

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

LIONS NEWS BRIEFS

PAST PRESIDENT ÅKESTAM DIES AT AGE 89



Sten and Martha Åkestam (right) meet with King Carl Gustaf XVI and Queen Silvia of Sweden. The past president served as a member of the board of the King's Foundation for young people in Sweden.

His youngest daughter had died of kidney failure when she was 14, and Sten Åkestam of Sweden was a staunch advocate for health, particularly diabetes education, when he served as international president in 1986-87. He urged diabetes testing in a letter he wrote to popular syndicated columnist Ann Landers, and his appeal was printed in more than 1,200 newspapers. A Lion since 1956 and a groundbreaking leader as a club president, district governor and international president, Åkestam died in Stockholm on Dec. 18. "He will be remembered as a compassionate man with smiling eyes who touched many lives," read an email sent to LCI staff.

As president, Åkestam expanded Lions Quest beyond the United States and the United Kingdom into seven new nations. He also favored admitting women as Lions, and at his outgoing international convention in 1987, held not long after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a case involving Rotary that excluding women was discriminatory, Lions voted to admit women.

As a school boy, tall and fit, Åkestam was a champion sprinter and sports fanatic. He first learned of Lions while in his 20s when he saw the logo on car windshields in Stockholm. "At first, I thought it was some sort of organization of automobile owners," he told the LION. It didn't take long for Åkestam to get up to speed—and then zoom ahead as a trailblazing Lion. He organized the first International Youth Camp in 1961 and four years later initiated Sweden's First Red Feather Campaign. Lions smashed the non-Lion fundraising record in Sweden by raising 1 million kronor (\$183,000).

Lions who served under Åkestam's leadership cherished his willingness to lead by example. In his farewell message to Lions in 1987 in the LION, identifying himself as an intrepid Viking, he wrote, "It was my honor to have served as your helmsman during this voyage."