Sue Petrisin of Michigan becomes first female president of Kiwanis International

INDIANAPOLIS – Oct. 1, 2015 – Susan A. “Sue” Petrisin today becomes the first female to lead a top international service organization. As president of Kiwanis International, Petrisin will guide more than 630,000 members who make a difference in the lives of children in their communities and around the world.

This year, during Kiwanis’ 100th anniversary, 15 women will serve alongside Petrisin as district leaders, or governors. The history-making precedent continues in 2016-17 with Jane Erickson of Nebraska. Erickson will be the second female to lead the international organization as president when she takes office in October of next year. In Kiwanis, 30 percent of the members are women.

Rising through the ranks of Kiwanis, Petrisin began her affiliation with the organization as a member of its youth clubs. She was one of the first women to join the East Lansing, Mich., club when women were admitted in 1987.

“It’s truly an honor to be the first woman president of Kiwanis International,” Petrisin said. “Most importantly, it’s an honor to serve alongside men and women around the world who are dedicated to improving the lives of children, in their communities and in places they’ll never visit.”

As a Kiwanis club member, Petrisin has participated in service projects that have benefitted her community of East Lansing. Globally, Petrisin has raised money for, visited with and worked alongside volunteers who will eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus from the globe. Through The Eliminate Project, a Kiwanis partnership with UNICEF, US$100 million has been raised toward a goal of US$110 million to eliminate the disease. It’s the second global project for Kiwanis and UNICEF; the two partnered on the Iodine Deficiency Disorders initiative, raising more than US$100 million to eradicate IDD, the leading preventable cause of mental deficiencies. This effort has been heralded as one of the most successful worldwide health initiatives ever.

For Petrisin, who is assistant director of Alumni Programs at Michigan State University, working with students is invigorating and rewarding.
“Students at Michigan State, and all of the students in Key Club and Circle K have one thing in common – they want to help others,” Petrisin said. “In my role at the university it’s been rewarding to reconnect graduates to the university to support a project or a program and with the Kiwanis youth programs, it’s inspiring to work with them as they seek to make changes in the world. Many of their service projects are targeted to their community, but these kids always have the bigger picture in mind. These are the future leaders of the world.”

As a child, Petrisin and her siblings always volunteered in their community. “I was raised in a family that always reached out to help others, and it’s a tradition we continue today,” Petrisin said. With 7 brothers and sisters, the Petrisins could make an impact on any project.

While the volunteer aspect is key to all Kiwanis clubs, Petrisin says the leadership skills she’s learned in Kiwanis have served her well in other endeavors, even at Michigan State University.

“The youth members learn about leadership in subtle ways, and some progress to leadership roles such as club president or international president,” Petrisin said. “Every student learns the value of working together toward a common cause, of teamwork and the rewards of completing a project. There is no doubt that the leadership skills I learned as a student have been put to good use as an adult – in Kiwanis and in my role at the university.”

During her year as president, Petrisin will focus on the Kiwanis motto of serving the children of the world by asking Kiwanis clubs and their members to recommit to the foundation of the organization.

“I want our club members to focus on projects and activities that will help children in their communities and children a world away, because we know kids need Kiwanis now more than ever. In an age of municipal budget cuts, decreased school funding and fewer civic organizations, it’s important for Kiwanians to identify the ways children in their community can benefit from a service club, whether it’s providing school supplies, building a playground or sponsoring a youth club.”

**About Kiwanis**

Founded in 1915, Kiwanis International is a global organization of clubs and members dedicated to serving the children of the world. Kiwanis and its family of clubs, including Circle K International for university students, Key Club for students age 14–18, Builders Club for students age 11–14, Kiwanis Kids for students age 6–12 and Aktion Club for adults living with disabilities, dedicate annually more than 18 million service hours to strengthen communities and serve children. The Kiwanis International family comprises nearly 630,000 adult and youth members in 80 countries and geographic areas. For more information about Kiwanis International, please visit [www.kiwanis.org](http://www.kiwanis.org).