

Touchstone Story #32 Going to Extremes



U.S. Navy Admiral Richard E. Byrd carried the Lions flag with him on historic flights over the North and South Poles in the 1920s.

U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd Jr., the famed polar explorer and pioneer aviator, was an admirably loyal Lion. Early in the organization's history, he made a pair of gallant gestures, signaling the day when Lion ideals would spread everywhere, even to the earth's highest settled latitudes.

A member of the Washington, D.C., Lions Club, Byrd brought the club's flag with him on May 9, 1926, on his historic flight over the North Pole with Floyd Bennett. He would pack the flag again in a successful but danger-fraught mission to fly over the South Pole on November 28, 1929. Byrd shared his Lions pride in a letter to delegates at the 1926 Lions Clubs International Convention in San Francisco. "We carried the Lions club flag



with us to the top of the world and felt it was the greatest possible honor to do so,” he wrote.

The Lions flag was not firmly planted in Antarctic ice until 1959, as part of the International Geophysical Year, when a group of 16 scientists and support personnel at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station received their charter for the 59ers Lions Club. When the club became inactive, Antarctica again became the only continent without a Lions club.

Today’s southernmost active Lions are members of the Porvenir Club in the Chilean province of Tierra del Fuego. At the opposite end of the earth, the Barrow Lions Club serves small communities in Alaska’s North Slope, 320 miles above the Arctic Circle.