

Multiple District Nineteen Lions Clubs International

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To my fellow Lions:

It seems an eternity that little more than three weeks ago, March 6 and 7, a wonderful contingent of Lions from around MD19 gathered for the first stop on the annual tour of District conventions, the District 19–H Spring Conference in Langley, B.C. It was a terrific convention. Great energy, wonderful fellowship wrapped in a unique package that truly honored the Lions of District 19–H and celebrated Patty Allen-White’s year as the 19–H Governor.

For Susan and I the surreal, coronavirus journey we are all now facing began Friday night in Langley. While all of us were enjoying the parade of 19–H talent entertaining the conference attendees, Susan and I started getting flooded with cell phone calls from members of our Lions club. Once we were able to actually connect, we got news that one of our fellow Vancouver Lions was in the hospital, in a coma, on a respirator, the first COVID-19 case in my home town 310 miles south of the 19–H festivities. We had not seen our friend for almost a month— a few days visiting his daughters and grandchildren in King County, a Valentines vacation with his wife, and nightly volunteer work for A.A.R.P to prepare tax returns for seniors had taken him away from contact with us, the Club and our other Club members most of February.

Back home Friday the following week, Susan’s school, along with all other public schools in Washington, were ordered closed for 6 weeks through April 24. And then, one by one, as governmental recommendations and orders were announced or imposed and their conference registrations dwindled, all eight of the remaining MD19 Districts were forced to cancel their plans to honor their Lions and celebrate their DGs’ year. Lions Clubs International postponed and then cancelled its convention in Singapore along the way. “Social distancing” became a household term: Club meetings postponed; Projects and fundraisers sidelined; Elections (club, district, MD19 and LCI) interrupted; Gatherings quashed. And even our MD19 staff, along with almost everyone else, is now confined to staying at or working from home.

Wow! Don’t blink!

So, what is a Lion to do? That is a question I have been fielding, directly or indirectly, since the coronavirus adventure began. How do we hold a club meeting when meetings are banned and our meeting places are closed? How do we fund–raise when we have to stay at home? How do we help our communities when we are supposed to stay away from people? How can we raise money for our causes when our only fund–raiser of the

year had to be cancelled? How do we elect DGs and VDGs? How can we elect club officers when we can't get together?

The answer is a bit trite, but true: We do what Lions clubs always do. Together we come up with solutions that help our communities.

“We Serve” may look a little different, for a while or maybe longer. Our communities' needs may be different, for a while or maybe longer. How we go about figuring out community needs and how to fill those needs may be different, for a while or maybe longer. But needs are still there, need has not gone away. Vision, diabetes, childhood cancer, environment, hunger... it is all still there waiting for our solutions.

Lions are experts at broken-field running. Lions do not throw up their hands and give up in the face of adversity— there has never been any undertaking by any Lions club that hasn't faced some adversity along the way. Lions figure things out. My theme for this year has been “Together”: We get together, pool our thoughts, our ideas, our resources, our (there is no such thing as stupid) questions, and we come up with answers and solve problems together. We do things together that we could never accomplish or do by ourselves. The adversity of the coronavirus outbreak has not changed the simple fact that we are Lions, together.

That's all fine and dandy, you say, but we can't even hold a meeting!

Let's think about that a minute. Maybe you can't do your club business right now the same way you have done it in the past. But maybe there are other ways.

Lionism is not about holding meetings, it is about serving. We meet to figure out the who, what, where, when, why and how of serving. Meetings are tools, means to an end. Meetings are nothing more than a way to communicate with each other, pool our collective wisdom, together.

Here is a news-flash: Face-to face meetings are just one way to get together to make decisions. There are now a lot more ways for Lions to talk to each other, see each other, communicate, make decisions, and support each other than there was when herding everyone to some place to hold a meeting was the only way. Everyone has a phone. Almost everyone has a smart phone, iPad/tablet or a computer. Make a few phone calls; Invite your club members to a conference call (*see*, www.freeconferencecall.com); Hold a video conference so you can all see each other's smiling faces (*see*, www.zoom.com); Host a “Virtual Happy Hour” for your club mates for some socialization (there's that www.zoom.com thing again); Check out Skype, or Facetime, or... the list goes on. There are literally dozens of options that let you meet, talk, make decisions, enjoy a cocktail with friends, without having to dip into your pocketbook (or get out of your pajamas). Surely one of them is perfect for you and your club.

With adversity comes opportunity. Here is another news-flash: Virtually any member of your club under the age of 40 holds business meetings on their phones or in front of their computers, not in person in some conference room or sitting around a table in some restaurant. And, they have been doing business that way for several years. For them, hanging around the house or working from home is no big deal. It certainly doesn't stop them from meeting ("collaborating", to be PC) to get their work done. There is no reason for us to stop being Lions, or to put our clubs on hold, simply because we have to be Lions from home for a few weeks (or more) while the coronavirus pandemic runs its course.

For those of us with résumés longer than 40 years, how about we treat the current shutdown of North America as an opportunity to learn how Zoom (my virtual meeting choice), GoToMeeting, Ring Central, Free Conference Call, What's App, or other, scary, social media tools work. We ordinarily tend to spend so much of our time working on club projects and fundraising that there is no time to be bothered learning about business tools that, until now, we really had no reason to learn. Now you have some time. The luxury of that time will not last forever. Take advantage of that time to learn some new tricks. Doing so is a lot better for you than watching Wheel Of Fortune reruns.

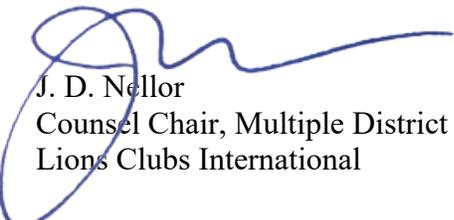
And even if you are a proud luddite and have no desire to be otherwise, you can still serve your club and your community: Be proactive. Make a few phone calls, check on club mates, friends and relatives and see if any need a helping hand.

One of my mentors used to say that at any given point in time you are either moving forward or you are falling back. Energy spent on staying the same is wasted energy— staying the same is not moving forward. Don't waste time hand-wringing in frustration that you can't do things the same way you have done them in the past. Get around the "can't" roadblock— focus on "can". Move forward. Do what you can do today, don't worry about what you used to do that you can't do today.

I am not omniscient. I do not know whether we are working through a bump in the road or whether we are facing a fundamental change in the way we will have to be Lions. But I do know that if we stick with what we have always done as Lions, if we focus on what we can do now, our clubs will keep moving forward and we will all be prepared to serve our communities no matter what the future holds.

Be safe Lions.

Together, we've got this.



J. D. Nellor
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Lions Clubs International