

Business Quarterly

Lions Club gives back to community

By Patricia D'Ascoli

In the spring of 1929, a group of civic-minded local young men organized a Lions Club in New Milford.

Established on the eve of the Great Depression, the club would soon be called upon to enact its mission to serve the community.

And for 85 years, the New Milford Lions Club has been true to its mission.

The New Milford Lions Club is part of the world's largest service club organization. Founded in 1917, Lions Clubs International includes 46,000 clubs with 1.35 million members.

Steve Gallant, who has been the president of the New Milford Lions Club for the past two years, wants to dispel some of the misconceptions people have about the Lions Club.

"It's not just an old men's club," Gallant said. "And we do more than collect unwanted eyeglasses."

Many of the club's members are under 35, and 25 percent are women.

The club's eyeglass collection effort in the community is an important part of the parent organization's Lions Recycle for Sight Program.

Optical missions sponsored by Lions clubs distribute the donated eyeglasses to needy people throughout the world.

Also important is the club's free pediatric vision screening program.

Susan Johnston, executive director of the Children's Center in New Milford, has high praise for the club.

"They screened 100-plus kids at the center," Johnston said. "Every child was treated with kid gloves."

She described the volunteers who performed the screenings as funny and easy going, and they put the children at ease, conducting the screenings in a warm and happy way.

One child who was referred for vision correction after the screening now wears glasses and it has made a world of difference in his life.

"What a gift!" Johnston said.

Proceeds from the club's fundraising activities go



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Chosen recently as officers for the next year for the New Milford Lions Club are, from left, Larry Tracey, Jim Bannan, Bill Deak, Tammy Deak, President Steve Gallant, John Dunne, Bob Coppola, Katie Ducey, Trish Grinnell, Cliff Ricci and Charlie Chapin.

to the Lions Community Betterment Fund, and 100 percent of these proceeds are distributed within the community with no administrative fees deducted.

Over the years, the Lions Community Betterment Fund activities have included land purchases for public use, such as Lynn Deming Park on Candlewood Lake and, as a way to preserve open space, the donation of 70 acres to the Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust.

The club's 50th anniversary project was the pavilion and facilities at Young's Field.

In 1989, the club constructed and donated the Robert Ohmen pavilion, named for a longtime local Lion, and cookout facilities at Harrybrooke Park.

Gallant said the club donates funds to a large number of groups in town, including the library, the New Milford VNA & Hospice and the town's food bank. The club recently bought the food bank a refrigerator and freezer.

There are presently 55 members in the New Milford Lions Club. According to Gallant, there is no special criteria for becoming a member.

"All that is necessary is a desire to give back to the community," said Gallant, who noted there are many different ways to do that. "We ask new members

about their interests, and they are free to choose the activity in which they would like to be involved," he said. "The club is very flexible."

An existing member invites a prospective member to join, and the board of directors votes to accept the new member. Members meet twice a month, although it is not mandatory to attend meetings.

Trish Grinnell, who maintains the club's website and edits its newsletter, said the club is a wonderful way for her to get involved in the community and make new friends.

"It feels good to raise money and do a lot of great things around town," she said. "It's emotionally rewarding."

One important way the club gives back to the community is through the Lions Club Memorial Scholarship.

Each June, the club awards a scholarship to a New Milford High School senior. Since 1965, the scholarship has awarded more than \$200,000.

Money was recently raised for this scholarship through the club's first-ever murder mystery dinner last month. This year, a student will receive \$8,000 from the club.

Tammy Deak was introduced to the club when her daughter, Kristina, was awarded the Lions Club

Memorial Scholarship.

After attending the meeting when her daughter received the scholarship, her interest in the club was piqued.

"I wanted to join when I found out what a great organization the Lions Club is," said Deak, secretary and an active member for the past seven years.

Her husband, Billy Deak, will be inducted as the club's next president in July.

One of the club's long-term relationships has been with the New Milford Senior Center; most recently, the club donated \$6,000 for the purchase of a new handicapped accessible bus for the center.

"They are always supportive to the senior population," said center director Carolyn Haglund. "Every year they do a huge holiday party for the seniors and a summer picnic as well."

The annual Fourth of July carnival at Young's Field, sponsored by the club with a percentage of the proceeds dedicated to the Chamber of Commerce's fireworks display, is another summer activity.

In the fall, the club sponsors an old-fashioned Country Fair and Car Show, with crafts, rides, food and entertainment, at Harrybrooke Park.

This year, the club is celebrating its 85th anniversary.



TRISH HALDIN/SPECTRUM

Brooke Todd, 4, of New Milford takes a turn at the children's tractor pull as Lions volunteer Jim Bannan looks on during the New Milford Lions Club's fifth annual Country Fair and Car show at Harrybrooke Park in September 2013.

embrating its 85th anniversary.

Yet there's another reason for the New Milford Lions Club to be proud. Longtime member Mike Wilcox will soon be sworn in as district governor at the upcoming Lions Clubs

International Convention. The club is committed to serving New Milford long into the future.

For more information about the New Milford Lions Club, visit www.e-clubhouse.org/sites/newmilfordct.

Chamber offering new networking opportunity

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effective and low cost component of any business's marketing plan and often yields a relatively high "bang for the buck" compared to other forms of marketing.

Also, for some people, it can be difficult to break down barriers and approach new people at existing, less structured chamber networking events like the monthly Business Scenes.

With these things in mind, the Chamber of Commerce is offering Business Featured events.

In addition to learning about

and participating in the featured business, these free events will include a structured networking period.

Each attendee is encouraged to prepare an elevator pitch — a brief overview of an idea for a product, service, or project that lasts about 30 seconds, or the time span of an elevator ride — and bring a stack of business cards, pamphlets, or other marketing materials to distribute as part of the event.

Our intention is for each attendee to arrive with a stack of his or her own business cards

and leave with a stack from those new business acquaintances he or she made a connection with during the event.

When considering how to develop an elevator pitch, answer these statements: "We help people that ..." and "People come to us for ..."

For example, my elevator pitch for the chamber might be as follows:

"The Chamber of Commerce is a medium for area business people to network, share information and ideas, and collaborate on issues affecting the


community. People come to the Chamber for networking and advertising opportunities as well as ways to participate in a variety of community events. Some of the community events we host include the Fourth of July fireworks celebration, Village Fair Days, A Taste of New Milford, the Harvest Festival and the tree lighting ceremony.

"Our networking opportunities include our traditional Business Scenes, breakfast networking scenes, speed networking, and Business Featured events. Panel discussion and Lunch

and Learn seminars provide insights into advertising, networking, marketing, technology, and other subjects to help you grow your business.

"Chamber members can increase their online presence with a listing in our searchable online membership directory. Greater New Milford Chamber of Commerce: In the business of growing business."

If your business is interested in being showcased as a Business Featured, please contact the Chamber office at nmcc@newmilford-chamber.com.



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