

History Of Lions Hearing Foundation

The History of this program goes back to the Multiple Convention of 1972, held in Duluth, MN. Lion Larry Meskan was the District Governor at the time.

The Lions Multiple District 5M adopted the project to work with the Deaf and Hearing Impaired at this Multiple Convention.

Lions International had adopted the project at the previous International Convention in Mexico City. It was decided at that time there would be two (2) trustees from each of the eight sub-Districts. Lion Jack Webster (Waterville Lions Club) and Lion Dayne Walker (Bryon Lions Club) were the original trustees from District 5M-6 (later redistricted as 5M-2 and 5M-1). Lion Jerry Schmieg (Victoria Lions Club) was named as trustee from District 5M-5 midway through the first year.

In 1977 the Lions of Multiple District 5M signed an agreement with the University of Minnesota to work with them to establish a Lions Hearing Center. The contract and the Hearing Center would both be patterned after the agreement and the Lions Eye Bank/Children's Clinic that was in operation at the U. of M. at that time. The Lions committed to raise \$1.7 million (over the next five-year period) to get the Hearing Center established. Lions were very generous in their donations toward this project. In March of 1982, the Hearing Foundation held a Telethon, which raised over \$400,000 for our project. Another Telethon was held the following March but with less success. While this was a financial windfall, the publicity generated by the Telethons was invaluable and made our Hearing Center project known throughout the state.

It was decided that the Hearing Center would be located on the eight floor of the Philips-Wangensteen Building, one floor below the Lions Eye Bank/Children's Clinic. Construction was started on this site in 1977. It was in 1978 that the Multiple District went through 'redistricting' and 13 sub-districts were established. At that time some of our 5M-6 clubs became 5M-1 and this immediate area located northward and westward to become 5M-2.

The Hearing Center began operation on a small scale in 1979, but was not completed until 1984. The formal Dedication and Grand Opening of the Hearing Center was held in November of 1985. In 1990, the cochlear implant program was begun. Lion Bill Curtis, member of the Glencoe Lions Club of 5M-2, was chairman of the Foundation when this program was begun, and he presented the 'traditional doll' to the child who received the first cochlear implant. Improvements and additions have been added to the Center over the years, with one of the most, important, the Research Lab, being dedicated in 1994. In 1999, the Lions Newborn Hearing Screening Program was set into motion. In 2002 another major step was taken with the decision to establish the Lions 5M Children's Hearing Center.

The Lion 5M Hearing Center has been a huge success from the very Beginning, and several Hearing Centers have been established around the world, patterned after our 5M Hearing Center here in Minnesota. Multiple District 5M has been, and continues to be, a leader in the work with Deaf and Hearing Impaired.

Lions of 5M-2 have played a leading role in our Lions Hearing Center from the beginning. Lion Larry Meskan, District Governor when the Lions adopted the project, played a leading role in the adoption of the Hearing program. Lion Jerry Schmiege, Victoria Lions, served as secretary of the Multiple Hearing Foundation in 1981-1982. He then served as Chairman of the Foundation from 1982-1987. Lion Bill Curtis, Glencoe Lions, served as Chairman of the Foundation from 1989-1994. Lion Jack Webster, Waterville Lions, prepared the slide program in 1979 that was used for several years for presentation to Lions Clubs throughout the Multiple. In 1979 District 5M-2 became the first District in the Multiple to have 100% participation on a club level, with every club in the District contributing to the Hearing Conservation program. Our District has continued this tradition (100% participation) down through the years and continues as one of the leading Districts in the Multiple.

Lions in our District who have served as trustees on the Hearing Foundation Include Lion Jack Webster (13 years), Lion Jerry Schnieg (12 years), Lion Bill Curtis (8 years and continuing), Lion Roger Hespenheide (6 years), Lion Larry Meskan (6 Years), Lion Bill Harkins (6 Years), Lion Arden Severson (6 years), Lion Orville Trettin (6 years) and those serving for a single 2- year term include Lions Leudke, Crabb and Sabesta.

Lions Bill Curtis and Sue Bowman are the current Hearing Conservation co-chairmen of our District 5M-2.

2008 Lion Bill Curtis retired, and Lion Mike Vos took his place.