brandel to take a test for the police department. He did well on the test, and the job. He put in 35 years before retiring. And learned how to handle his emotions. "I understood I had to react in a certain way to be effective," he says.

The events of September 11, 2001 put his ability to handle tough situations to the test. Brandel took reports for many of the 400 missing Nassau County residents, and worked with Lions' leaders from New York and elsewhere to coordinate recovery support efforts. Later, he volunteered for a bereavement retreat. And trudged to doorsteps to notify families when victims' remains were found.

By then, Brandel was a detective with the police department's Juvenile Aid Bureau. He investigated missing children, child abuse, and juvenile crime. "I really understood I could make somebody's life a little better," he says.

### **Meeting Maureen**

On their first date, Brandel told his future wife Maureen that he was "a little involved with the Lions." "What's a Lion?" she asked. "I was really impressed that a 40-year-old man who could spend his time doing whatever he wanted chose to spend that free time in a volunteer organization."

Brandel became an international director the year they married, and she traveled the world with him. Maureen joined the Melville Lions Club in 1999, became its president, and then district leadership chairperson. Brandel joined her club as an associate member. "She serves as a role model to spouses that you can have your own career as a Lion."

### **Heroes of Service**

As a Lion, Brandel has hand-delivered corneas for transplant, worked with UNICEF to ensure children in disaster areas could continue their education, and saw a Lions district in South Africa feed multitudes. "Lions don't understand the impact they have on the community," he says.

"The real modern-day heroes may never be on TV or have a book written about them," Brandel says. "But the things they do, like bringing a food basket, put a smile on somebody's face. Lions Clubs are making a big impact in people's lives. My role is to let everybody know the miracles happening around the world – and that they can make miracles happen in their backyard."