



HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE FOUNDER LIONS CLUB Founder Club of Lions Clubs International



1917
Melvin Jones
Founder Lions Club



The Young Men's Business League existed in Temple in 1916 when they became interested in a Dallas meeting to form an organization of civic clubs, the meeting that would lead to the founding sessions for Lions Clubs. George M. Cunningham was one of the Temple organizers along with H. K. Orgain and W. J. Bassett. The Temple Lions organization effort that began in 1916, came to fruition on November 1, 1917. Other charter members of the Temple Lions Club were Dr. J. M. Woodson, B. A. Hodges, J. C. Mitchell, John A. Cole, Dr. O. F. Gober, H. P. Robertson, Jr., W. E. Willis, W. F. Lucas, Andrew McBeath, H. L. Daily, W. O. Cox, P. L. Downs, Sr., W. W. Clement, Dr. J. M. Murphy and W. H. Knickerbocker.

Some club records show that Col. Downs was the first president of the club, but the newspaper of the day listed Robertson as the first man to serve as president. See our web page which lists the Past Presidents of the Temple Lions Club.

Early Club minutes document that the members were interested in community cleanliness and appearance, patriotism and high ideals for the membership.

The first projects were to support the sale of "Liberty Bonds" and to assist with record-keeping on the draft of men into military service. Temple Lions staged a "Victory Sing" for the community morale in the early days of World War I.

"City Beautiful" was a project begin in February 1918 and the Club inspired the townspeople to haul off 319 truckloads of trash from the downtown section in the first campaign.

Other projects in the formative years were sponsoring a "Manual Training Department" at Temple High School and sponsoring a carnival with profits directed to the YMCA and the Band Parents Club.

Minstrel shows were early fund-raisers, beginning in 1936, a tradition that continues today with the Temple Lions Club Annual Show, which is usually held in February or March of each year. The 64th Annual Show will be held on February 28 and March 1, 2003 and is entitled "DateLion." The foolishness which takes gentle pokes at local individuals, organizations, and the news media,

continues as an important part of today's show in addition to a limited amount of legitimate talent that performs each year.

In 1941, then Lions President D. Q. (Jack) Baskin reported that in the previous seven years the Lions had contributed to almost 300 cases of children's' medical needs under committee chairman Tom S. Wright's supervision.

Civic projects such as the "Bakers Field Fund," Ed Yarborough Park" and "Lions Park" fill the pages of Lions activities. Specific focus has been given to the prevention of blindness through the years.

At the beginning of World War II a Temple Daily Telegram article detailed the history of the Lions to that point, nothing that "the honor of being the oldest continuously operating club in all Lionism belongs to the Temple Lions Club, which has not defaulted a meeting since the first of 1917. Subsequent research shows that the Temple Lions Club is the 8th oldest Lions Club in the State of Texas.

The Lions began their weekly meetings at the Martin Hotel and then the Harvey House. Later meetings were held at the Doehring Hotel, the Kyle Hotel, the Temple Country Club, Inn at Scott and White and Temple College. Today the Temple Founder Lions Club meets at noon on Wednesdays at the Lions Den @ Gober. Anyone is invited to attend the weekly meetings of the Club.

Through the years, the Lions have taken pride in their "Founder Club" status. All clubs which were organized by 1917 were designated as "Founder Clubs." As the Club approached its 50th Anniversary, the arose some question about the Founder Club status. Records preserved by such men as J. Q. Baskin and former club historian W. F. Burchard show that Lions International General Counsel William R. Boyd came to Temple to research the club's history as Lionism itself neared its 50th anniversary.

It was Byrd who notified Temple Lions that they were certified as a "Founder Club after Lions Happy Smith, Dick Epperson and Gene Schwartz accompanied Byrd to the local newspaper file rooms to see accounts of early meetings.

Of all the thousands of dollars Lions have directed to our community, several projects stand out as visible Lions efforts in our community. Leading up to the 1965 groundbreaking for the Crippled Children's Rehabilitation Center on Marlandwood Road. Club members sold small bricks to raise funds for the "Bricks for Brace" campaign. Since that mid-60's beginning, the Rehab Center has served countless thousands of children who face physical challenges on a daily basis. The facility has been enlarged by other efforts through the years. Today the facility is know as the Central Texas Children's' Center.

The largest single project in which the Club has been involved prior to 2000 is the creation and continued development of Temple Lions Park. A joint project of the City of Temple and the Temple Founder Lions Club, the Club initially borrowed \$160,000 from banks in our community to build the Temple Lions Pool in Lions Park. The City received a Parks and Wildlife Department

grant to assist with the pool's funding. Through the years the Lions Club, the City and other organizations have continued to support the development of Lions Park. Today park includes the A. J. Mercer Softball Complex (4 fields), a Lions pavilion, a Rotary pavilion, a South Rotary playground for disabled children, hiking trail, and fishing pond. An outdoor amphitheater is under construction (2013) with funds from Temple Lions Club Parks & Charities and the Temple Parks Foundation contributing to its development. Named the "Lion Sam Farrow Aphitheater," it honors a long-time and life member of the Temple Founder Lions Club who has alone sponsored more than 70 members into our Club.

The Lions Club established a non-profit organization, Temple Lions Club Parks, Inc., to receive funds to retire the debt on the park and provide additional funds for future development of Lions Park and other parks in the city. TLC Parks, Inc. provided significant funding (\$125,000) for the renovation of the former Hardin Swim Center. A recent significant donation of \$100,000 was made to the City of Temple and Temple College to assist with the placement of lights on the joint use baseball field at Temple College.

In the early 1990's the Temple Lions Club was among the first clubs to bring the "Lions Quest" program into Temple schools. Lions-Quest programs teach youths to accept responsibility, communicate effectively, set goals, make healthy decisions and resist pressure to use alcohol and drugs. Lions clubs, districts and multiple districts support Lions-Quest through funding, coordination of teacher training and in other ways. The Club donation to the Temple schools for Quest programs and training have totaled about \$40,000.

Lions-Quest often had been cited for its quality. In June, after a rigorous evaluation, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, a federal agency, rated Lions-Quest's Skills for Adolescence component (for ages 10-14) as one of the country's most effective programs of its kind. A study by the Centers for Disease Control in 1996 praised Lions-Quest programs for improving grades, boosting reading test scores, decreasing tardiness and enhancing peer-to-peer interaction. Since its inauguration, Lions-Quest has helped adolescents to develop positive attitudes toward and answers for the crucial problem of self-esteem, drug and alcohol abuse, decision making and critical thinking.

Lions are known for their service to persons who are blind and visually impaired. This dedicated service began in 1925. During a Lions international convention, Helen Keller, a woman who had been blind and deaf since childhood, challenged Lions to become knights of the blind in this crusade against darkness. Lions accepted Keller's challenge.

Today, Lions Clubs around the world are involved in the following sight-related areas: Age-related macular degeneration, Braille, cataracts, cornea transplants and Lions Eye Banks, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, Helen Keller Day, Lions Camps for the blind and visually impaired, Lions recycle for sight, Lions World Sight Day, rehabilitation, vocational and recreational services, sight partnerships, support services for the blind and visually impaired, vision screening, and White Cane Day.

The World Health Organization estimates that the eyesight of one-fourth of the world's population can be improved through the use of corrective lenses. Unfortunately for many, a pair

of glasses is both unaffordable and inaccessible. In developing countries, an eye exam costs as much as one month's wages, and a single doctor may serve a community of hundreds of thousands of people.

For nearly 90 years, individual Lions Clubs, including our club, and districts in the U.S., Canada and several other countries have collected used eyeglasses for distribution to the needy in developing nations. The general public is encouraged to donate their used eyeglasses and sunglasses to their local Lions Club, or to send them to the Texas Lions Eyeglass Recycling Center, 200 Plaza Street, Midland, TX 79701.

The Temple Lions Club is proud of its record of community involvement and support of needy and disable individuals. Each year the Club spends about \$3,000 to purchase eye exams and eyeglasses for needy children in our community. Referrals are made by school nurses. We currently provide a limited number of glasses and eye exams for needy adults.

The Texas Lions Camp in Kerrville, TX is the major project of the Club. The Texas Lions Camp has been providing camping experiences for children with special medical conditions since 1949. The expenses associated with these experiences are paid in full by the Lions Camp Organization, so children attend completely free of charge. In many instances, transportation to and from Camp is provided as well.

The Texas Lions Camp offers the following types of Camps, completely free of charge to children: Camps for children with physical handicaps, day camp-for children with physical handicaps, camps for children with Type 1 diabetes, day camp for siblings of children with Type 1 diabetes and specialty camps for Down's syndrome and kids with cancer.

The Texas Lions Camp broke its all time record for the largest number of children served in a single summer (2003), when 1,523 campers participated in the summer camping program. While numbers are not our ultimate goal, it is gratifying to know that more children than ever before are benefitting from our services. Texas Lions Camp website is www.lionscamp.com.

Numberous Texas Wide Lions make up the 32 directors of the Texas Lions Camp. The Board of Directors meets quarterly to conduct the business of the camp and develop its long range strategies. For information about the Texas Lions Camp, contact the Texas Lions Camp in Kerrville, TX, or view the the Camp on their current Web Page..

The Central Texas Lions Eye Bank is another project supported by the Temple Lions Club. The Eye Bank started as the District 2-X3 Eye Bank and Scott and White. In recent years, three Central Texas Lions Districts have joined forces to fund the Central Texas Lions Eye Bank in Manor, TX. Dues and special gifts to the Eye Bank are funded by the local Lions Clubs in the three districts. In recent years the Central Texas Lions Eye Bank provided more than 1,000 cornea transplants annually at Central Texas hospitals. Through the generosity of the Lions, individuals are given sight when they would otherwise be confined to a world of impaired sight or blindness. The Eye Bank web site is <http://www.lebct.org>

Lion Donna Cole was the first female president of the Temple Lions Club. Under her leadership the Club has developed a \$40,000 project budget for the 2002-2003 Lions year. Funds for our yearly projects are derived primarily from the Temple Lions Club Annual Show, a lasagna supper held prior to the first home football game, an annual golf tournament in May, and Wildcat football parking income. We are grateful to the citizens of Temple for their support of our activities.

Annually the Club is a 100% (or more) contributors to the Lions humanitarian projects: Lions Clubs International Foundation, Texas Lions Foundation, Leader Dog for the Blind, Texas Lions Camp, World Services for the Blind, the Lone Star Lions Eye Bank, and Lions Efforts Against Drugs (L.E.A.D.).

The Lions programs for youth that are supported from our projects budget include Ralph Wilson Youth Club basketball, THS Project Graduation. Two annual scholarships are awarded: one is academic based and the second is service based. Also from this year's project budget we will provide contributions to the Children with Special Needs Network, Salvation Army, Ronald McDonald House, the Temple Free Clinic, and we continue to provide a contribution to the Central Texas Children's Center. Each year the Club transfers funds to the Temple Lions Club Parks and Charities, Inc. to continue the development of Lions and other parks in Temple. Recently TLCP&CI donated \$200,000 to the City of Temple for the development of the Lions Junction Family Water Park, with another donation of \$139,000 for the development of Lions Park Project 2026 playground with an African theme for a childrens playground. The Club's Foundation also completed (2013) a \$60,000 project for parking lots at the City of Temple Gober Park and Party House.

The Temple Lions Club is proud of our record of service to the Temple area for the past 109 years! To learn more about the Temple Founder Lions Club, check out our website at templelionsclub.org

If you are interested in learning more about the Temple Founder Lions Club or membership in the Club, you may contact the Temple Lions Club, P. O. Box 544, Temple, TX 76503. You may also contact the Club Secretary, William (Bud) Sperling, at 254-278-7404 or at templelionsclub@gmail.com. We welcome visitors to our weekly club meetings (Wednesdays at noon) at the Lions Den @ Gober, 1516 West Avenue H in Temple.

Last Updated: 1 July 2026