



SHARON HUSS (from left), Loren Ebert and Ralph Acker are members of the Appleton Noon Lions and have been collecting eyeglasses. Photo for The Post-Crescent by Wm. Glasheen

SEEING CLEARLY

Lions Clubs collect eyeglasses to help people worldwide

By Toni Hoh
For The Post-Crescent

People across the globe are enjoying better vision thanks to the efforts of area Lions Clubs. Local Lions collect used eyeglasses for distribution in underprivileged countries.

The eyeglasses are processed through the Lions Camp in Rosholt and are then made available to anyone heading overseas to provide medical and optical services. Among the places where local eyeglasses have ended up are Mexico and India.

In February, the Appleton Noon Lions Club delivered its 50,000th pair of glasses to the camp. The milestone was reached over five years, according to project chairman Ralph Acker.

The majority of those glasses are collected in 20 boxes set around the Fox Valley, including at St. Elizabeth Hospital and Appleton Medical Center, Affinity Health System on Midway Road, Ridgeview Highlands Senior Apartments, Thompson Community Center and at some optometrists' offices, which are a good draw for donations.

The box at Dr. Michael Vrabec's office gets full enough to be emptied every two weeks, Acker said.

Acker and other Appleton Noon Lions Club members make regular rounds emptying the boxes. Acker then sorts and re-packs the glasses and stores them at his

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Making the Valley a great place to live

home. Every couple of months he delivers between 3,000 and 4,000 pair of glasses to the camp.

"I got involved with the Lions because I thought it was a wonderful organization. I think the eyeglass program is a great program," said Acker, who has chaired the project for five years.

The Lions Camp at Rosholt serves as one of just five eyeglass recycling centers in the United States. From the camp, the glasses are sent to state prisons to have their calibers determined. They are then returned to the camp for distribution.

"For anyone that's going anywhere, the Lions camp furnishes all the glasses they need free of charge," Acker said. "They give glasses out to needy people. You've got people working 6 in the morning to 7 or 8 at night giving people glasses."

While the Lions no longer can accept only lenses, Acker makes sure loose lenses get to Lenscrafters in Fox River Mall, where they also are recycled for use by people in need.

Glasses that contain precious metals such as gold or silver cannot be shipped out of the country so they are disassem-

bled and the precious metals are sold to raise money to help with expenses at the camp, which is completely self-supporting.

The camp serves people of all ages who are blind or handicapped. Campers are surrounded by trained counselors and medical staff as they enjoy typical camp activities — paddle boats, a climbing wall, hikes in the woods and archery. The camp is open almost year-round.

The Lions also collect used hearing aids, which are taken to the Rosholt camp along with eyeglasses.

In another effort to improve people's sight, the Lions also play a key role in the transportation of eyes harvested for transplants. When eyes become available, Lions volunteer to make the trip — anytime day or night — to pick them up and get them to state troopers in Fond du Lac, Beaver Dam and Green Bay. The troopers deliver them to patients and surgical teams waiting at hospitals across the state.

Appleton Noon Lions Club member Sharon Huss serves as a dispatcher for that effort. It's her job to find a driver or make the trek herself.

"When they harvest the corneas, they have to be transplanted within 12 hours," Huss said. "That's the urgency of it."

For more information on donating used eyeglasses to the Appleton Noon Lions Club collection, contact Ralph Acker at 920-993-1103.