

Local organ, tissue donations bring hope to many

by Larry Arnold

Serving the entire state, the Lions Eye Bank of Wisconsin fulfills their mission by procuring, processing, and distributing eye tissue to corneal transplant surgeons, researchers, and teachers.

A corneal transplant becomes necessary when the cornea becomes cloudy or damaged due to disease, injury, accident, or hereditary conditions. When this happens, the corneas must be replaced with healthy donor eye tissue. The procedure restores sight, and in some cases even provides sight for the first time.

Hess Memorial Hospital of Mauston, and area Lions clubs play an important part in this process. Hess Memorial's Chaplain, Jeff Fairchild, has a team of nine staff members who, when someone passes away in the hospital, seeks permission from the family to use their loved one's eyes. "If the permission is granted, we contact the Eye Bank and they send an inoculator, who removes the cornea or the entire eye," the chaplain explained.



New Lisbon Lion, Bill Bruce, serves as coordinator for the transport runs made on behalf of the Wisconsin Eye Bank.

Commenting on the process, he said: "The recovery is done tastefully and humanely, showing the utmost respect for the deceased. After the eye is removed, it is replaced with a plastic prosthesis, so the normal appearance is maintained for viewing at the funeral."

He added: "What a wonderful gift from the family; that of sight. A person whose eyes are donated can

help two people. A tissue donor can help as many as 75 or 80 people."

An important part of this whole process is the individual decision to donate your eyes/tissue/organs. When you make that decision, sign your driver's license or identification card and tell your family about your decision.

The Eye Bank will not act without the consent of the donor's legal next of kin, even in the presence of a signed driver's license with a donor dot.

In addition to the corneas for the Eye Bank, other organs, such as the heart, lungs, and kidneys can be used. Tissue includes skin, bones, and heart valves. The UW Organ Procurement organization is in charge of that program.

The first Lions Club in Juneau County to act as transporters for the Eye Bank was the Camp Douglas Lions Club.

Rolf Kurandt, genial host of the Target Bluff German Haus in Camp Douglas, has acted as coordinator and dispatcher for the program. Ron Lauden and Rod Wagenson fill in as dispatchers for Rolf when needed.

When asked how they became involved, Rolf recalled that "... Jerry Rabbach a past district governor who is a representative of the Eye Bank, attended one of our meetings during the summer of 2006 and asked if we'd be interested in getting involved with the Eye Bank as transporters." He added: "Our club members were enthusiastic about the idea and we signed up to take part. Our first month of responsibility was August of 2006."

When the Camp Douglas club was called for a transport run, they would pick up the container in which the eyes were carried - either at Kwik Trip north or south in Tomah - and take them to Eau Claire, La Crosse, or Portage. The club pays a stipend to each transporter to help defray the cost of gasoline.

Lion Kurandt commented: "Our members have remained enthusiastic about this worthwhile project and we were happy to get the New Lisbon Club involved."

During the month of December, the following Camp Douglas Lions



Rolf Kurandt (left) serves as coordinator for the Camp Douglas Lions Club's Eye Bank transport program. Shown with him is Everett Miller, a volunteer transporter.

made runs: Gary Frei (two trips), Ron Lauden (two), Everett Miller, Larry Bonner, Rod Wagenson (two), Kit Schleicher, Larry Grilley, and Mike Froh.

Bill Bruce serves as coordinator for the New Lisbon club. When he gets a call for a run, he calls a driver from his list of volunteers. Most of the runs made by the New Lisbon Lions during the month of March, went from the Kwik Trip at Tomah to the Comfort Suites on the outskirts of Portage. It is here that a courier from one of the Madison area clubs picks up the precious cargo to deliver it to the Eye Bank, located at 2302 International Lane in Madison.

When the eyes are to be used for an implant, they go to Sacred Heart Hospital in Eau Claire.

The New Lisbon Lions had the courier duty during March, and that month they made a total of 11 runs. Lion John Gregar serves as backup coordinator. During the month of April, the New Lisbon club served as backup for the Tomah Lions, who had the primary responsibility.

The New Lisbon Lions will have the duty again in October, when Lions Brian Larson and Kent Roessler will serve as coordinators, with Lions Bill Bruce and John Gregar serving as backup.

Lion members from New Lisbon who made trips during the month of March included: Len Gilchrist (two trips), Del Gindt, John Gollmar, Ken Hall, Ted Haschke, Bob Jasinski, Fred McDonald, Gene Morris, Dave LaTexier, and Levine Wetley. A total of 20 club members have volunteered to be transporters and four have volunteered to act as dispatchers. The club pays a portion of the cost of gas for each trip.

In addition to the New Lisbon and Camp Douglas Lion clubs who are participating in the Eye Bank project, other area clubs who are taking part include: the Tomah and Sparta Lions in Monroe County and the Rochea-Cri club in Adams County.

ORGAN & TISSUE FAIR!

If you would like to learn more about organ and tissue donation, please join us at Hess Memorial Hospital Friday, May 18 between 10 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. See page 10 for further information.