

Lions in the wilderness

By Tristan McGough
Special to the Lakes Edition

The Lions have moved to the wildlife area just about half a mile north of the quaint Village of Cambridge, Wis. But we're not talking about lions in the wild — just about the Cambridge Area Lions Club (CALC) members at their new rustic club house.

Officially chartered in November 1980, the Cambridge Area Lions have been living up to their mission "to create and foster a spirit of understanding among all people for humanitarian needs by providing voluntary services through community involvement and international cooperation."

In short, they have been selflessly serving the wider community for the past 37 years — over a third of the time the Lions as an organization has been in existence in Wisconsin. In fact, Wisconsin Lions will be celebrating their centennial in 2020, following close on the heels of the first club established in Chicago in 1917 by Melvin Jones.

"We serve," says Gary Posorske, 17-year Cambridge club veteran, who is reciting the Lions motto. Posorske emphasizes, "That says what we're all about."

Gene Jorgensen, who is the last active charter member of the CALC, briskly chimes-in, "Serving our community is what we do."

Both know about serving the people in the greater Cambridge area, as does another longtime member of the club, Darin Zimmerman, who is quick to highlight the other men's service record and zeal.

Zimmerman reveals, "Both Gary and Gene are Melvin Jones Fellows, which is the most prestigious award we can give at the club level." The award, of course, alludes to the Lion's founder, who is reputed to have challenged his fellow Chicago businessmen to apply their zeal for creating profitable businesses to civic and community service.

Posorske, Jorgensen

and Zimmerman reminisce together and count the few people who have received the highest Fellows honor at their club. Only seven come to mind.

With that said, the three men in unison say that no Lion serves with the idea in mind of being recognized, much less rewarded. Service rendered is heartfelt and considered its own reward.

Posorske, who has served as Governor of the 51st District of the Lions from July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017, offers an overview of the service projects the Lions are engaged in. "All our service touches someone somewhere, both locally and internationally."

He elaborated: "We offer free sight screenings to the kids at the elementary school, and we collect and help distribute gently used eye-ware, especially for people in the third-world."

Part of the club since its inception, Jorgensen adds, "We also have youth programs that do other things, like hearing and speech tests, and diabetes awareness."

Zimmerman adds, "The Lions also are involved in environmental issues, building good international relationships, and many other programs, like Knights of the Blind."

All the Lions-sponsored programs make significant contributions to the health and well-being of millions of people worldwide, but perhaps none are as emblematic of the important work the Lions perform as the

Knights of the Blind.

When the Lions Club International (LCI) held its international convention in 1925, Hellen Keller addressed the assembly and ignited a flame that has never left the Lions hearth. After her challenge, the Lions began a century-long journey serving as "Knights of the Blind," where volunteer Lions have impacted hundreds of millions of lives through vision-related work, such as providing medicines, surgeries, and eyeglasses, as well as outfitting hospitals and eye banks.

Of course, many people are familiar with the ubiquitous Lions eyeglasses stations set-up at stores and other public places for collecting gently-used eyewear. The accumulated items are taken and sorted at the Lions of Wisconsin campus, owned by the Wisconsin Lions Foundation, Inc., located at 3834 Cty. Rd A, Rosholt, Wis., and one of only 18 LCI-certified recycling centers in the world.

The center processes more than 800,000 pairs of glasses each year and, once categorized, about 450,000 pairs of these gently-used eyeglasses are distributed to people in 49 developing nations through the "Recycle for Sight" program. Internationally, the Lions collect about 30 million pairs of glasses a year in an effort that has been going on since the 1930s.

"We do a lot with sight," Jorgensen emphasizes. "Each year we go to

the Cambridge Elementary School, as well as Pleasant Time Child Care, to do vision screenings, where we use a \$6,000 camera for kids under six and eye charts for grades second through the fifth."

The LCI website proudly proclaims, "In 1962, the Lowell Lions Club in Massachusetts staffed concession booths at a fashion show to raise money to screen children for amblyopia. Lions around the world have continued that tradition by providing fast and simple vision screenings to help identify treatable vision problems."

Vision screen is a fine example of an international program with local applications.

Whether providing free vision screenings to children, distributing school lunches or teaching young people the skills they need to succeed as adults, the Lions as an organization in general and the CALC in particular are focused on youth.

As a world service organization, they declare, "Today, Lions have helped millions of children around the world suffering from poverty, homelessness, hunger, abuse, neglect, disease and disabilities."

LCI continues, "Since 1984, Lions have helped promote school-based curriculum designed to help youth develop life skills. Today, Lions Quest has helped more than 13 million students in 85 countries make responsible decisions, set goals, develop healthy relationships, resist peer pres-



Lions Gary Posorske, Gene Jorgensen and Darin Zimmermann serve the area's citizens proudly. (Photo submitted by Tristan McGough)

sure and engage in community service."

Gene, Gary and Darin enthusiastically take turn explaining the local value of such youth-based thinking as they relate what goes on at the Wisconsin Lions Camp, located on the Rosholt campus.

"It's a camp for kids with disabilities, like diabetes, kids who might be blind, or hard of hearing or deaf altogether, or have intellectual or educational limitations," Jorgensen clarified.

Posorske added, "Everything is free-of-charge. It's open to people with disabilities from Wisconsin, and though there are a lot of kids who come every year for summer camp, handicapped adults are welcome, too."

Zimmerman disclosed more, "Kids who are eligible get to swim and boat on Lions Lake. There's archery, a climbing tower, high ropes and even a zip-line. I know they have all kinds of art and theater projects, too, plus the usual campfires and group times."

In order to help provide those services for free, the Wisconsin Lions Foundation holds an annual raffle to raise funds specifically earmarked for the Wisconsin Lions Camp. Top prize is \$2,500 cash, with decreasing awards through to the 18th prize-winner. Proceeds go to help defray the costs of serving more than 1,300 campers each summer.

Jorgensen said, "This is one of the gem camps in the whole state."

"And those who go," Posorske shared, "get to go a whole week."

One of the other things the CALC does for, graduating youth is present a \$1,500 scholarship to some deserving senior each year. In that way, local Lions have helped further the academic and professional goals of many thankful students over the years.

Another set of community service projects have to do with environmental stewardship by taking care of roadways and, in particular, the Cambridge Area Wildlife and Fishing Area to which the Lions moved in 2014.

Located at the end of 136 Lagoon Road, which is directly across from the newer of the two village water-towers along County Highway 134, there stand a couple of transformed lagoons surrounded by a wildlife area.

Much like the stewardship the Lions practiced while out at Ripley Park prior to 2014, the Lions have an agreement with the village to help manage the wildlife area, even having built the wheel-chair accessible docks overlooking the large ponds that's stocked with fish that can be caught and released without a license.

Nevertheless, the biggest venture on the Lions horizon is the development of a 10-acre park

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The handicapped-accessible dock the Lions installed at the ponds in Ripley Park. (Photo submitted by Tristan McGough)

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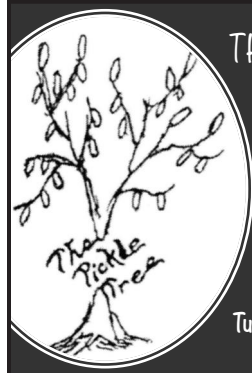
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