

Tribute to Derek Smith

by Hilary Evans

on presenting the Award for Long Service to UNA Twickenham and Richmond



While we're marking this special UN 75th anniversary –it seems a good idea to note another special number: 67.

Why is 67 special? Well, it's a prime number and quite a large one too, but what makes it a really amazing number is that it's the number of years that **Derek Smith of Twickenham** has been a member of UNA. He joined in 1953 and was first a member of the Wandsworth branch and then, when he got married in 1960 and moved to Twickenham, the Twickenham branch (now Twickenham & Richmond – TRUNA). His wife Estelle joined at around that time too but, sadly, she died two years ago.

I asked at Whitehall Court whether Derek might be the longest-serving member in the country but they haven't kept membership records going back that far so were unable to tell me. They did say though that they thought it entirely possible.

And not only might Derek be the longest-serving member but I think he must also over the years have ranked pretty high amongst the most active members, particularly at the local level. For many, many years he filled the roles of Chair or Secretary of the local branch, and whichever of those posts he was in, he worked with outstanding dedication, enthusiasm and efficiency. He led branch campaigning on a range of UN issues from peacekeeping to humanitarian relief and always made sure he was very well-informed on all the causes he took up.

He organised public meetings, exhibitions and fundraising events, maintained contact with the local MP, wrote articles for the local press, organised MUNGAs, organised an annual UN Civic service reminding the local council to fly the UN flag on the civic flagpole every year, and recruited new members (at one time I believe the Branch had door to door recruitment campaigns!)

One of Derek's recruits was Sir Vince Cable. Just before Vince Cable was first elected MP for Twickenham, he knocked on Derek's door canvassing support ... and left having been convinced by Derek that he should join UNA – and true to his promise, he did (progressing eventually to become President of the London & SE Region and meeting his second wife in the process!)

In the 1990s Derek heard Trisha Rogers speak at a UNA meeting in Richmond and was inspired by her comment that teaching about the UN should be included in the national curriculum. This led to what was arguably Derek's finest campaign. If Derek were here he would tell you that it was a branch campaign but there is no doubt that it was his initiative, drive and enthusiasm which led to its successful conclusion.

In 1997 at Derek's suggestion, the branch put forward a resolution to the UNA national conference proposing that every effort be made to ensure that the UN was included in the new curriculum – a resolution that was overwhelmingly approved.

When the preliminary proposals for the new curriculum came out, it was disappointing to find that there was no requirement to teach about the UN. Vince Cable MP agreed to ask a parliamentary

question about whether the new citizenship programme would incorporate specific reference to the UN, and Derek corresponded at some length with David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education. He also contacted UNA HQ and they arranged for an Urgent Action Network Letter to be sent by members to the Minister. When the final version of the curriculum was published in 1999, - great news - it included the UN!

Now Derek is enjoying a well-earned retirement but he continues to take a keen interest in TRUNA activities and can always be relied on to supply useful information or to give us a gentle nudge when necessary as happened recently when he reminded us to enquire about arranging for the UN flag to be hoisted on the civic flag pole for UN Day. When I told him that arrangements had been agreed, but on the morning of hoisting the council discovered they had lost their flag, Derek said 'Well perhaps they could fly it on Human Rights Day then'.

So I'm sure you'll agree that those 67 years have been very well-spent and Derek deserves a big thank you. And his work is a reminder that we should all redouble our efforts to raise awareness of the UN, particularly among young people.