



EYE CATCHER

Winter/Spring Volume 56 No. 2



2026 Grants
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Banquet Invite
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A message from
MLERF President,
Pat Kalicki of the
Sherborn Lions Club

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2026 Polar Plunge
at Lake Pearl

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See what the Lions of Mas-
sachusetts have been doing
to support cutting-edge vision
research.

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Dear Lions,

Thank you! Thank you! I am so appreciative of all your support. Every dollar raised by the Lions helps advance vision research—and it is truly making

Our “Grants of Hope” have helped bring breakthrough ideas to life—from LASIK and advances in cataract surgery, to stem cell therapies that have contributed to progress in treating retinitis pigmentosa (a hereditary cause of blindness), and improving diagnoses for diabetic retinopathy, and strengthening treatment options for macular degeneration. The future is brighter because of your generosity and the dedicated research it supports. Please keep the momentum going and help me reach my goal of \$1.2 million in grant funding.

Let’s recommit ourselves to our mission: ending preventable blindness in our lifetime. Research is bringing us closer every day. One recent MLERF grant supported work that **restored black-and-white vision in previously blind mice**. It is only a matter of time before discoveries like this can be translated into treatments for people—and your support helps our researchers take the next steps.

As we celebrate nearly **seventy-five years of MLERF** service, let’s continue building on this legacy and support the next generation of breakthroughs to eliminate preventable eye disease and blindness. Our President’s pin—the lighthouse—symbolizes our mission as a beacon of hope, service, and purpose: ***“We are the bright light for others when their world becomes dark.”***

The year is winding down quickly, and I’m grateful for your generous support. Let’s finish the year strong.

Yours in Lionism and Friendship,

PDG Patricia Kalicki
President MLERF
2025-2026



Ways You Can Support MLERF

Direct Donation

MLERF is a 501(c)3 tax exempt corporation. You can donate directly to MLERF by visiting our website at www.mlerfi.com and click on the donation link in the upper right corner, or the How to Help link at the top. A check may be made payable to Mass Lions Eye Research Fund, Inc., c/o Treas. Debbie Hayes, 37 Island Road, Millis, MA 02054. A donation can also be made to your local Lion's club, earmarked for MLERF, and have them forward the donation to the above address. Additionally, we have Celebration of Life envelopes if you wish to honor someone special. See your district MLERF Director or officer for an envelope.

President's Circle Pin \$20.00

Please consider joining the President's Circle and show your pride and support of MLERF with this beautiful President's Circle lapel pin. If 2000 Lions/Leos of Massachusetts purchase this pin that would be \$40,000 raised to help fight blindness. This small donation will help fund our annual grant goal of \$1,000,000.00 for our research institutions, who are looking to find cures for all blindness and vision-related diseases.



MLERF DONATION "QR-CODE"

The MLERF QR code can be used on all fundraising materials to help educate others and raise funds for MLERF. Just snap a picture of this QR Code with any cell phone that is connected to the internet, and you will be directed to the MLERF website. The website will provide more information about MLERF and how to make a donation to MLERF.



VISIONARY AWARD

The purpose of this award is to encourage new support and fundraising ideas by all Lions, friends of Lions and vision research supporters. Existing Club and district fundraising events are not included in this program. Individuals who raise and contribute \$250 or more, will receive this beautifully designed Visionary Award lapel pin. Individuals may earn this award on an annual basis, and all monies donated are earmarked for the Grant Program. This award is for individuals only, but will count towards the total club donations for the year. If a non-Lion or non-LEO contributes to the grant for a Visionary Award, they are asked to provide the name of the club to be credited. If no club is designated, the funds will be allocated to the district of the current president of MLERF. A submission form is required to receive this award.

Journey for Sight - Pennies for Sight

Another great way for our Lions/Leos to help support MLERF, is to place penny canisters in their communities or in their homes. The change you get back from your daily cup of coffee or that sandwich you buy at lunch, can change the vision of someone in need. These canisters are also a great way for our communities to learn about Lions, Leos and MLERF. Ask any MLERF Director about the canister program and they will get you everything you need.



IGive.com

IGive.com is an easy fundraiser, which is similar to Amazon Smile. You create an account and choose MLERF as the non-profit you want to help, and IGive will donate a percentage of your total to MLERF.

2025 – 2026 Calendar of Events



2026		October 22	Full Board Meeting in-person 7:00pm The Tavern on Central 391 E Central St, Franklin, MA 02038
May 14	Full Board Meeting, in-person 6:30pm Restaurant 45, 45 Milford St, Medway 02053	October 25	Woburn Host Lions Club Halloween Parade
June 18	Full Board Meeting, in-person 6:30pm Restaurant 45, 45 Milford St, Medway 02053	November 12	E-Board Zoom meeting 6:30PM
July 3 – 7	International Convention Hong Kong	November 19	Full Board Meeting in-person 7:00pm The Tavern on Central 391 E Central St, Franklin, MA 02038
August 1	MLERF Banquet Luncheon Milford Doubletree Hotel 11 Beaver St, Milford, MA	December 10	Full Board Meeting in-person 7:00pm The Tavern on Central 391 E Central St, Franklin, MA 02038
		2027	
July 16	Full Board Zoom Meeting 6:30pm	Jan 15-17	District S Midwinter
July 18	Full Board Meeting in-person 9am – 1pm Grafton Lions Pavillion 86 Brigham Hill Rd, Grafton, MA	Jan 22-24	District N Midwinter DoubleTree, Andover
August 13	E-Board Zoom meeting 6:30PM	Feb 5-7	District K Midwinter The VERVE Hotel, Natick
August 22	Full Board Meeting in-person 10am – 2pm Grafton Lions Pavillion 86 Brigham Hill Rd, Grafton, MA	Feb 11	E-Board Zoom meeting 6:30PM
Sept 10	E-Board Zoom meeting 6:30PM	Feb 18-21	District Y-A Midwinter, Southbridge
Sept 12	M/C Ride for Sight Monson, 9:30AM	Feb 25	Full Board Meeting in-person 7:00pm The Tavern on Central 391 E Central St, Franklin, MA 02038
Sept 19	Full Board Meeting in-person 10am – 2pm Grafton Lions Pavillion 86 Brigham Hill Rd, Grafton, MA	March 11	E-Board Zoom meeting 6:30PM
Sept 26	District S “SEE-Side Walk”	March 25	Full Board Meeting in-person 7:00pm The Tavern on Central 391 E Central St, Franklin, MA 02038
October 4	District N Journey for Sight Lord Wakefield, Wakefield, MA	April 3	Polar Plunge, Lake Pearl
October 8	E-Board Zoom meeting 6:30PM	April 8	E-Board Zoom meeting 6:30PM
		April 16-18	MD33 State Convention Sea Crest Hotel & Resort, Falmouth
		Late April/May	MLERF 75th Jubilee Diamond Anniversary Gala

Board of Directors

Corporate Officers/Executive Committee

PDG Patricia Kalicki

PRC Brenda McPherson

PRC Robert Grover

PDG Kathryn Salem

PDG Debbie Hayes

PGD Beverly Dillon

33K President

33N 1st Vice President

33A 2nd Vice President

33S Secretary

33K Treasurer

33S Immediate Past President

Assistant Treasurer

(Non-Voting)

Marianna Riemer, PDG, 33A

Jeralyn O'Connor, PCST, 33N

Rich Flynn, PCS, 33K

Patricia Salvas, PCST 33S

Special Advisor to the Treasurer

(Non-Voting)

Dr. James R. Roth, PDG, PP, 33K

Directors - 2027

Thom Swift, PDG, 33Y

Maureen Wojnar, 33A

Alice Gaudet, PCST, 33N

*Tim Munn, PCS, 33K

Jennifer Stec, PDG, 33S

Directors

District Governors

Mary Swift, 33Y

Andrew Keane, 33A

Marcel Plouffe, PDG, 33N

Anthony Baliola, 33K

Steve Garran, 33S

Directors - 2028

Jeffery Turner, PDG, 33Y

Marianna Riemer, PDG, 33A

Linda Erwich, PZC, 33N

Dr. Deb Wayne, PDG, 33K

Deb Howland, 2VDG, 33S

1st Vice District Governor

Vacant, 33Y

Mark Bucchino, 33A

Linda Erwich, 33N

Kristine Shanahan, 33K

Jesse Armell, III 33S

Directors - 2029

Jim Allen, VDG2, 33Y

Lionel Carbonneau, PCST, 33A

Beth Picos, PhD, 33N

Steven Levy, ZC, 33K

Andrew Parker, 33S

2nd Vice District Governors

(Non-Voting)

Vacant, 33Y

Joni LaPlante, 33A

Vacant, 33N

Christine Cedrone, 33K

Deb Howland, PCST, 33S

Eye Catcher Reporters

Debbie Hayes, PDG, 33K, Editor/Publisher

Jean Wilder, 33Y

Denise Andrews, PDG, 33A

Cindy Alexander, 33N

Steven Levy, ZC, 33K

Wayne Smith, PDG, 33S

Directors - 2026

*Maryann Bankman, PZC, 33Y

Barry Alman, PZC, 33A

2025 - 2026 Committees

AWARDS - MLERF

Y James Allen, PCST
Y Maryann Bankman, PZC
A Marianna Riemer, PDG, (Chairperson)
A Lionel Carbonneau, PCST
N Jeralyn O'Connor, PCST
N Alice Gaudet, PCST
K Rich Flynn, PDG
K Dr. Deb Wayne, PDG
S Andrew Parker
S Pat Salvas, PCST

AWARDS BANQUET

A Maureen Wojnar
N Linda Erwich, PZC
K Debbie Hayes, PDG (Co-Chairperson)
K Patricia Kalicki, PDG (Co-Chairperson)
K Tim Munn, PZC (with Lion Lisa)
K Diana Faust, PDG
S Kathryn Salem, PDG (Advisor)

CLUB COORDINATION

Y Jeff Turner, PDG
Y James Allen, PCST
A Maureen Wojnar (Chairperson)
A Joni LaPlante, 2VDG
N Linda Erwich, PZC
N Mark Erwich, 1VDG
K Tim Munn, PZC
K Steve Levy, ZC
K Christine Cedrone, 2VDG
S Andrew Parker
S Pat Salvas, PCST

CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS

Y Thom Swift, PDG
A Lionel Carbonneau, PCST (Chairperson)
N Mark Erwich, 1VDG
K Debbie Hayes, PDG
S Jesse Armel, 1VDG

GRANTS

Y Jeffrey Turner, PDG
A Marianna Riemer, PDG
N Brenda MacPherson, PRC (Chairperson)
N Beth Piocos, PhD
K Dr. James Roth, PDG, PP (Advisor)
K Dr. Deborah Wayne, PDG
K Steve Levy, ZC
S Kathy Salem, PDG

LONG RANGE PLANNING

Y Thom Swift, PDG
A Marianna Riemer, PDG
N Linda Erwich, PZC
K Steve Levy
S Bev Dillon, PDG, IPP (Chairperson)

All Past Presidents

NOMINATING

Y Jim Allen, 1VDG
A Mark Bucchino, 1VDG
N Mark Erwich, 1VDG
K Kristine Shanahan, 1VDG
S Jesse Armel, 1VDG
S Bev Dillon, PDG, IPP (Chairperson)

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Y Thom Swift, PDG
Y Mary Ann Bankman
A Barry Alman, PZC (Chairperson)
A Maureen Wojnar
N Alice Gaudet, PCST
N Jerilyn O'Connor, PCST
K Steve Levy, ZC
K Rich Flynn, PCS
S Andrew Parker
S Deb Howland, 2VDG

2025 - 2026 Committees

TRUST & ENDOWMENT

Officers

President Patricia Kalici, PDG
Ex Officio - Treas. Debbie Hayes, PDG
Ex Officio - Asst. Treas. Marianna Riemer, PDG
Advisor Dr. James Roth, PDG, PP

Term Expires June 2026

Y Jeffrey Turne PDG
K Tim Munn, PZC
S Wayne Smith, PDG, PP (Chairperson)

Term Expires June 2027

A Lionel Carbonneau, PCST
N Beth Picos
K Diana Faust, PDG
S Deb Howland, 2VDG



Seeking 2nd Medical Opinions Through our MLERF Institutional Partners

• Targets for help

- For matters related to children
Boston Children's Hospital
- For matters related to diabetes
Joslin Diabetes Center
- For matters related to vision and hearing
 1. Massachusetts Eye & Ear
 2. Boston Medical Center
 3. Tufts Medical Center

• Information required from patient

- Name, address, and mobile phone number
- Date of birth
- Insurance plan and policy number
- Description of medical issue

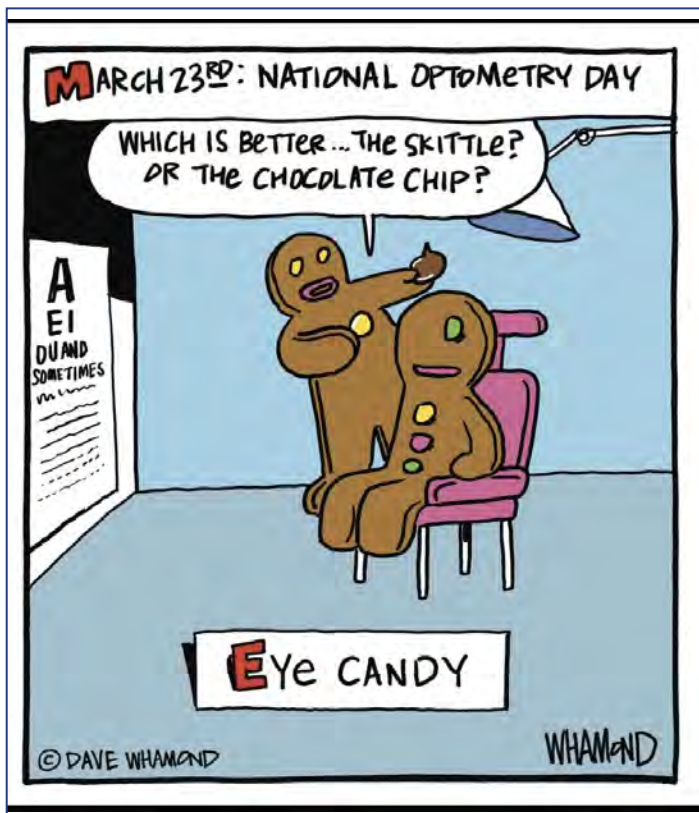
All information should be passed on to your District rep

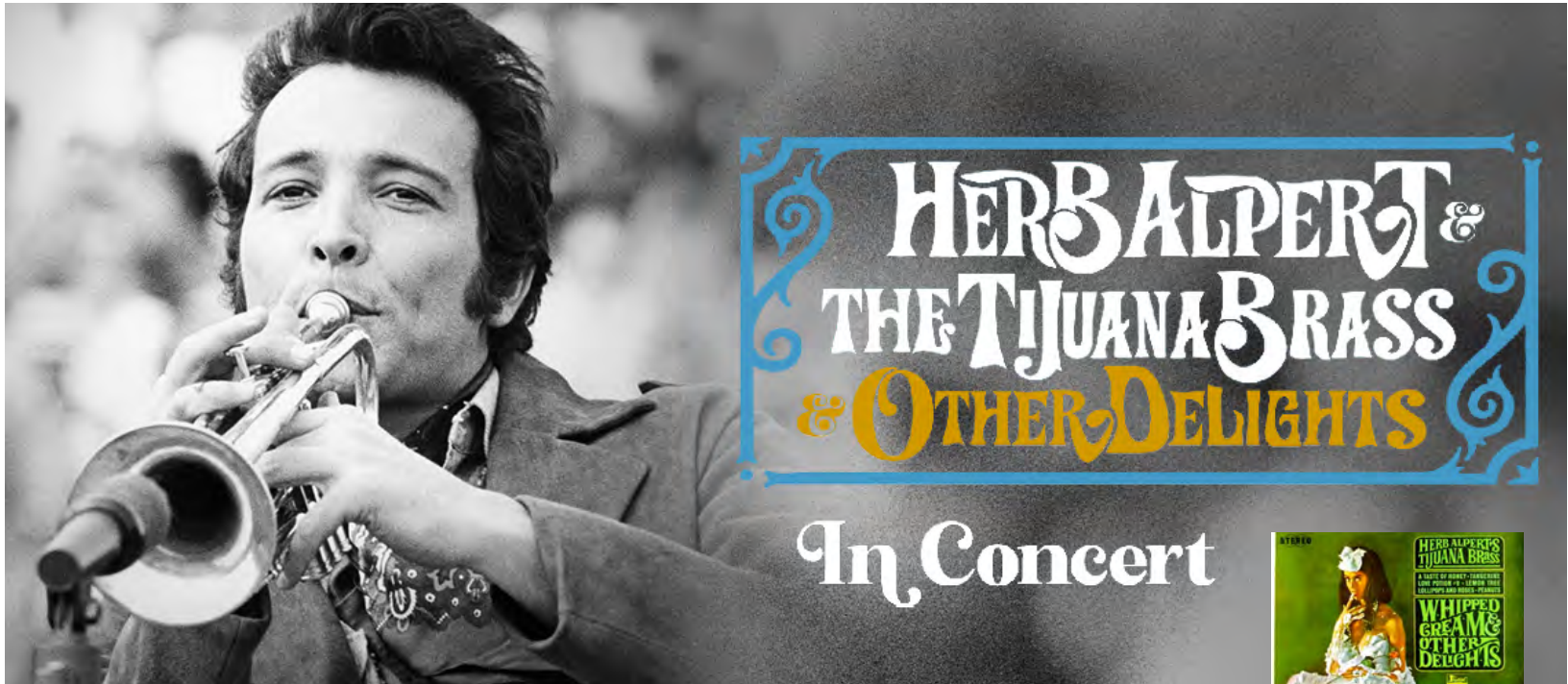
• MD33 District representatives

- District Y - PDG Jean Wilder - jwmartinh1@yahoo.com
- District A - PDG Marianna Riemer - marianna.riemer@gmail.com
- District N - PDG Jeanne Farrow - lionjeanne33n@gmail.com
- District K - PDG Dr. Deb Wayne - doctoradeb@comcast.net
- District S - PDG Kathy Salem - kathrynsalem@gmail.com

• Process to schedule appointment

- District rep will pass on patient information above to MLERF President or Dr. Jim Roth to determine the right place to seek a 2nd opinion appointment
- They will schedule an appointment with the hospital
- Hospital will communicate the specifics (date, time, place, Doctor's Name) of the appointment to the patient





Nine-time Grammy winner Herb Alpert will bring his "Tijuana Brass & Other Delights" tour to the Hanover Theater on August 2nd.

Spend an unforgettable evening with Herb Alpert and his brand new Tijuana Brass. Joined by six exceptional musicians, Herb performs the classic TJB hits just as you remember them.

Celebrating the 60th anniversary of the iconic album Whipped Cream & Other Delights, the concert features favorites from that landmark recording along with beloved hits including "The Lonely Bull," "Spanish Flea," "A Taste of Honey," "Mexican Shuffle," "Tijuana Taxi," "This Guy's In Love With You," "What Now My Love," "Zorba the Greek," "Ladyfingers," "Rise" and more.

This 90-minute performance is informal and engaging, with Herb sharing stories and answering audience questions about his extraordinary career, the legacy of A&M Records and the iconic artists he has worked with, including Sérgio Mendes & Brasil '66, The Carpenters and Burt Bacharach.

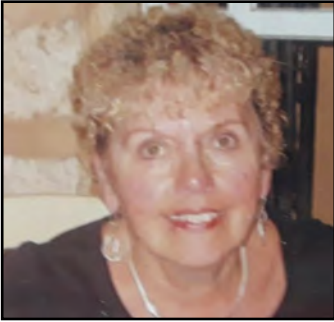
Tickets are \$77 and \$87

Contact the box office at 877.571.7469 for more information.

We wish to gratefully acknowledge the support given to us by the Hanover Theater. We respectfully ask that you support them so that they can support us and others.

News From the Districts

District 33Y



Maryann Bankman PZC

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Holyoke MA 01040
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mtmnovajo@aol.com

Happy Spring! I think it is finally coming. The last bit of snow in a shady area of our back yard just melted a few days ago. The daffodil leaves are pushing through now. I hope all your Fall and Winter fund raising events were successful. I wish you much luck as you prepare for your Spring/Summer fund raisers. It is the season for dog shows, walkathons, marathons, bike rides, auctions, tag sales, bake sales, plant sales, golf tournaments, pancake breakfasts, food booths and whatever else you can do.

It is hard to believe we have only 11 weeks left in this fundraising year to achieve our goal. Ordinarily I would not be talking about money so early in my message, however MLERF President Pat Kalicki challenged us to increase our raised amount to \$1.25 million. It is amazing to think MLERF will celebrate its 75th anniversary next year, so let's reach that goal for Pres. Pat in honor of our upcoming 75th Anniversary.

The following District 33Y clubs made donations at the 33Y Midwinter, our Advisory meeting, and the MD33 State Convention: Adams - \$2500, Lee - \$1000, Southwick - \$15,000, North Adams - \$1750, Northampton - \$2500, West Springfield - \$7000, P Krynicki/Southwick - \$76, North Adams Ladies - \$20, and Charlemont \$200. Donations for District 33Y as of 3/17 totaled \$39,063.96. Please do not wait until the very end of June to submit your donations. They must be post-marked no later than 7/1/26. It is important Treasurer Deb Hayes closes the books at the end of June. We continue to be very grateful for your hard work and dedication to help us with this important fundraising.

I first heard about baby blindness when I was a student nurse in college and studying at a large hospital in New

York City in 1963. I had just helped with the delivery of a premature baby & I watched the attending pediatric physician complete the baby's examination. As he placed the baby in the incubator he said "This baby can see and we now know why so many of our previous premature babies could see at birth, but later became blind. A doctor in Boston had discovered that too much oxygen concentration in the incubator destroyed the tissue of the retina in the baby's eyes. A valve was developed to control the amount of oxygen being given and that discovery has saved the vision of many premature babies over the years." Little did I know that 53 years later I would become a Lion in Massachusetts and find out that the Massachusetts Lions supported the research to save those babies, and so much more over the years.

The researchers we have supported over these years have truly done amazing things in the vision field. We are currently supporting research at six institutes in Boston, who's grants have been approved by the Grants committee and our Board of Directors. Here is a brief summary of some of the projects and approval amounts:

Boston University -Two of three projects include Exploring a Natural Way to Protect Sight and Reduce Eye Pressure and Treating Strabismus using activated satellite cell derived muscle implants. \$146,000.

Schepens: Two projects: New Approaches to Understanding Blinding Ocular Diseases w/real world evidence on visually impaired drivers using automated driving systems. \$144,262.

Boston Children's Hospital - One of three projects: Investigating New Approaches to Address Abnormal Retinal Development and Visual Dysfunction Caused by Amino Acid and Metabolic Imbalance. \$146,000.

New England Eye Ctr Tufts University - One of three projects will support a mechanism guided discovery of new drug targets in retinopathy of prematurity (ROP). This research is related to too much oxygen concentration for premature babies. (Although this problem was rectified by the valve designed MLERF sponsored, recent research shows more factors need to be con-

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News From the Districts

District 33A



1VDG, Denise Andrews

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978-227-8450
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Lions of the Awesome District,
Happy Spring! It's that beautiful time of year when everything comes back to life. The days are longer, the weather is warming, and green is peeking through once again. Of course, for us Lions, the season doesn't matter—we stay busy year-round, living our motto, "We Serve." After all, need never takes a vacation.

A Huge Thank You for an Incredible Mid-Winter Conference!

District 33A clubs came together with generous hearts and donated an outstanding **\$24,425** to the Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund (MLERF), with an additional **\$13,500 in pledges** to be fulfilled before the end of the year.

Way to go, Lions—give yourselves a well-deserved round of applause!

Congratulations to PDG Marianna Riemer and ZC Barry Alman on receiving the MLERF Presidential Sight Award in recognition of their outstanding dedication to our shared mission. These two Lions truly embody what service and leadership are all about—thank you both!

Where Your Donations Go

Each year, hospitals and research institutions apply for MLERF grants, which fund cutting-edge vision research. The MLERF Board carefully reviews each application to ensure funds are awarded where they will have the greatest impact. Many of these grants serve as "seed funding," often leading to larger support from national organizations such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Our partnerships go beyond funding. Many institutions host visitation days, allowing us to see firsthand how your

generosity is changing lives. If you haven't yet visited one of the hospitals we support, consider doing so—it's inspirational and will make you incredibly proud to be a Lion.

Spreading the MLERF Message

District Directors Barry Alman, Lionel Carbonneau, Bob Grover, and Marianna Riemer have been actively visiting clubs to share MLERF updates and success stories.

If you would like a speaker at your next meeting, please reach out—they are always happy to connect and share the impact of our work.

MLERF Fundraisers in District 33A

• March 21 – Petersham Lions 19th Annual Curling Tournament

If you haven't tried curling, come out and give it a try—it's a fun way to support a great cause!

Congratulations to this year's winners from the Rutland Lions Club!

• May 9 – Mendon Lions "Toll Road for Sight"

(Rt. 16 & North Ave/Main St., 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM)

A very special thank you to **The Hanover Theatre and Conservatory in Worcester** who donated 30 tickets to the December 20 performance of A Christmas Carol to the Mass. Lions Eye Research Fund. Those tickets along with an anonymous donation of "guest passes" were sold throughout the Multiple District and raised \$2200 for MLERF. 100% of those monies will be used to fund research grants in the future.

Other Ways to Give

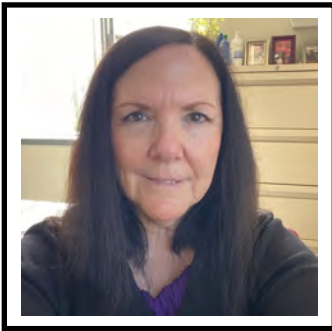
Consider donating through Celebration of Life Gift Envelopes to honor loved ones or mark special occasions. These are available through your MLERF Directors.

Learn More

Visit the MLERF website to watch short videos, read impact stories, and learn more about how you can help: www.mlerfi.com.

News From the Districts

District 33N



Cyndy Alexander
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cyndy.alexander@gmail.com

Hello Lions!

I hope everyone is keeping warm during this true New England winter season!

Here are some highlights from District 33N – MLERF good news stories I would like to share with you.

The MLERF mission is to provide critical funding for cutting-edge vision research at leading Massachusetts medical and academic institutions. Since its inception in 1951, the fund has donated more than \$42 million to help eradicate eye diseases and restore sight.

During the **Lions District 33N Mid-Winter Conference** in January 2026, Mark Alexander, IPDG and Karen MacPherson, President Shoe City Lions were honored for their exceptional dedication to the Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund (MLERF).

- Mark Alexander, IPDG: Recognized for his leadership and steadfast support of the MLERF mission during his tenure and beyond. As a prominent figure in District 33N, his commitment has been instrumental in advancing the fund's goals.
- Karen MacPherson, President Shoe City Lions Club: Honored for her significant contributions and service to the MLERF and LCI, highlighting her role as a dedicated advocate for vision research and sight preservation. Karen is an invaluable resource to many.



In November 2025, the Reading Lions Club presented a \$15,000 donation to the Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund (MLERF). The donation was the result of their highly successful 40th Annual Journey For Sight Road Race & Walk. Presenters of the donation were Journey for Sight Co-chairs Tom Clough and Joe Madden. Brenda MacPherson, MLERF First Vice President, accepted the check on behalf of the fund.

The Race had over 270 registered participants for this 5K Run and 1-Mile walk. Total Raised was \$15,000. This contribution brings the club's lifetime donations from this specific event to over \$350,000. Fantastic job Reading Lions!



The Woburn Host Lions Club Halloween Parade is a cornerstone of District 33N's fundraising efforts for the Mass Lions Eye Research Fund (MLERF). Held annually on the last Sunday of October, the event is one of the largest parades in Massachusetts, often drawing over 80,000 spectators. Following the 71st Annual Halloween Parade on In early 2026, the Woburn Host Lions Club President Louie Barretto presented a check for \$15,000 to District 33N District Governor Marcel V. Plouffe. The entire donation was earmarked for MLERF. The funds were raised through the generosity of spectators who donated along the parade route, as well as

Continued on page 15

News From the Districts

District 33K



Steve Levy
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Marlborough, MA 01752
774-285-2359
stevenlevy@comcast.net

District 33K in Action: Turning Community Spirit into Vision for All

In District 33K, supporting the Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund is more than a tradition—it is a living, breathing commitment carried out in our communities every day.

This commitment was on full display just this past month, as the Lions Clubs of Wrentham, Plainville, and Norfolk once again hosted their annual Polar Plunge at Lake Pearl. Now in its eighth year, the event brought together dozens of brave participants willing to “take the plunge” into icy waters, all in support of sight-saving research.

This signature District 33K event continues to grow in both participation and impact. Organized collaboratively by the three clubs, the Polar Plunge reflects the very best of Lionism—teamwork, visibility, and community engagement. Each year, funds raised go directly to MLERF, helping to advance cutting-edge research into diseases like macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy.

Equally important are the long-standing, grassroots efforts happening across the district. The Marlborough Lions Club continues its highly visible White Cane Day toll road collections—engaging the public directly while raising critical funds and awareness for vision programs. These roadside efforts, repeated year after year, are a reminder that even small donations, when multiplied across a community, can fuel life-changing outcomes.

Together, these efforts represent the dual strength of District 33K: large-scale signature events and consistent local fundraising. Whether it's a Polar Plunge participant jumping into freezing water or a driver dropping a few

dollars into a White Cane canister, every action contributes to something much larger.

And that “something larger” is truly remarkable.

Since its founding in 1951, MLERF has invested more than \$40 million into eye research, with 100% of funds raised going directly to research—not administration. Lions-funded breakthroughs have helped identify causes of blindness, improve surgical techniques, and develop treatments that are now used worldwide. What began as a response to prevent “baby blindness” has evolved into a global force in vision research.

But MLERF's impact isn't just measured in dollars—it's measured in lives changed. From helping premature infants retain their sight to advancing treatments that preserve vision later in life, the work supported by Lions reaches across generations.

District 33K has long been a leader in this mission, but the opportunity ahead is even greater. Imagine the impact if every club hosted just one additional MLERF-focused fundraiser each year, or if every Lion made a personal commitment to support initiatives like the Polar Plunge or White Cane Day.

The recent success of the Wrentham, Plainville, and Norfolk Polar Plunge—and the ongoing dedication of clubs like Marlborough—prove that the model works. It's visible. It's engaging. And most importantly, it changes lives.

As Lions, we are called to be “Knights of the Blind.” In District 33K, that call is not just heard—it is answered, again and again.

Lion Steve

News From the Districts

District 33S



PDG Wayne Smith
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Abington, MA 02351
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subwps@aol.com

I've been asked many times over why I became a Lion. And why I remain one. The answer? The answer, initially, is because I was asked.

Simple as that sounds, being asked is one of the most consistently cited reasons people give for supporting a charitable organization or cause. It removes the ambiguity of "wanting to help" and provides a clear opportunity to engage.

That said, the first time I was asked to join the Lions was in 1968. I declined, initially. I was working seven days a week and had a wife and four young children at home. The appeal from my friend who asked was that it would be a night out of the house. At the time, I thought the last thing I needed was to be home even less. Yet it was my wife Priscilla who encouraged me. She, rightly so, suggested that it would be good to meet other people in town.

The following year, a different friend, called. He shared with me all the work the Abington Lions were doing to help the community and raise funds for eye research. It was compelling, and this time I said yes.

Shortly after I became an Abington Lion, a speaker came to one of our meetings. Her name was Barbara, and she had recently had a corneal transplant, restoring her sight after being blind for most of her life. Prior to that, she had never seen her own young children. Hearing first-hand the profound impact that life-changing gift of sight had on Barbara and her family made an indelible impression on me. From that moment on, I was hooked. Being a Lion became personal and purposeful.

Meeting many of the researchers who had received grants from Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund (MLERF) - funds not readily available elsewhere for initial research - had an overwhelming influence that only strengthened my resolve and passion for being a proud Lion.

One of the first researchers I met was Howard M. Leibowitz MD, from the Department of Ophthalmology at Boston University. He told me about a 94 - year - old woman he had recently treated. One of her greatest pleasures had been reading until cataracts dimmed and diminished her world to a point that she could no longer see words on the page. He understood how vital reading was to this woman, and when many others might not have, he restored her sight and the joy of reading for her remaining years of her life. For as long as I knew him, Howard Leibowitz was a man known not only for his impeccable medical expertise but for his deep compassion.



Howard M. Leibowitz
June 1, 1937- February 25, 2026

It was about that time, in my first year as a Lion, that the MLERF made its initial pledge to provide financial support to an eye research program at Boston University. The seed money was the catalyst that enabled BU to attract additional sufficient funding to construct the Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Laboratory within the Boston University School of Medicine. Over the years, the partnership between the MLERF and scientists at BU has been extraordinarily productive and led to tremen-

District 33Y Continued

sidered, including babies surviving at a much younger age). Another reason is the birth weight of the baby is a strong predictor of the severity of the ROP, as well as when infants leave the incubator and are in room air. This often triggers a proliferative neo vascular reaction. Current research is trying to identify what other factors might be causing ROP in addition to the oxygen. \$146,000.

Mass Eye and Ear - Three projects: Leveraging Genetic Knowledge to Personalize Glaucoma Care, Mapping the Geometry of Glaucoma Progression and Assessing the Clinical Utility of a Novel CRISPER - Based Point of Care Test for Ocular Toxoplasmosis. \$146,000.

Joslin Diabetes Center - Three research projects addressing Diabetic Retinopathy: Pathogenesis, Prediction and Prevention. One of three projects includes Prospective Validation of Artificial Intelligence Models for Detection of Key Diabetic Retinopathy Features in Screening Programs. \$146,000.

These six great eye research institutes and the researchers are so grateful for the amazing ongoing financial support that MLERF has provided for them. Our seed money provides them with the opportunity to get further funding for their research from government grants. Having the opportunity to meet with the researchers and go to their labs to see first-hand what they are doing, is absolutely amazing. If you have the opportunity to go with us, please come to this year's MLERF Award Luncheon meeting on Saturday August 1st at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel in Milford. Invitations will be sent to the clubs. Meet with the MLERF directors and researchers. I guarantee it will be an informative, enjoyable afternoon.

As we approach the 75th MLERF anniversary we can look back and reflect on how much the Lions Clubs in Massachusetts have contributed to the advances made in the treatment and prevention of blindness. The history of MLERF is amazing as are the success stories of so many people that have been helped by the services provided by MLERF. It has been my honor to have served on the MLERF board for 10 years.

We wish you much success with your upcoming summer fund raisers. Come join MLERF at the Zoo on Saturday May 2nd. Also remember to visit the Agawam Lions and West Springfield Lions food booths at the Big E in September.

Have A Wonderful Summer and We Thank You Again For All Your Fundraising Efforts!

Lion Maryann and Lion Jean

District 33A Continued

You'll feel proud to be a Lion when you see the lives you've helped change.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support, generosity, and service. Keep up the amazing work—you truly make a difference.

With much appreciation,
PDG Denise Andrews

District 33N Continued

through corporate sponsorships. This parade featured approximately 25 marching bands and over 100 floats, including a special appearance by the Boston Renegades, a beep baseball team for the sight-impaired based in Woburn. This year's parade will be on October 18, 2026. Come on down!

The Concord Lions Club President, Heidi Clapp Webster, welcomed District Governor Marcel Plouffe to their September meeting and presented to him a donation for MLERF from their club. DG Marcel was happy to receive the donation and we all thank the Concord Lions for their efforts!

So many clubs are doing so many fund raisers for MLERF and all deserve recognition and are our heroes. I know I don't have all of them here but here are a few more examples of greatness:

Haverhill Lions held a successful Breakfast with Santa MLERF fund raiser.

Newburyport Lions were the largest donor to MLERF in the State in 2025.

Shoe City held a time at Rolly's in the fall 2025. Great fun for a good cause!

Many participated in a Belly Flop contest, Polar Plunge, raffles and other various fund raisers, all for MLERF.

Every donation counts and every effort matters.

Thank you to everyone of District 33N!

Lion Cindy Alexander



Continued from page 13

District 33S Continued

dous advancements in eye research technology and prototype instruments - the world's first ophthalmic laser coagulator to treat retinal disease, the first clinical specular microscope to non-invasively visualize the cells lining the inside surface of the cornea, the development of synthetic corneas, and new learning about ways to combat infections and inflammation in the eyes.

Much of that early progress through the '70s,'80s,'90s occurred under the leadership of Dr. Leibowitz, who then served as chairman of BU Ophthalmology department. This year, the eye research community lost a great man when Howard Leibowitz passed away on February 26, 2026. The legacy of his lifelong commitment to eye research lives on in the generations of ophthalmologists he taught and the gratitude of untold numbers of patients to whom his work gave the gift of sight.

Contributions in his memory can be made to the MLERF, Inc., 37 Island Road, Millis MA 02054, attn. Debbie Hayes, Treasurer.

At our 33S Mid Winter Conference Governor Steve Garran asked Abington Lion's Club President Amy Chrisom to speak about her life with Diabetes. I was not there but had the privilege of seeing the video of her presentation. Amy grew up with diabetes and lost her sight when she was about to graduate from college to be a teacher. She was candid with her life experience and spoke about the importance of being a Lion. Also what her Lion family is to her. Especially PDG Kathy Salem.

The Lions Seaside Walk chaired by First Vice District Governor Jesse Armell,III was a smashing success this year raising over sixty thousand dollars for MLERF. Governor Steve Garran certainly set the example with his fund raising and enthusiasm.

On August 1, 2026, we will host our MLERF Annual Awards and Lion Appreciation Banquet to present this year's grants and hear from representatives of each of the eye research institutions we support. It also is an opportunity to recognize the hard work and financial contributions from our Massachusetts Lions Clubs during the 2025-2026 Lions' year. I look forward to seeing my many good friends and fellow Lions there.

As Priscilla said to me all those years ago, maybe it would be good to meet more people in town. It was much more than that. Fifty-seven years later, I can say that becoming a Lion and remaining one was one of the best and most meaningful decisions I ever made.

Yours in Lionism,

Wayne

You are cordially invited
to attend the



Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund, Inc.

74th Annual
Lions Appreciation
&
Awards Banquet

**2025 - 2026 MLERF President
Patricia Kalicki, PDG**

Welcome all Lions, Researchers and Guests!!!

This annual event allows us to honor our Massachusetts Lions Clubs for their generous contributions to MLERF, introduce the newly elected MLERF officers, recognize the 2026 Grant Recipients, and honor individual Lions for their outstanding commitment to MLERF.

Saturday, August 1, 2026

11:00am - reception 12:00 noon - lunch
awards ceremony immediately following lunch

DoubleTree by Hilton

11 Beaver Street
Milford, MA

for room reservations, please call
508-478-7010

over...



\$35.00 per person
RSVP by July 10, 2026
NO WALK-INS

The annual **MLERF Awards Luncheon** is a celebration of the Massachusetts Lions Clubs for their support of MLERF to fund the research being done in our Boston medical and academic institutions to end vision disease and blindness.

If your Club has donated \$5,000 or more this past year, or has reached a lifetime donation of \$200,000, \$300,000, \$400,000, \$500,000, \$600,000 etc, your Club is eligible for two (2) complimentary meals. Clubs earning complimentary meals **MUST still register** with the attendee's names and meal choices below.

We hope you will be in attendance to meet the new officers and directors, honor all clubs of MD33 who make our research grants possible, and support the researchers who are working tirelessly to end vision disease and eradicate blindness.

Please complete the registration form below and mail with a check for \$35.00 per meal, made payable to MLERF. Reserved tickets will be available at the check-in table upon arrival.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please call or text Patricia Kalicki at 508-498-2770 or email her at pak331@aol.com.

RESERVATIONS DUE NO LATER THAN JULY 10, 2026

Name: _____ **Title/Club Position:** _____

Club Name: _____ **District:** _____

Full Address: _____

Email: _____ **Phone:** _____

Guest Name: _____ **Title/Club Position:** _____

Guest Name: _____ **Title/Club Position:** _____

Mail completed form to: PCST Lisa Munn, 92 Thurston St., Wrentham, MA 02093 or you may email the completed form to: lisamunn@verizon.net.

MEAL SELECTION:

Baked Stuffed Chicken _____ Baked Haddock: _____ Veg/Vegan (Pasta Primavera) : _____

GF Baked Stuffed Chicken _____ GF Baked Haddock: _____

of complimentary tickets being used: _____ x \$0.00 = \$ 00.00

of paying Attendees: _____ x \$35.00 = \$ _____

Total Attendees: _____ **Total \$** _____ **Check #** _____

Reservations will be acknowledged by email. We look forward to seeing you on August 1st!

10th Annual Polar Plunge

Lions Clubs held the **10th Annual Polar Plunge** on March 21 at Lake Pearl in Wrentham to benefit Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund (MLERF). Almost 100 people – Lions and others – braved the 36-degree water to raise more than **\$50,000 for vital eye research** that can one day help you or a loved one. Many plungers wore creative and colorful costumes representative of the colorful atmosphere of the day.

Lions are known for working with sight-related issues and visually impaired or blind people. There are over 240 Lions Clubs throughout Massachusetts and together they operate and manage MLERF, which is dedicated to providing seed funding for cutting edge research projects and has a goal of trying to eradicate preventable blindness. Since 1952, MLERF has donated more than 43 million dollars in eye research grants. MLERF research grants have been critical support for Boston scientists to continue pioneering research that is paving the way to eradicating eye diseases and preventable blindness.

Lions Polar Plunge Committee



The Millis Mice - Best Team Costume



Medfield Lions Club



??? - Best Costume



Dr. Deb Wayne & Lion Steve Levy



Raynham Lions Club

10th Annual Polar Plunge



George Washington crossing the... *Pearl?*



?



1st VP Brenda MacPhearson and
Lion Denise Cataldo



The Brave Souls of Massachusetts!
Thank you for your support of MLERF!



???



The Polar Bear Family



33K DG Anthony Baliola

10th Annual Polar Plunge



APPROVED GRANTS FOR 2025-2026



Boston Children's Hospital

Grant: \$146,000



**Chobanian & Avedisian
School of Medicine**

Grant: \$146,000

Beth Israel Lahey Health 
Joslin Diabetes Center

Grant: \$146,000



**Mass General Brigham
Mass Eye and Ear**

Grant: \$146,000



**Schepens Eye
Research Institute**
Massachusetts Eye and Ear

Grant: \$144,262



Grant: \$146,000

PRESIDENTIAL GRANT

Joslin Diabetes Center

Grant: \$200,000

TOTAL PRESIDENTIAL

GRANTS TO DATE

\$5,486,509

TOTAL GRANTS TO DATE

(including all other institutions and grants)

\$44,106,980



OUR STORY

75 years ago...

A \$5,000 Lions donation...

Facilitated a renaissance for eye research in Massachusetts.

In the ensuing years, \$43 million has been raised for eye research by the Lions of Massachusetts.

But back in 1950, the Great Depression was still a faint memory. Kids were watching “Howdy Doody” on 12-inch black-and-white TVs. The median family income was \$3,300 per year, and milk was still delivered to the doorstep. The average home price was \$1,940.

And babies were going blind.

During the summer of 1950, E. Daniel Johnson, then-Massachusetts District Governor of 33N, was visited by a friend who brought with him his four-year-old son, blind since birth with retrolental fibroplasia or so-called “baby blindness.”

Turns out that Johnson’s fellow Lion, Mass-

achusetts 33K District Governor Harry Hartford, also had a friend with a blind baby—Al Hirshberg, a sports writer for the Boston Post and a Trustee of the Foundation for Eye Research.

In October 1950, these men—Johnson, Hartford and Hirshberg—along with a small group of Lions, met with Dr. Edwin B. Dunphy, Professor of Ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School and Chief of Staff at the Massachusetts Eye & Ear Infirmary. Dr. Dunphy explained that there was a disease, discovered just 10 years previously by Dr. Theodore L. Terry at Boston’s Lying-In Hospital (known today as Brigham & Women’s Hospital), called retrolental fibroplasia (commonly known as “baby blindness”) that was affecting 4 out of 5 premature babies weighing less than 4 pounds. With no known pathology and no financial resources to inves-

tigate the cause, 2,500 babies (just the US) were losing their sight every year.

What could be done?

An informal meeting in DG Harry Hartford's hotel room at the 1951 Lions Clubs International Convention in Atlanta led into the first committee appointed by the Council of Governors in October 1951, which then led to Eye Research being voted at the State convention in 1952 as the statewide official project of the Lions of Massachusetts; The Lions of Massachusetts raised a whopping \$5,000, equivalent to \$50,000+ in today's dollars. Soon thereafter, the first Eye Research Grant was given to Dr. Theodore H. Ingalls of Harvard Medical School, who was instrumental in confirming that baby blindness was being caused by using too much oxygen in the incubators of premature babies. Today over 150,000 adults can see because of the foresight and concern of these Lions.

Soon thereafter, the Lions supported the Ophthalmic Plastics Laboratory, operated by Dr. William Stone, Jr., which developed pure plastic corneas to be used for persons afflicted with scarred corneas.

In 1953 support was given to the Joslin Clinic under the direction of Dr. Elliot P. Joslin, an energetic man in his early nineties, concerned with the cure for diabetes, which is the leading cause of blindness in the United States. The "Lions Laser Lens" project, which can detect diabetes in the eye before any other physical signs appear, was headed by Dr. Sven Bursell. In addition, Tufts New England Medical Center's Dr. Bertram Silverstone also received grants for his work using radioactive isotopes to cure eye and brain tumors. Further, Dr. Bernard Schwartz at Tufts New England Medical Center received Lions support for his work on modern photographic techniques for damage to the optic nerve and disc in glaucoma.

By 1955, a \$45,000 fellowship was awarded established in honor of Dr. Edwin B. Dunphy for his contributions to eye research. The Retina Foundation (now known as The Schepens Eye Research Institute), under the direction of Dr. Charles Schepens, constructed the first upside down operating table to repair detached

retinas using the Lions grant. Schepens has the longest continuous relationship with MLERF and have dedicated some of their laboratories to the Lions for their continued support of their research efforts.

In fact, there are three major laboratories dedicated to the Massachusetts Lions. The first was at the Mass. Eye & Ear Infirmary called the Howe Laboratory of Ophthalmology run by Dr. David Cogan. The Fund set aside \$40,000 for a lab for young doctors being trained in eye research. The lab was actually a janitorial supply room located on the top of the building and was affectionately known as "The Lions Penthouse."

The second laboratory was established in 1969 at Boston University Medical Center, where a major commitment was made for space located on the 9th floor of the new instructional building. It was dedicated exclusively to eye research and is known as "Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Laboratory." Dr. Ephraim Friedman, the first director, and his successor, Dr. Howard Liebowitz, were instrumental in conceiving, designing and constructing one of the first photo-coagulator ophthalmic laser beams, which was later used in surgery. The prototype was housed in an entire room, while today's model is the size of a small microwave oven. The world's first clinical specular microscope was also conceived and built here. In 1975 the "Elton MacNeil Memorial Unit" was dedicated in his name for his many years as chairman and president (1954–1961) of the Mass Lions Eye Research Fund, Inc. PDG MacNeil was known as "Mister Massachusetts Lions Eye Research."

The third laboratory was established in 2011 at Schepens Eye Research Institute. The Lions Laboratory for Genetic Research was established by Dr. Neena Haider to treat and prevent retinal diseases. The lab identified a genetic modifier that is able to ameliorate retinal degeneration. The lab's current research also revealed a novel role for Vitamin D metabolism in the development of Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) and antioxidants in neuroprotection from light-induced retinal damage. The lab has also developed unique genetic models to study the retinal and vascular observable characteristics associated with macular degeneration.



These are just a few of the major Boston research centers we have supported over the years and just a few examples of some of the basic research conducted in those early years. Today, research has moved light years ahead with the use of DNA, growing of culture cells and the separation of genes to find the genetic cause of eye diseases, but there is still so much more to be done.

The Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund Inc. was incorporated on January 20, 1958, and was given tax exempt status 501(c)(3) in February 1959. In 1971, a memorial fund was established to honor the memory of a loved one allowing individuals to contribute. A separate Trust and Endowment Fund was established in 1980 to perpetuate our research efforts. Today the T&E corpus is over \$1,800,000. The 1998/1999 year was the first time the Fund raised over \$1 million in a single year in donations from the clubs and memorials.



The first statewide project offered to the Clubs was the sale of Westinghouse "Light Bulbs." The Fund bought the bulbs wholesale, and they were then distributed to the clubs for door-to-door sale. This was a major fundraiser for many years through the late 60s and

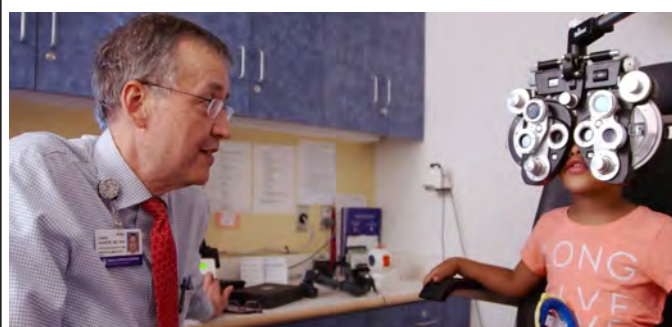
70s. In the mid 1970s we participated in "White Cane Day" during which white cane stickers were given out for donations. In April 1983 all the special fundraising projects were combined into the "Journey for Sight" project, which asked each club to have one extra project and contribute the proceeds in addition to their regular donations. It was the first time the Fund used advertising on radio, newspapers and TV along with T-Shirts, hats and aprons. The "Pennies" project was born at the same time using a 1/2 gallon milk container to collect coins in local establishments across Massachusetts. The container displayed the new "Lions Logo" and the "Journey for Sight" lettering. In June 1982 the Fund was designated as the Charity of the Senior PGA Golf Classic at Marlboro Country Club. The sponsor was Digital Equipment Corp., who donated a \$25,000 computer for eye research. It was given to Joslin Clinic, and was the first computer to be used for research at that center.

In 1999 the Fund established a "*Presidential Grant*" in

conjunction with Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF). It is a one-time grant, separate from the normal grants, directed towards projects which do not meet the normal grant criteria but are considered worthy for the advancement of eye research. LCIF matches the MLERF monies up to \$150,000 annually. To date there have been \$3,500,00 in matching grants.

Over the years, the Fund has given out over \$43 million in research grants. We are proud of the fact that every penny donated since 1951 has been given back in grants to many of Massachusetts prestigious medical and academic facilities. These grants are directed for pure conceptual vision research projects.

These initial grants are the "seed money" used to fund initial "*brain to bench*" – clinical research and the first clinical trials to prove the efficacy of the research to bring these brilliant ideas to life. Once these concepts



David Hunter, MD, PhD. Boston Children's Hospital

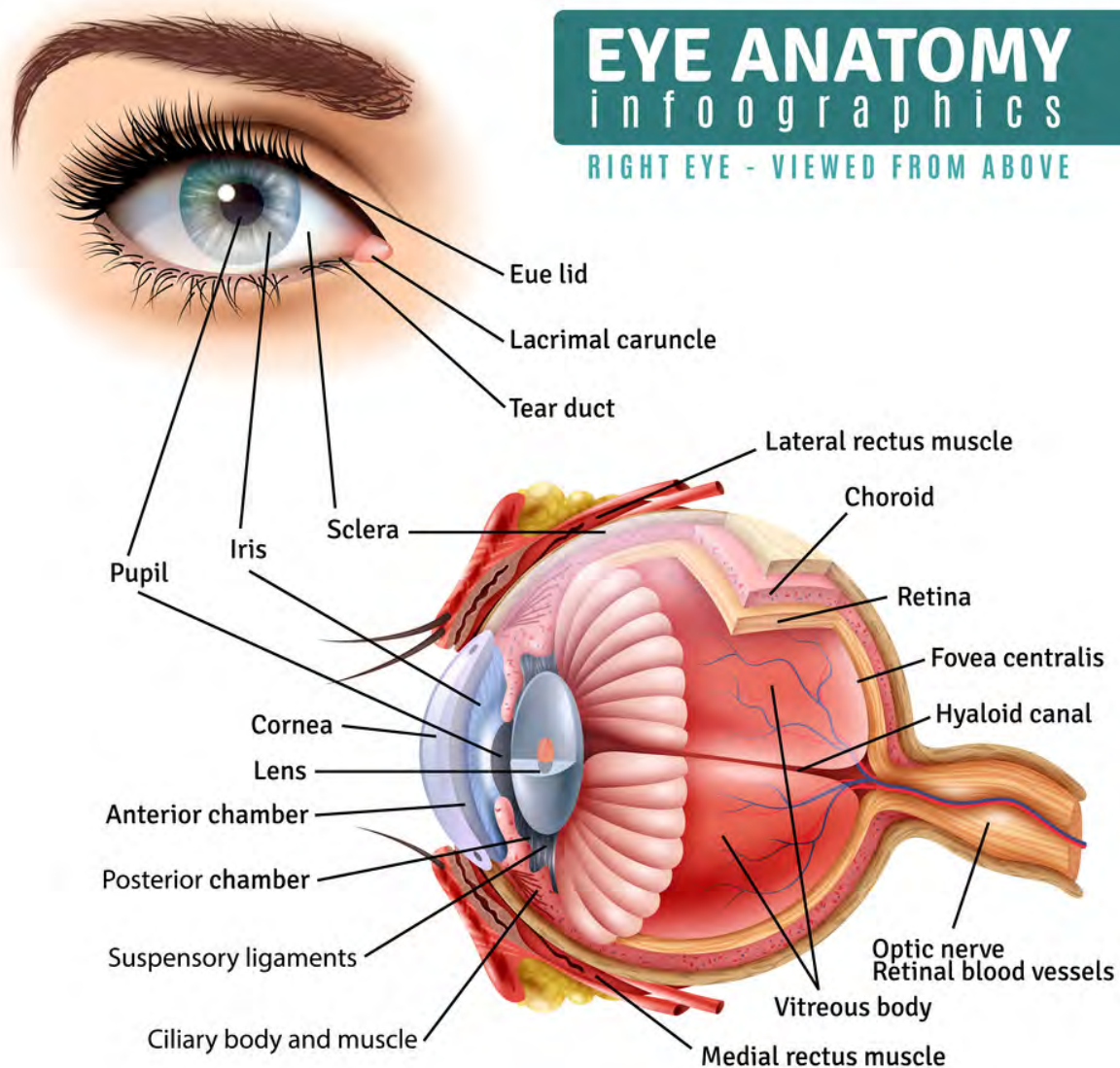
have been proven, researchers may then apply for further grants through the National Institute of Health and other federal and private sources. Because of Lions support, Boston has become one of the leading eye research hubs in the world.

Much has been accomplished...

but there is still much more to be achieved.



Thank you to all of the Officers, Directors, Lions Clubs, Researchers, donors and supporters of Mass Lions Eye Research. Together we will find a cure for vision diseases and blindness.



Hatfield Lions Club Annual Fundraising Raffle!



The **Hatfield Lions Club** has always tried to make a difference locally. **Lions** have been best known for their efforts to eradicate blindness, but as **Lions**, our main goal is to serve the local community. Through our fundraising efforts which include the Lions Road Race, Bike Tour and Sports Raffle, the **Lions** are able to fund two scholarships at Smith Academy Graduation and donate to local organizations such as The Hatfield Historical Society, Heads Up, Hatfield PTA, Hatfield Schools Health and Wellness, Kindness for Kids, Fourth Grade Forestry Project, Hatfield Ambulance Fund, and Hatfield 350th Celebration.

This year's Fundraising Raffle includes:

- **2 Patriots Football Tickets** to a home game in Foxboro.
- **2 Red Sox Tickets** to a home game in Boston.
- **\$500 in Gift Cards** to the Munich House in Chicopee.
- **\$275 Farm Share** donated by Bardwell Farm.
- **A Foursome with Cart** to the Wyckoff Country Club.

Tickets are \$5 each or a book of 5 for \$20

Drawing is June 15th

Scan here to get tickets using the camera app on your smartphone!



"Win Big" while helping your community!
Good Luck and Thank you for your support!