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Lions elect Linthicum man international president

Kusiak is first Marylander to serve as group's leader

By Kayleigh Kulp
Sun Staff

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Good luck catching up to Clement F. Kusiak.

The retired Linthicum engineer, an energetic civic leader, has just become the first Marylander to lead the world's largest service club, Lions Clubs International, with 1.4 million members and 46,000 chapters globally.

He's on the road constantly, traversing airports and hotels nationwide to set direction for the group, which mixes civic service, charitable work and business networking.

"I feel excited," said Kusiak about taking over as president, saying that his achievement required a lot of planning in the past two years.

Kusiak will have little time to savor his election. Sworn in July 9 at the club's 87th annual convention in Detroit, he expects to spend the next 12 months living out of his suitcase.

His work will involve forging partnerships with businesses and foundations, visiting hundreds of Lions and young Leos clubs and following up on the Lions club's largest endeavor, eyesight conservation.

Members of the organization see his appointment as significant - and rare - for the state's 8,000 Lions.

"Because Maryland is not one of your larger states, it will probably be the last time it will happen," said Kent Eitemiller, 2nd vice president of the Freedom District Lions Club in Pikesville, and among 14 people from that club who went to the convention to support Kusiak.

Kusiak said he was drawn to the Baltimore Brooklyn Lions Club as a child when the group put on Christmas events and other community programs.

Trained as a mechanical engineer, he was invited to become a member of the Brooklyn club in 1967 at age 25. Over the years he held various offices in the organization, including district governor.

For his work on such projects as the Lions Eye Health Program, designed to educate people about glaucoma and diabetic eye disease, he was honored with the international organization's Ambassador of

Good Will Award, among other awards.

Thomas Bartnick, fellow Brooklyn Lions member of 12 years, said Kusiak chaired many events and fund-raisers, like the club's annual Easter event, carnival and chicken fry.

"He's an ambitious person," Bartnick said. "He set this goal many, many years ago. ... He's been a volunteer all his life. It's something you have to have in your heart."

Bartnick and other members of Kusiak's home club are not only proud of his accomplishment, but also enthusiastic about the international president being a member of their club.

New duties

Kusiak's duties will include setting the future direction for the association and overseeing the Lions Clubs International Foundation and the foundation's SightFirst program.

He said he is looking forward to presiding over international board meetings, where he and the Lions' board of directors will meet with government officials and diplomats to make them aware of the Lions.

"We'd like all of them to know what we do throughout the world," he said.

Kusiak said one of his biggest plans is to begin a Lions club based out of John Hopkins Hospital.

Because the hospital has four medical institutions, said Kusiak, "It's a great opportunity for members of those schools to form Lions clubs."

He will also encourage present Lions members to pursue goals at the local level.

Kusiak's responsibilities require him to travel often. Though his son is grown, his wife travels with him. And he makes it back to his home turf from time to time. Recently, he was in town to oversee an eye exam program sponsored by the Lions at the Brooklyn Park Senior Center.

Future plans

After his term is up, Kusiak said he will be chairman of the Lions Club International Foundation, which provides education and disaster relief programs - and he plans to return to his local home club to do "any normal things a Lions club member would do."

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