



Former president will visit Oak Brook to honor Lions

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Just days after President Obama called on citizens to write to soldiers, help in soup kitchens and devote time to assist others, former President Jimmy Carter will come to Oak Brook to continue his long legacy of service.

On Tuesday, Jan. 27, Carter will visit Lions Clubs International headquarters to dedicate a "Gift of Sight" bronze sculpture, which is a gift from The Carter Center, a not-for-profit group working to advance human rights.

Since Carter is a longtime Lion, the statue is a thank-you to the organization for its latest donation of more \$203 million for international sight programs and research through its SightFirst initiative.

Al Brandel, president of Lions Clubs International, said it was easy to convince Carter to travel to Oak Brook.

"I didn't have to twist his arm," he said with a laugh.

Brandel said most of the \$203 million was raised by local Lions Clubs throughout the world, including groups in Bloomingdale, Glen Ellyn and Naperville. Lions Clubs International is the world's largest service club organization with 1.3 million members.

"We are so proud of the clubs we have around the world doing things in their own communities that sometimes don't even come to our attention," Brandel said.

While Lions Clubs serve their communities in whatever way they see fit - rebuilding after disasters, helping needy families during the holidays - the group also has a long history of working to prevent and reverse blindness.

Brandel said the club forged a partnership with The Carter Center in 1996 to fight river blindness, which is caused by infection.

"It was just a marriage made in heaven" Brandel said. "We have almost totally eliminated river blindness in South America and now our focus will be on Africa."

The life-size sculpture Carter will dedicate Tuesday depicts a child leading a man who lost his sight to river blindness.

Carter's dedication corresponds with a two-day symposium that runs Monday and Tuesday at the club's Oak Brook headquarters. Representatives from organizations and governments worldwide will gather to discuss youth development and blindness prevention.

Brandel said the event attracted attention of major not-for-profit groups, including The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Carter's visit, he said, will help the initiatives gain more visibility.

"The attention we bring to ourselves and our good works will not only increase our membership but improve the communities we are serving," Brandel said. "It is a synergy of us all getting together and giving something bigger and better to the people we serve."

For details, visit lionsclubs.org and lcif.org.