

History of Lions Clubs Working Together

The philanthropic focus of the Lions Club has an interesting back-story. In 1925, Helen Keller stood before a room full of men at the Lions Club International Convention in Cedar Point, Ohio, asking them to imagine what it's like to stumble around in the dark.



In a plea to raise money for the newly formed American Foundation of the Blind, she recounted her own experience with blindness and pleaded with them to join the cause to help more people see the light. "I appeal to you, Lions -- you who have your sight, your hearing, you who are strong and brave and kind -- will you not constitute yourselves Knights of the Blind in my crusade against darkness?"

Since that day, fighting blindness has been the primary focus of Lions Clubs International, which at this time still sponsors free eye screening programs through mobile clinics, pays for cataract surgeries for the poor and collects eye glasses for those in need.

Headquartered in Oak Brook, Ill., the Lions Clubs has a simple motto: "We serve." Today it's one of the world's largest service organizations, with 1.4 million members in more than 200 countries including China, Ethiopia and Iraq.

Besides blindness, the Lions Clubs also sponsor programs to provide schoolbooks for children, feed the hungry, provide transportation for seniors and raise money for disaster relief. Clubs meet regularly to discuss possible opportunities to give back and there's a certain level of freedom that allows each Club to make decisions based on what their communities need.

Most Lions Clubs meet once or twice a month to plan projects and discuss club business. Some clubs host their meetings over breakfast, others over lunch or after work. A handful even meet online.



Melvin Jones is widely credited as the founder of the Lions Club. However, some feel the honor should be given to Dr. William P. Woods of Evansville, Indiana. He founded the "Royal Order of Lions" as a fraternal organization and secret society in 1911. He later disbanded that and re-formed it as a service club in 1915. By June 1917, there were some 27 clubs in existence. That same year, Jones began contacting other business clubs to create a network of service clubs

across the U.S. Jones, a Chicago insurance broker, wanted to expand the reach of a local business club he belonged to by merging with similar groups across the country. In October 1917, delegates from those groups, including Woods, met in Dallas for a national convention, during which they drafted a constitution, bylaws, objects and a code of ethics.

Jones gave up the insurance business in 1926 to become Lions' de facto CEO and global goodwill ambassador. He played both roles brilliantly building and managing an expanding headquarters operation and travelling constantly for club visits and speaking engagements. The pace never stopped.

Three years later, Lions Clubs expanded into Canada, becoming an international organization. By 1927, 60,000 members in 1,183 clubs were performing charitable services in communities all over the world.

In 1945, Lions Clubs was one of the first NGOs to help draft the charter that created the United Nations. Since then, Lions Clubs International has continued an amicable and supportive relationship with the UN.

In 1957, the first Leo Program -- the youth division of Lions Clubs -- was established by a baseball coach at Abington High School in Pennsylvania. There are now 7,000 Leo Clubs in 140 countries that do community service projects like

collecting food and clothes for needy children, repairing playgrounds and starting after-school tutoring programs.

In 1987, Lions International underwent another significant change: admitting women. For 70 years, it had been a men-only organization. But that changed when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously in May of that year that Rotary Club International could not exclude women based on gender. Rather than face its own legal action, Lions International voted in July 1987 to become co-ed, incorporating its auxiliary "Lioness" clubs, which comprised the wives of Lion members, into the general membership. Within the first six months of the rule change, more than 3,000 women joined.

In 1990, Lions Clubs launched SightFirst, its biggest sight preservation campaign, raising \$346 million to pay for cataract surgeries, expand eye hospitals and clinics, distribute sight-saving medication and train eye care professionals across the world. With plans to expand the program, the Lions Clubs raised more than \$200 million in 2005 for SightFirst II.

Lions Clubs International celebrated 100 years of service in 2017 and is recognized as one of the top civic organizations in the world. It has a 4 star rating by Charity Navigator and is proud to state that 100% of money raised by the clubs from the public goes back into the community.

Membership in a Lions Club is by invitation only. Through the organization's website, contact a member and let the Lion know you'd like to attend a meeting or participate in a service project. Expressing interest is a great way to let the Lions know you want to join.

Once you've attended a meeting or service event, you can get a better feel for the group and its goals. If you're still interested, ask an active member to sponsor you. If you can't find a club near you, you can order a new club kit and start your own.

Membership dues vary from club to club, averaging \$35 a month. Family and student discounts are available.

Clubs frequently get together for Zone and District meetings to collaborate on projects, exchange ideas, or attend leadership development programs.

The meetings also allow members to network outside their immediate community and make friendships that often last a lifetime.

Lion Clubs in Hamilton County

Club	Number of Members	Charter Date
Signal Mountain	85	August 1958
Lookout Valley	42	April 1952
Red Bank	30	July 1940
Sale Creek	28	April 1946
Hamilton County Virtual	26	September 2020
East Hamilton County	18	September 1954
Hixson	17	April 1973
Chattanooga-Downtown	14	November 1927
Chattanooga University Community	13	January 2018
Daisy Dallas	6	January 1962
Soddy Daisy	3	February 1945