Born in Germany in 1940 at the beginning of WWII, Norbert was no stranger to deprivation and suffering. It was harsh growing up in a combat zone, the oldest of six kids in a fairly poor family. His chances of getting into a good school were slim, but he persevered and was accepted to a prestigious high school run by St. Benedict monks. It was there that Norbert first met someone who was blind.

“I was fascinated,” said Norbert. “He took all of his notes in Braille. When we had tests or a paper due, he used a typewriter. He typed all of his stuff, without the opportunity to correct or to read what he wrote. It all had to be in his head and I was just fascinated by how a blind person can function this way.”

From that time on, Norbert had a desire to help people who were blind. After graduating from college in architecture in Augsburg, he learned of the Lions Club International, an organization which supports projects to prevent blindness, restore eyesight, and improve eye health worldwide. He looked into joining, but quickly found out that the Lions Clubs in Germany were very expensive.

“They were expensive,” said Norbert. “As a young architect, starting a family, I did not have the money. So, it was not an option for me.”

After the war, a lot of German engineers who had worked in the military sector had gone back to the universities for a two-year crash course in architecture. Norbert quickly found out that there was an oversupply of architects—so he began to think of leaving Germany.

In November of 1969, Norbert came to the United States and began working for an architectural firm, Marr Knapp & Crawfis, for which he would become president in later years. He joined the Mansfield Evening Lions Club in January of 1979 which did a lot of work for the blind and “had projects where everybody could participate.”

Norbert was always pretty active in sports, but over the years had gained a bit of weight. He began running as a way to get back into shape. To encourage him, a friend paid for his registration to run the 1981 Columbus Marathon. It was his first major run and it was so tough, he figured that he would probably never run again. But, he finished and there was another marathon in Cleveland, so he ran that one. Then, he qualified for the Boston Marathon and soon it became a way of life for him.

In 1985, Norbert began to consider how to use his running to help the Lions and raise money for the blind. With all of the training he was doing for the Boston Marathon, he wanted to see if people would sponsor him.

“I thought ‘A penny a mile or something’ and pledged to do three and a half thousand miles that year. Well, some people said you could never do this. Three and half thousand, that’s between nine and ten miles on average a day for a year. I actually did 4,022 miles. That money was then put into the Ohio Lions Eye Research Foundation.”

After that, he ran several long distance fundraisers including running from Columbus, OH to the 1990 Lions International Convention held in St. Louis, MO. At an average of 38 miles a day, he made it in 12 days and raised $50,000.

“Running is how I got involved in eye research. It was not just fundraising. It was a celebration of research. It was making people aware of how important vision is.”

After running 47 marathons including the Boston Marathon five times, and raising thousands of dollars in endurance races for the Lions, Norbert was diagnosed with cancer in 1996.

“I retired as an architect and had to step back from my position with the Ohio Lions Eye Research Foundation, because my focus had to shift.”

Recognizing his many years of service, the Ohio Lions Eye Research Foundation Board of Trustees voted to name their graduate fellowship, “The Norbert Peiker Fellowship” in his honor. The first Norbert Peiker Fellowship was completed at the Havener Eye Institute by Kim Metzler studying corneal biomechanics.

“As a child in my native Germany, I experienced the destruction and rebuilding of a war-torn nation,” said Norbert. “That experience has led to a lifelong drive to rebuild lives and communities. I have always ascribed to the philosophy that vision with action can change the world.” It’s all about determination, endurance, and perseverance. You have your frustrations and you may have to reroute when you run into a wall, but when you stick in there, you can accomplish so much.”