

Touchstone Story #62 Forever Green



Photo Caption: In August 2011, Lions and partner volunteers in India planted 3.4 million trees in a single day.

Lions have been planting trees to help save the environment since the organization's earliest days. But in 2011 International President Wing-Kun Tam of Hong Kong, China, challenged the association to join in the effort as never before by asking Lions to plant 1 million trees within one year. "We want to wrap the earth in greenery," Tam told members in *LION Magazine*.

Lions, known for going above and beyond expectations when presented with a challenge, took Tam's goal and blew it sky high.

Multiple District 324 in Southern India played a large role in the initiative's success. On August 25, 2011, more than 100,000 Lions from 2,855 clubs coordinated with local governments, schools, police, family and friends to plant 3.4 million trees in just 12



hours—a world record. In total, from July 2011 to June 2012, Lions worldwide planted 15 million trees.

The challenge helped address a critical environmental problem. Due to human activity, the Earth's forests have been disappearing at alarming rates, especially since 1980. Deforestation impacts the whole planet. Converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, trees provide fresh air and stabilize many ecosystems. At the same time, they give shade from the sun, provide a livelihood for millions and beautify the landscape. Trees are the breath of life.

Lions' monumental effort took much preparation. In fact, Multiple District 324 had been planning the event ever since hearing then-Second Vice President Tam mention the idea at Lions Day at the United Nations in 2009. The Lions of Southern India took time to identify locations—such as school campuses, private farms, major roads and protected forests—where trees were needed and worked with the Indian government to obtain some of the saplings for free.

India's Lions put just as much effort into what would happen to the young trees after the big event. For about two years, the saplings would need to be cared for by volunteers. In many cases, the Lions turned to the students who had assisted in planting the trees for help. For example, students in a village near Hyderabad took charge of 1,450 saplings, making sure the trees had enough water and care to thrive. In return, the youth received an education in ecology and experienced the joy of watching their trees grow.

Lions in India helped take Tam's tree planting to new heights in 2011. By sharing the excitement of helping the environment with the next generation, they also planted seeds of stewardship and volunteerism that will grow for years to come

