

Madisonville Lions Club Serving Since 1939

On June 17, 1917 Chicago businessman Melvin Jones lead the formation of civic organization designed to be of service to others, rather than an organization to promote their own business interest. From this humble effort and beginning the organization of Lions Clubs has led to an international group known as The International Association of Lions Clubs which now ranks as the world's largest service organization. In 1989 the Madisonville Lions Club celebrated its 50th anniversary of service to the citizens of Madisonville, Hopkins County, Kentucky and Our Nation.

Lionism spread quickly from its initial begging in 1917 and spread to Kentucky on April 16th 1920 when the Paducah Lions Club was chartered. Paducah was soon followed by Mayfield, Owensboro, Louisville and Lexington. In 1939 eleven men came together to form the Madisonville Lions Club. The eleven dedicated citizens who became charter members of the Madisonville Lions Club were: L.R. Fox, E. C. Hardesty, L. B. Hoover, Jr., E. F. Ivy, E. W. Jackson, William Lindsey, C. B. Miller, F. C. Pilson, Edward P. Roberts, and Dr. A. G. Steinfield. Each new Lions club must be sponsored by an existing Lions Club and the Owensboro Lions Club did the honors for the Madisonville Lions. A Charter Night was held on Wednesday the 22nd of November 1939. Thus began a long period of community service which extends for over a half a century and reaches 60 years service next year when the Madisonville Lions Club celebrates its 60th birthday in November of 1999.

From initial eleven members in 1939 the Madisonville Lions Club has experienced steady growth. By 1974 the membership had reached 72 and topped 100 in 1987. Since 1987 the membership has ranged between 100 and 80. As of 30 September 1999 the membership reported on the Monthly Membership Report to Lions Clubs International was 92 members. As of April 30, 1999 the number of Lions worldwide was 1,439,604 members in 44,458 clubs in 740 districts in 185 countries and geographical areas.

During its illustrious history the Madisonville Lions Club has met in many different locations. For many years in its early history the club met in the homes of its members. Later the club met in local restaurants, with one of its favorite locations being the F & F Café located on the corner of Franklin and Federal streets in downtown Madisonville. This spot is currently the parking lot across from Boggess Chevrolet and is behind the police department. The F & F Cafe along with many other restaurants in town served the needs of the club for twenty-five years several members expressed a desire have a building owned by the Madisonville Lions Club to be used for meetings and community functions. Lion Bob Turner had been to a Lions Club in Southern Illinois that had it own building and he energetically encouraged the local Lions to consider owning their own building. In 1965 a building committee of five Lions was appointed to determine size, cost, location and other related matters for the proposed building. This committee consisted of Lions Tom Florida, Bob Turner, Charlie Ben Ashby, John Adams and Horace Boggess.

Lion Charlie Ben Ashby was able to persuade his cousin Otto Corum to sell the Madisonville Lions Club approximately one acre of land on U.S. Highway 41 near the Rizpah Shrine Temple located north of Madisonville. On July 22, 1964 the Madisonville purchased this tract of land for \$1,000.00 and the first step toward having a local Lions Den taken. The difficult task of coordinating the financing for the building was placed in the capable hands of Lion Tom Florida. The first major project towards financing the building was a community auction. Finally on April 15, 1964 Lions Gene Stinnett, Club President, and E. F. Ivy, Charter Member, turned the first shovel of dirt and the construction of the building was under way.

The final cost of the initial building was \$20,000.00. The construction of the building required a tremendous effort by Lions and non-Lions. However, paying for the building proved to be an equally difficult task as Lions Club members had to cook meals, wait tables, and pour coffee for numerous special events to pay for the new building. When Lion R. T. "Tom" Swaidner was president in 1970 the club received a boost in its efforts when it was able to lease a portion of the building to the Bureau of Mines and Minerals, a federal agency in the Department of Interior. Under Lion Tom's able leadership the basement was expanded and a second story was added and leased to the Bureau of Mines and Minerals. The Club continued to meet in one of the basement meeting rooms. In early 1975 the Bureau of Mines and Minerals was again want additional space in the building.

The Lions were faced with an important decision. Additional space for the Bureau of Mines and Minerals would displace the Lions from their meeting room. During the discussion regarding accommodating the Bureau of Mines and Minerals request for additional space several options were considered. Another addition to the building was discussed along with where would the Lions meet during the construction phase. Could the Club afford to undertake this addition with a debt of approximately \$40,000.00 remaining on the other addition. This along with other concerns led the Lions to decide to sell this building and look for other facilities.

In December of 1976 the Madisonville Lions Club sold their property on old U.S. Highway 41 [Near the Pennyrile Parkway]. Earlier that year on February 18th the club purchased property located on North Main Street in Madisonville. This property was located near the railroad bridge and was a former petroleum warehouse [metal storage building & separate office building owned by Kocolene Oil Corporation]. The shell of this metal building was joined to the office building and transformed into a nice modern Lions Den. This was accomplished the tremendous efforts and hard work of the membership. The Lions utilized their many talents to remodel and furnish the metal storage building into the current Lions Den. During 1981-82 the porch was enclosed and the parking lot and driveway were paved and some trees were planted.

The Lions Den is not only used by the Lions but is available for use by community groups and non-profit organizations.

The strength of the club throughout its history has been its charitable contributions and

service to the community, state and nation. The chief focus of the Madisonville Lions Club, as well as Lions Clubs International, has been sight conservation. Ever since Helen Keller challenged all Lions at the International Convention in 1925 to adopt sight conservation as a project. The Lions accepted this challenge and Lions worldwide have worked diligently to conquer blindness through its Sight First program.

In 1930 Lion George A. Bonham, then President of the Peoria, Illinois Lions Club came up with the idea of using the white cane [Universal identification symbol of a blind person] is used by Lions to help raise funds to assist in sight conservation and aid blind persons.

The Madisonville Lions Club spends thousands of dollars purchasing eye glasses and providing eye care to assist those needy individuals in Hopkins County who need such assistance. In addition to their participation in sight conservation programs the Madisonville Lions Club has a long history of providing financial support to other local projects. In 1981-82 the Club established a scholarship program for high school and college students from Hopkins County. This scholarship is a grant of \$500.00 with this amount being paid to the college or university chosen by the recipient and designated for the use of that student. chooses. Along with the support of Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Community Auditorium, YMCA the Madisonville Lions funded the Lions Journey for Quest program in the Hopkins County Schools for a period of years. Support for state wide projects such as All State Band. Trooper Island, Blind Youth Camps and the Kentucky Lions Eye Foundation has also been a hallmark of local Lions. The All State Band program allows the local sponsoring Lions Club to designate a high school band from which a member recommended by the Band Director is selected to participate. The Kentucky Lions All State Band travels to the International Convention when it is held in the United States or Canada and leads the delegation of Kentucky Lions in the International Parade.

One of the major service projects for the Madisonville Lions Club has been its annual Man and Woman of the Year recognition. This project began in 1945, six years after the formation of the club. Each year the club receives and reviews nominations from the community. After careful review of the nominations received a committee recommends that one man and woman be honored for their contributions to the community and honored at a awards and recognition dinner in late March or early April.

Over the many years of the Club's existence many different activities have been used to raise the necessary funds to support the charitable efforts of the local Lions. Two things are synonymous in the minds of many residents of our community — Lions and Pancakes— as the Lions have used Pancake Days to raise the bulk of the funds that are used to support the local Sight Conservation and Eye Glasses programs. For a nominal fee the Lions have provided local citizens with all the coffee, milk, Orange juice, sausage and pancakes they could eat. Pancake Days were originally held in a large tent located near the Hopkins County Courthouse before moving to the parking lot of Edward's IGA on East Center Street. In the beginning the Pancake Days were a two day event. Many groups have assisted the Lions with Pancake Day. The local U.S.

Army Reserve Battalion provided grills and Unit Cooks to cook the pancakes during the early 1970's. A few years back the club changed to format of Pancake Day to make it a one day event and hold it twice each year. The dates are usually the third Friday of October and April. After they occupied the Lions Den on North Main Street the Lions moved the Pancake Day to this location where it remains today.

Another major fundraiser which brought the club recognition was the "Nickel Pitch" which was operated during the Hopkins County Fair. This project began in the early 1960's with the club manning a set of boards which were originally covered with Lucky Strike cigarette labels. If the lucky player could pitch a nickel on the board and have it stop inside the red circle that lucky individual would win a stuffed bear. The increased cost of the bears and the return generated for club projects led to the club abandon this fund raiser and go to a second pancake day each year. In 1975 this project was a major source of revenue with a possible record 40,000 nickels being tossed on the board of the Saturday night of the 1975 Hopkins County Fair. Inflation soon had an adverse impact on the quality of the bears and change in the fair led to decreased revenue while still requiring a major commitment of Lions and man hours to generate less revenue which caused the Lions reevaluate this fundraiser. For nearly a quarter of a century this game served the club well as a fundraiser and provided hours of entertainment for Hopkins County residents. In addition to these two major fundraiser the Madisonville Lions Club has held other fundraiser including go-cart races, mule races, circuses as well as musical and theatrical programs. All these projects were intended to serve two purposes: #1 Provide family entertainment and #2 raise funds for Lions and community projects.

Any history of the Madisonville Lions Club would not be complete with a reference to the Greater Madisonville Lioness Club. Founded in November 1985 under the sponsorship of the Madisonville Lions Club, the Lioness have offered women a chance to join an organization devoted to civic and service work. Lioness members did not have to be the spouse of a Lion and in fact the vast majority of the membership were not the spouse of a Lion. When Lions Clubs International changed its By-Laws to allow women to be members of a Lions Club many Lioness Clubs converted to a Lions Club. The Greater Madisonville Lioness disbanded after ten years and several of the Lioness became members of the Madisonville Lioness Club.

From its humble start in 1917, the Lions [whose slogan is Liberty, Intelligence, Our Nation's Safety] have grown into the world's largest service organization with its strength at the local level. Kentucky Lions comprise Multiple District 43 of Lions Clubs International and are currently divided into six districts with the Madisonville Lions Club being in District K. The other districts are E, N, T, C and Y. Madisonville Lions have held high office at the district and state level. Lion Ed Roberts was the first District Governor of District K and Lions Ira Johnston, John Paul Jackson, who served as Council Chairman, and Byron C. Watkins have served as District Governor. In addition to serving as District Governor Lion Ira Johnston and Lion Byron C. Watkins have served as President of the Kentucky Lions Eye Foundation. The Madisonville Lions club celebrated their 50th anniversary in 1989 when Lion Byron C. Watkins was District

Governor.
