



Fourth Largest Eye Bank Celebrates 40 Years of Service

2000 marks the 40th anniversary of the Lions Eye Bank. Despite difficulties, the Lions Eye Bank has grown dramatically over the years into the fourth largest eye bank in the country. This achievement would not be possible without the bravery /foresight and support of the Lions. The Lions had the forethought and wherewithal to start the eyebank, and the determination to keep it going for forty years through gifts of time and money.

“One of the genuine pleasures of my life was starting the eye bank,” declares PDG Etsyl Sparkman, who was one of the driving forces behind the formation of the Lions Eye Bank during his 1958-59 term as District Governor. Starting an eye bank posed a big challenge for PDG Sparkman and the other District Governors. Opposition to the eye bank was strong from Lions throughout Missouri. Many Lions wanted to reserve their donations for local projects. Local projects, however, were not the only concern. Lion Wayne Thruston notes that “Money was a worry. The Lions worried that the eye bank might be a bigger venture than what could be successful.” Since eyebanking was a new phenomenon, no one was sure what kind of support an eye bank would require over time.

The Lions were not the only opposition to the Eye Bank; there was opposition from the University of Missouri-Columbia as well. PDG Etsyl Sparkman approached Dr. Ellis about housing the Lions

Eye Bank in University Hospital and about providing staff to man the eyebank. Dr. Ellis was hesitant about the venture. The University had been approached about similar projects that were never carried to fruition. Dr. Ellis would only agree to the arrangement if the Eye Bank was a statewide project of the Missouri Lions.

Despite the concerns of the Lions and the University, at the 1958-59 State Convention, the Missouri Lions voted to approve the formation of the Lions Eye Bank. In 1960, the Lions Eye Bank opened. The next big step for the District Governors was to educate the Lions about eye donation. Eye donation was still an unfamiliar topic in 1958-59. The District Governors visited clubs, encouraged Lions and their families to become eye donors. Steadily, eye donation became more accepted.

The support of the Lions enabled the growth of the Lions Eye Bank to Heartland Lions Eye Banks operating six branches in three states. This expansion has enabled HLEB to help greater numbers of people. For example, during the FY 98-99, HLEB provided more corneas for transplant than were provided during the first 24 years of the Lions Eye Bank.

HLEB has developed technology and service that has allowed the eyebank to become one of the top eyebanks in the country and to help ever increasing numbers of

people receive the gift of sight restoration.

•**Ocular Tissue Services** is a web site, which allows surgeons to securely order cornea tissue online any time of day or night. The surgeons receive an email confirmation from HLEB within hours of the request.

•**DBS Pro** is software developed for HLEB’s needs but is now being used by several eye banks across the country. It tracks the myriad of eyebank data such as donor history, recipient information, and lion transporter information.

•**Dispatch service**, HLEB operates a 24 hour dispatch service to coordinate donor referrals (calls about a potential donor) for all six eye bank branches. This system ensures that the vast multitude of information is centralized. The dispatch service provides the quickest, most efficient service to those dealing with donor activity, including hospitals, physicians, enucleators, and Lion transporters.

Thanks to the Missouri Lions, thousands of people have had their sight restored from HLEB, and the numbers of those helped are continually increasing. As Helen Keller challenged the Lions in 1925 to become Knights of the Blind, the Missouri Lions have clearly fulfilled her call to action.

*You Are Cordially Invited To Attend
The Lions Eye Bank 40TH Anniversary Banquet*

*SATURDAY, JULY 8th, 2000
Social 6:00 P.M. Dinner 6:30 P.M.
TIGER COLUMNS 23 S. 8th Street, Columbia, MO*

COST \$20 per person

Name _____

Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Number Attending _____

Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Please make checks payable to **MLERF Banquet**

Mail reservations and payment to MLERF, PR Office, 404 Portland St., Columbia, MO 65201

Seating is limited. Reservations must be received no later than June 19th 2000.



Lions End Anguish For Thousands

Recycled Eyeglasses Aid Individuals In Developing Countries

The Lions are probably best known for their efforts to collect used eyeglasses. But do you know what happens to these eyeglasses once they have been collected and delivered to the Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation (MLERF)?

Upon arrival at MLERF, volunteer Lions or MLERF staff sort the eyeglasses, separating plastic and metal frames, reading glasses, children's glasses, sunglasses, cases, lenses and any broken glasses. Once sorted, the eyeglasses are picked up by humanitarian groups that travel overseas on medical missions.

One humanitarian group, HealthCare Ministries (HCM), is a frequent beneficiary of the Eyeglass Recycling program. HCM, located in Springfield, MO, dispenses over 12,000 pairs of recycled eyeglasses donated by the Missouri Lions each year. PDG Bob Snell has been the coordinator for getting the used eyeglasses from MLERF to the HealthCare Ministries site. Snell along with his good friend Steve Walegir, a volunteer with HCM, sort through several thousands of pairs of glasses in order to compile what is needed for the monthly mission trips.

"Every pair is soaked, then I check the screws and make note of any missing nose pad or spare parts, then I separate the kid's glasses, wash them all in the dishwasher and then take them to HCM to be read," stated Walegir.

Volunteers at HCM then repair, clean and polish the glasses and read each pair for its' prescription level. The eyeglasses are then packed and taken along on missions to developing countries for distribution. The volunteer teams will provide care to anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 people in a weeks time. Many of these people will wait in line all night, for the team's services.

"We focus on quality care, not quantity, but we also have to weigh the size of the

crowds," explained Dr. JoAnn Butrin, PhD, Director of HCM, "we want to give the people individualized care."

The HealthCare Ministry volunteers have encountered many heartbreaking stories which illustrates the importance of each pair of eyeglasses collected by the Lions.

One such story was about a young child by the name of Josie. Josie was having difficulty in school. Her teachers were upset with her because they felt that she was refusing to learn to read. Feeling helpless, Josie tried to convince them that she was unable to read because she could not see the letters.

Many days Josie would come home from school crying. The mother was very poor and unable to afford to take her daughter to get her eyes checked. Distraught and plagued with guilt, the mother cried and prayed for an answer.

Those working in optical were deeply moved by their story. As a volunteer examined her eyes, he realized that she would need a strong prescription. Silently he prayed that the right prescription would be among the hundreds of pairs of glasses that the HCM team had brought. They would need to be a child's pair of glasses too.

The volunteer found a pair he felt would work. When he placed the glasses on her face, she lifted her head, looked around, then immediately began shouting, 'I can see! I can see! Now my teachers won't hit me anymore because I can't read!'

By this time her mother was weeping profusely, releasing the feelings of immense guilt that she had carried for so long because she could not afford to get help for her daughter. The anguish was over.

Thanks to the collection efforts of the Lions, the anguish is over for thousands of people with poor vision who do not have access to, or the means to pay for eyeglasses. all over the globe.



PDG Bob Snell presents a box of eyeglasses to volunteer Steve Walegir, for preparation of an upcoming HCM mission trip.

'Race For Sight' A Success Brings Special Elite Division Triathlete To The Race

The second annual Race for Sight was a success. MLERF had a good turnout of racers, volunteers, and spectators. Free amblyopia screenings were offered for children. After the screenings, children were able to play with Gigi the Giraffe. MLERF gave away prizes to children who went through the screenings, including gift certificates for McDonald's happy meals, and two tricycles donated by Toys R Us.

The Race for Sight held special importance for Elite division racer, Sara Rosenkranz. Rosenkranz was diagnosed with amblyopia as a young child and has been wearing eyeglasses since the age of three. Unfortunately, Rosenkranz' amblyopia was not completely cured despite visits with a specialist at Children's Hospital in St. Louis, to patch the amblyopic eye and do eye exercises. Today, Rosenkranz is quite far-sighted and must always wear either eyeglasses or contact lenses. She also has trouble focusing with her right, amblyopic eye. Rosenkranz added, "It doesn't do much of the work in every day vision either."

"I'm really excited to be able to play a part in the Race for Sight," said Rosenkranz. Rosenkranz's mother also suffers from amblyopia, which was not cured. Sara Rosenkranz believes that amblyopia screenings are important because not all children exhibit symptoms, such as an eye that turns inward or out, as hers did. Clearly, from Sara Rosenkranz's experience, MLERF's Amblyopia Screening program is one of the most effective tools in preventing serious vision problems. Thanks to both MLERF's annual Race for Sight fundraiser and the Missouri Lions, free amblyopia screenings for Missouri children will continue.



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