

Lions Charity Foundation 24-D

Wherever the need: "We Serve"

By Vania O'Keefe

The Lions Club is best known for its fight against blindness, but its motto "We Serve" goes far beyond helping solve vision problems. The Lions also work to provide disaster relief, humanitarian aid, and help to local individuals with hearing problems and disabilities. Local Lions Clubs are supported in their goals by the Lions Charity Foundation of District 24-D, which serves Southeastern Virginia.

"The Foundation helps local Lions Clubs do things beyond their financial resources," Beth Stevens, a Lions Charity Foundation board member, explains. "Without the Charity Foundation, local clubs wouldn't be able to serve as well as they do."

One of the Lions Club's biggest programs is the children's eye screening program. The portable Spot Screener unit goes to schools in nearly every city in Southeastern Virginia and 90 Head Start school programs. There are 12 Spot Screening machines in the district, used mostly for children.

"The Spot Screener is the size of a Polaroid camera," Jerry Phelps, the Grant Chairman for the Foundation, explains. "It does a vision screening in seconds, and is definitely the way to go for anyone with communication issues and for young children because of its speed and accuracy."

According to Stanley Furman, incoming President of the Lions Charity Foundation 24-D, the Spot Screener prints out an accurate report of the eye's health. "Eye doctors who see these reports are always impressed with the accuracy, and it knocks their socks off," Stanley says. "The screenings detect vision problems, but can also detect eye diseases and disorders, helping to prevent blindness."

One in five children who are screened in school are referred for treatment. The Spot Screener printout goes home to parents who can then take it to a physician if treatment is recommended. "If the child's family can't afford to get the treatment, they can ask the local Lions Club for help," Beth explains.

Jerry interjects: "If the local club can't afford to help, the Charity Foundation steps in," he says. "Other than the E-chart with the school nurse, which doesn't show many eye disorders, for many of these young children the Spot Screener is the only vision assessment they will ever get."

Vision screening by the Lions Club is not limited to schools. There are also free, open public screenings several times a year throughout Southeastern Virginia that target adults. These screenings are made possible because of the Lions Mobile Sight and Hearing Unit, a 42-foot Winnebago equipped with screening equipment. If participants who are screened need glasses or hearing aids and can't afford them, the Lions Club provides them at no cost.

One such screening program takes place through Homeless Connect, at the Norfolk Scope, twice a year. Four hundred homeless people are screened for sight and hearing issues. Those who fail the screening will receive free exams, glasses, and hearing aids. The Foundation provides the participants with toiletries and also provides about one hundred reading glasses per session. The Mobile Sight and Hearing Unit makes approximately 30 stops per year.

The Lions Charity Foundation supports the local community in other ways as well. Through a grant to Access Virginia, the Foundation helped to provide audio description at live theatrical performances like "The Wizard of Oz" for the vision impaired. The Foundation has also funded higher-level eye surgeries, such as prosthetic eye(s), as well as retina and cataract surgeries for those who cannot afford them. The

Foundation continues to support the Lions Medical Eye Bank at Sentara Norfolk General Hospital. The Eye Bank collects corneas and prepares them for transplant.

"It is one of the top 10 eye banks in the world, and was created by local Lions Clubs," Stanley explains. "The Foundation recently purchased equipment for Olde Towne Medical Center and a retinal camera for Williamsburg Community Hospital. It also provided grants totaling \$30,000 to the Barrier Island Center on the Eastern Shore to fund the 'My First Field Trip' program for first graders."

When a natural disaster hits the area, the Foundation steps in and provides money to the local Lions Clubs to distribute wherever it is needed. According to current Foundation President Don Fuller, 100 percent of funds donated to the Lions Charity Foundation goes directly to the needy: "When you give money to the Lions Foundation, the money goes straight to help people who need it," he says.

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The work of the Lions Charity Foundation is funded by both donations and its yearly fundraiser: the Bid 'N Buy Auction. 2016 will mark the seventh year of this event, held each fall at Oak Grove United Methodist Church on Battlefield Boulevard in Chesapeake. The event is held in the church's auditorium and includes a silent auction, immediately followed by a live auction. There will be a classic car show, weather permitting, and refreshments will also be available.

"This event helps fund many of the Foundation's programs and grants for the year," Jerry says. "We need the public to support the Foundation as well as their local Lions Clubs. The auction really is one of the best kept secrets in Hampton Roads."

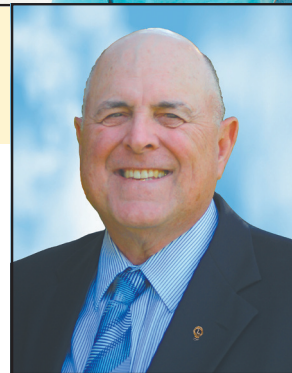
Businesses and individuals can help by donating auction items. "We love receiving large items such as riding lawnmowers and travel packages, but small items such as gift cards are helpful too!" Beth adds. "All donations of goods and money are tax deductible and will be recognized in the event program. Businesses can also help by purchasing ads in the program. We need volunteers, and we need people to come out to the event and bid, bid, bid! And, of course, all monetary donations are greatly appreciated," she says. "We want the public to understand that the Bid 'N Buy Auction funds all of our wonderful programs, so we need the support. Plus, it's a lot of fun!"

The Lions Charity Foundation credits the generous



The Lions' Spot Vision Screener is highly accurate at detecting vision problems

Foundation President Don Fuller



partnerships of local doctors and hospitals that enable the Foundation to provide services like surgeries and hearing aids at no cost to people in need.

"Hearing aids are very expensive," Don explains. "Before the Lions Charity Foundation, people in need were being turned away because local Lions Clubs couldn't afford \$5,000 for a hearing aid. But this year alone, the Foundation will provide 75 hearing aids at a cost of nearly \$83,000. The Bid 'N Buy auction helps pay for all of that," he says.

"The Lions Club motto 'We Serve' holds true for the Lions Charity Foundation as well," Stan continues. "We used to be known only for eyes. We are eyes, but we're also so much more!"

In 2017, the Lions will celebrate 100 years of service to the community. The Lions Charity Foundation depends on the support of the local community to fund its important programs. As the 100 year motto states: "Where there's a need, there's a Lion." Anyone who would like to learn more about how to become involved with Lions' service to the community can contact the club today!



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