

'They need help': why this Newcastle businessman is spearheading a city first

By Alexis Zok
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Lee Li said when he arrived in Newcastle in 2006, there weren't many Chinese people to share his culture with.

Two decades later, Mr Li wants to make it easier for Chinese people to settle into Newcastle and create the community he wishes he'd had back then.

The owner of the Lee's Kitchen franchise has taken on a new role as president of Newcastle's first Chinese-run Lions Club after seeing the success of similar clubs in Sydney.

Lions Clubs are a volunteer organisation aimed at helping vulnerable members of the community.

Mr Li said this would be one of the few Chinese community groups in Newcastle.

"I can see it's getting more and more Chinese and a lot of new people coming here, they need help as well," Mr Li said.

"It's tough, so I just try to give it back."

Mr Li and his wife, Mrs Tifenny Li, were involved in the Lions Club of Sydney Chinese and were excited when the opportunity arose to create a charter in Newcastle.

"A small group of us were thinking to do something for people who need help... one of my friends said the Lions Club is pretty good," Mr Li said.

"When we studied more about Lions clubs we thought yeah, that's what we want because they're helping the local communities."

Secretary of the Newcastle Chinese Lions Club Max Ding has been in Australia for less than three years, studying his PhD at the University of Newcastle.

Mr Ding has been engaging with the Chinese community at the university and via WeChat to seek out possible members for the club.

This Saturday, August 8, will mark the club's launch.

A celebratory lunch at Hao Chi Newcastle will host more than 130 guests, including members of the Sydney Chinese Lions Club, various Newcastle Lions Clubs and representatives of the Chinese consulate in Sydney.

Mr Ding has been in contact with Jesmond Lions Club to participate in an Eat Up Australia event on Tuesday, 11 August, making sandwiches for local schools.

"We will learn from Jesmond Lions Club how to organise everything, how to contact schools or local organisations," Mr Ding said.

"We are open to all the local community activities and charity... It's just a start to engage Chinese people in charity activities."

Jesmond Lions Club made more than 1600 sandwiches at their last event in July, 2026.