

# LION

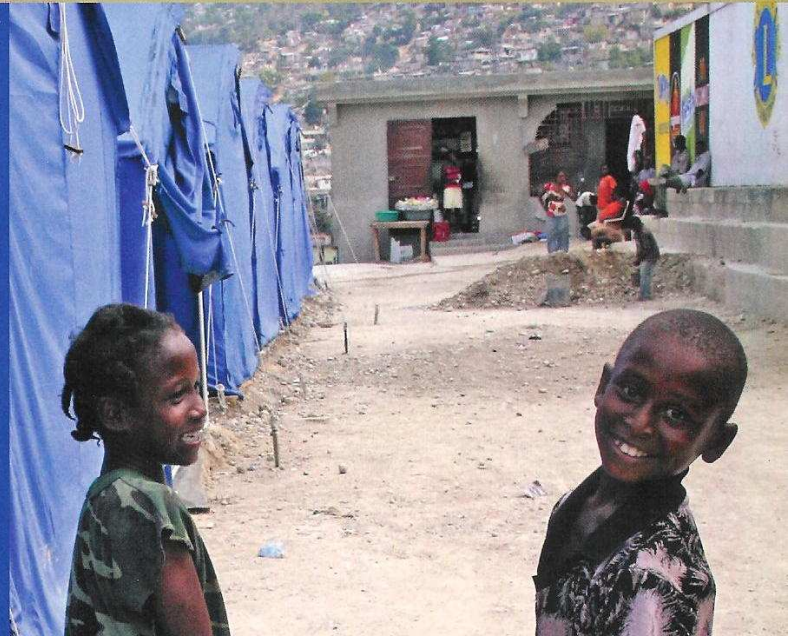


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## 22 Retired from Work—Not Life

Lions in Nation's Largest Gated Community Still Very Much Engaged in Service



A landmark fountain marks an entrance to Hot Springs Village, the nation's largest gated community.



# Retired from Work—Not Life

Lions in Nation's Largest Gated Community Still Very Much Engaged in Service

by Elizabeth Blackwell

The preschoolers who gather at one of the Hot Springs Breakfast Lions Club vision screenings are used to having their pictures taken at birthday parties or during family vacations. But they have trouble sitting still for long, and they're easily distracted. Getting accurate, close-up photos of their eyes is no easy task.

Not to worry. In the nine years the Arkansas club has offered vision screenings to their youngest neighbors, the Lions have learned how to keep the process running smoothly. A special camera, called a PhotoScreener, is set up in a semi-dark room at the school, often by Lion Dick Gams, who coordinates the program with schools and day-care centers throughout the area. One by one, the children are brought in and escorted to a seat about 4 ½ feet from the camera. A helper—usually a wife of a Lion—shows them where to look and provides reassurance. Sometimes, they prop a stuffed lion on top the camera to grab a child's attention. Then, as quickly as you can say “cheese,” it's done.

“Their power of concentration is about 10 seconds,” says Gams of his young photo subjects. “I usually get the picture within five or six seconds. We photograph as many

as 125 children in a day, but I've got a good team that keeps them concentrated.”

The biggest challenge? “You've got to fight like heck to keep them from touching the film,” laughs Gams, 75, a former electric lineman from Green Bay, Wisconsin, who is also a zone chairman. “Some of the really small ones cry, but we take care of 90 percent of the children with no problem. Afterward, they all want to give the helpers a hug. It's very rewarding.”

“They're so open and ready to help,” says Sister Mary Thomas, director of St. Michael's Child Care in Hot Springs, a preschool the Lions have visited for the past five years. “They knocked on my door one day and said here we are and here's what we do. They're so open and eager to help.” Some children, she says, have “big needs.” They come from low-income families and don't always get proper medical and vision care. “The Lions follow up and make sure they get the right services. We're lucky to have them in this community,” she says.

It's that sense of purpose that keeps Gams and his fellow Lions coming back, year after year, when they could be taking it easy, enjoying the rewards of retirement

## Retired from Work—Not Life



Hot Springs Breakfast Lions may be retired, but for years they've still put in a good day's work. A few years ago preschool student Macey Westfall was the 1,000 child to be screened by the club. Lions now have completed more than 6,000 vision screenings. Also pictured are (from left) Skip Landon (deceased), Dr. Everett "Bud" Holt, Macey's mother Jessica Westfall and volunteer Marty Oldham.

after years of hard work. After all, their club is based in Hot Springs Village, the country's largest gated community, where they have access to just about every leisure activity a retiree could want, from fishing and golf to card clubs and concerts.

Living in such a place, it would be easy to forget about the world outside. But the Hot Springs Village Breakfast Lions Club remains very much engaged with the community beyond its gates. While clubs throughout the country work with schools, the Hot Springs Village program intervenes earlier than usual, screening children as young as 18 months old. In the nine years the Lions have offered the service, they've screened more than 5,000 children.

The Lions may spend only a few minutes with each little boy or girl. But catching vision problems early can literally change the course of a life. If a child has defective vision in one eye, his or her brain will adjust to that defect. Even if the problem is caught and treated later on, the brain may never be able to process the signals correctly.

Young children who can't see well are also more likely to develop behavioral problems at school, because they get easily frustrated and lag behind other students.

They may be misdiagnosed with learning disabilities or get teased by their classmates. The longer a vision defect remains untreated, the more a child grows to dread or resent school.

Gams has seen firsthand how the Lions' screenings can change that dynamic. He remembers one little boy who was extremely disruptive in his first-grade classroom, the sort of child who never paid attention and seemed destined for a long career as a troublemaker. "All he needed was the right glasses," says Gams. "By third grade, he was a straight A student."

At another screening, he saw a little girl who was severely cross-eyed. "Her mother was a preschool teacher, making hardly any money, and her grandparents had nothing," he remembers. The club got her follow-up treatment with an eye doctor and gave her new glasses. "You should see how beautiful she is," says Gams, his tone as doting as a grandfather. "It's very satisfying."

The club works with two optometrists, Dr. Graham Holt and Dr. Michael Semmler, who donate their time to assess the photos. On average, between 6 and 10 percent of the children screened are encouraged to seek further treatment. The Lions provide referrals and pay for doc-

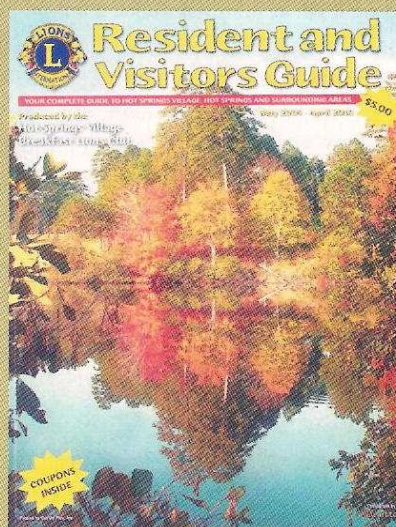
## Retired from Work—Not Life

tor's visits and glasses for needy families. They even help arrange surgeries at the Mid-South Lions Sight and Hearing Service in Memphis and offer to drive families to the medical center if necessary. (Occasionally, a member of the Evening Lions—the other Hot Springs Village club—has flown them in his Cessna plane.)

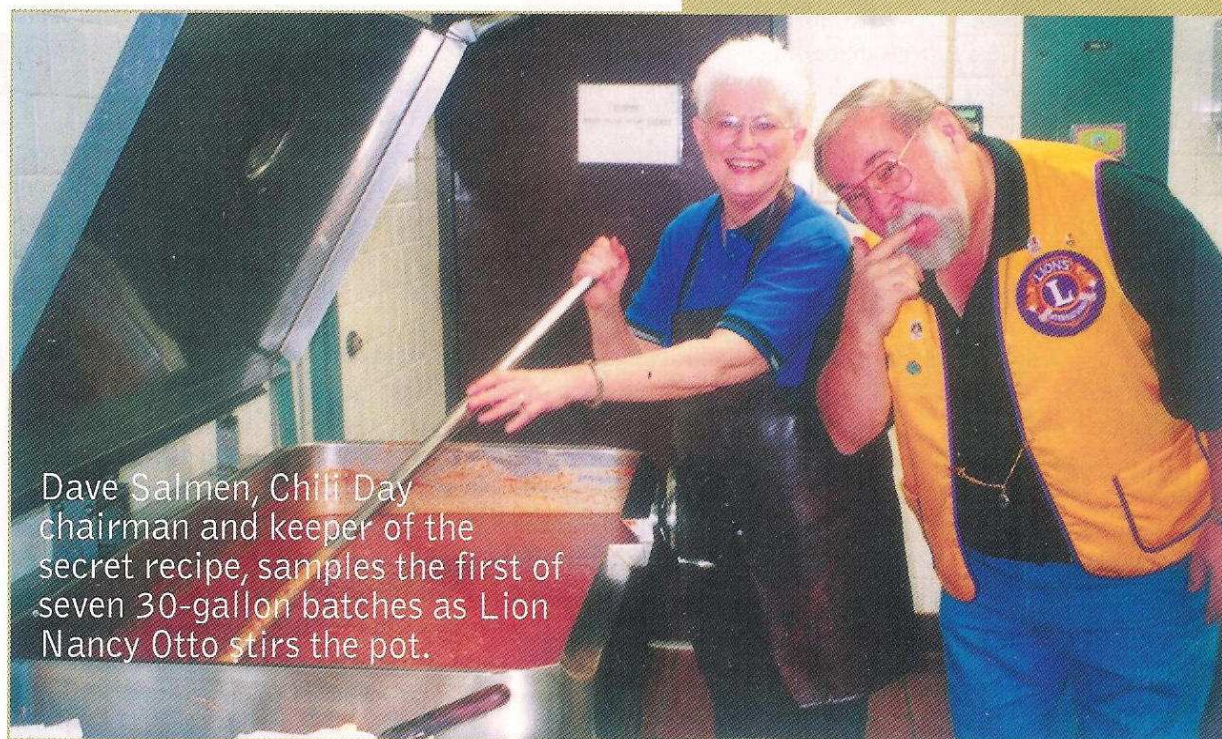
What's frustrating is that all those offers of assistance aren't always enough to convince families to take action. "Once a parent gets a notice from us, a lot don't want to follow up on it," says Richard Olson, 2009-10 club president. "We do our best, but we can't keep hounding them."

Funding the program is also a challenge. The club spends \$1 for each piece of film, and last year they screened almost 1,000 children. To raise money, the club sponsors an annual golf tournament, organizes a Chili Day and sells a local community guide. They also partner with other service clubs for larger projects.

All but a handful of the club's 65 members are retired, but they want to remain challenged and involved, says Dr. Everett "Bud" Holt. A former family practice physician in Corpus Christi, Texas, he moved to Hot Springs Village 24 years ago.



For 17 years the Breakfast Lions have published the Resident and Visitors Guide to the Hot Springs Village area. Delivered free to homes, the 120-page guide generates more than \$55,000 in ad sales.



Dave Salmen, Chili Day chairman and keeper of the secret recipe, samples the first of seven 30-gallon batches as Lion Nancy Otto stirs the pot.

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“At the time, so many people said to me, ‘You’re retiring to Arkansas?’” he remembers with a laugh. “Like it was the end of the world.”

But Holt, 89, credits the community with helping him get the most out of his retirement. “It’s a remarkable place,” he says. “People here live better and longer. People our same age who live on the outside seem older.” Perhaps it’s because so many of his neighbors share Holt’s belief that seniors shouldn’t retire from life. “Being retired means you don’t have to work for a living,” he says. “It doesn’t mean you don’t have to work.”

Holt also had a very personal reason for joining the Lions. He first got involved because he knew he was going to need a corneal transplant; he ended up having a total of four. “I would be blind by now were it not for the Arkansas Lions Eye Bank,” he says.

Like Holt, almost all his fellow Lions moved to Hot Springs Village from elsewhere in the country. Many are from the Midwest, refugees from Minnesota or Wisconsin who came in search of a more temperate climate. The club is about 80 percent male, with members whose professions ranged from sales to banking to teaching. About half were Lions before they moved to Hot Springs; others joined after being invited by a neighbor or golf buddy.

One thing they all share is an understanding of what it feels like to be the newcomer, and the Breakfast Lions have helped them build ties to their new community. “When I moved here, it was an adventure,” says Holt. “I didn’t know anybody. I had to find my own friends.”

Olson, 71, also took a leap of faith by moving to Hot Springs Village. A former fire department captain in Neenah, Wisconsin, he had moved to a farm after taking early retirement, but eventually he and his wife decided to settle somewhere warmer. Their daughter, who lived nearby, urged her parents to visit the Hot Springs Village. “My first thought was, ‘What am I going to do in Arkansas?’” he remembers. Like Holt, he didn’t know anyone who lived there and had to build a completely new network of friends.

“We got here on the first of December, and by the end of the month we had signed the papers to buy our house, so I guess you could say we liked it,” Olson says with a laugh. Since he had been a Lion in Wisconsin, he decided



Past President Richard Gams gamely takes his turn in the “Walmart Out House” fundraiser to support a boys and girls club near Hot Springs Village.

to join a local club as a way to meet people. “I’ve always enjoyed the camaraderie,” he says. “I chose the Breakfast Lions because they meet early, so you still have the rest of the day to do things.”

Meetings are held twice per month in a local church. Club members begin gathering around a quarter to seven, with breakfast served about an hour later. “We have one song to try to wake people up, then we eat and have our meeting,” says Olson. “This is a golf community—our members want to be done by 10 o’clock because they have tee times.”

But in between rounds of golf, card tournaments and busy social lives, the Breakfast Lions find time for numerous other community-service projects. They are strong supporters of Lions World Services for the Blind, an organization in Little Rock that teaches independent living skills to blind and visually impaired people from around the world; one of their members is on the board of directors. With other Arkansas Lions clubs, they take part in what they call the “Pony Express,” transporting donated corneas from throughout the state to the University of Arkansas Medical Center.

While many of their commitments are ongoing, they also help out as needs arise, doing what they can to help anyone with vision problems. When they heard about a blind man in the area who wanted to attend massage school, they organized rides for him to and from classes.

But the PhotoScreener program remains a particular point of pride. It's a chance for the Lions to leave their mark on the younger generation, helping the neediest children get on track to succeed in school. And apparently, some children enjoy the screenings so much that they come back even after their vision problems have been treated.

"We'll have some students show up, and we look at them and say, 'Don't you already wear glasses?'" Gams says. "They slip the glasses in their pockets and hope we don't notice." Clearly, the Breakfast Lions are doing something right. Their screenings are not only effective—they're fun.



Breakfast Lions Golf Scramble co-chairmen Bob Seekatz (left) and Jim Mainord inspect the course. The benefit, begun in 1977 when the club was chartered, raises funds for the Arkansas Lions Eye Bank, Lions World Services for the Blind and Mid-South Lion Sight & Hearing Service.

## Don't Retire from Life

I retired in September 1986. I chose not to stay in Texas even though I had lived there for 33 years. I came to Hot Springs. This is a nice place and most everyone is here because they want to be here. Most of them have been winners in life's race. There is a tremendous amount of talent: doctors, lawyers, CEOs, architects. And we're all in the same boat, trying to make the best of our remaining days. And with 13,000 of us retirees in the same place, we support one another and nurture one another in sickness and in health.

The best advice I heard about retirement I heard at a retirement seminar: "You must have something to retire to as well as retire from." There is a limit to how many times you can take the trash out or play golf or fish. A person must use his lifetime of experience.

With my Arkansas doctor's license I had many opportunities. I was a consultant at the Arkansas University Medical Center. I worked at the Jicarilla Apache Indian reservation in Arizona, where we were invited to Thanksgiving dinner with the Indians. I also worked for 10 years as the lab director of a plasma collection center.

I joined a service club. I had a corneal problem, Fuch's Dystrophy, and I knew I eventually would need a corneal transplant. I joined a Lions club because I knew they are interested in blindness. Eventually I was appointed to the Arkansas Lions Eye Bank and Lab and served as chairman of the board. I have had four corneal transplants, without which I would be blind. I could tell you why I had to have four transplants but that would be over a cold brew.

I found a great deal of satisfaction with the Lions club. Our club raises about \$75,000 annually for charitable projects. I remarked once that I didn't know when I retired I would be picking up trash by the roadside or I would be begging for money on the street corner at our annual White Cane Day or that I would be busing tables at our club's annual chili dinner. But I do these things because I am with friends and we are all working for the same thing.

Retirement is a life changer. It can be great or be a drag. It depends on you.

—Dr. Bud Holt, Hot Springs  
Breakfast Lions Club

