

Copper River Basin Lions Club Serving the Copper Basin for Over 30 Years



“WE SERVE” is the motto proudly used by the Lions Club International, the largest service organization of its kind, with over 45,000 clubs in over 200 countries.

Melvin Jones founded the Lions in 1917 with the idea that people should give back to their communities through contributions and hands on service. He also believed that the Lions Club should be a place where everyone worked together to fill a need, expecting nothing in return. In 1925, Helen Keller asked the Lions to be the Knights of the Blind, and eliminating preventable blindness and making life better for the sight impaired became the group’s world-wide challenge.

To help with the Lions world-wide challenge, the Lions International Foundation just completed Sight First 1 & 2, which raised over 400 million dollars around the world and saved the eye sight of an estimated 20 million people. They support Leader Dogs for the Blind and provide disaster aid to communities around the world. Several grants

were given in Alaska in recent years. Funding was given for flood relief, the blood bank of Alaska, and for a new kitchen for the Salvation Army. In addition, \$250,000 was given to support the low vision assistance program. The Copper River Basin Lions Club even received a \$62,500 grant towards a new ambulance for Copper River Emergency Medical Services (CREMS), who provides first responder emergency services in the Copper Basin.

The Copper River Basin Lions Club is a member of Lions Clubs International. The local club is 39 members strong and a part of Lions District 49A. This District is made up of 45 Lions Clubs and covers the southern half of Alaska, stretching from the Copper Basin to Bethel and all the way out the Aleutians and south to Ketchikan and Wrangell. The Copper River Basin club meets the first and third Tuesday of each month and their location alternates between the Grizzly Pizza and Gift Shop and the Brown Bear Rhodehouse. District 49A also has

4 Leos Clubs, which are the youth representation of the Lions. The Copper Basin Leos Club has 17 members. They help with many of the Lions Club service projects and have additional projects of their own. Leadership, experience, and an opportunity for service are just a few of the rewards young people get from participating in a Leos Club.

2009/2010 officers are James Horrell, President; Tom Gibbons, Vice President; Judy Munz, Secretary; Billy Williams Jr., Treasurer; Rick Craig, Tail Twister; and Ray Munz, Lion Tamer. If you’re not sure what a Tail Twister and a Lion Tamer are, the Tail Twister is responsible for keeping order in meetings. If things get off track, they are there to collect fines and keep people in line. The Lion Tamer provides guidance and support, reminding members of upcoming meetings and projects.

The Lions Club is funded through annual dues and fundraising. Members pay \$70 a year in dues, which helps, along with investments to cover the cost of running the club. Money raised through gaming and other fundraising activities is used to fund projects, donations, and charity work.

As a charitable service organization, the local chapter can work with any need in the community that the members would like to help with. Some of the local club’s recent projects have included vision screening to detect eye problems, purchasing eye glasses for those in need, giving out food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas, and donating to the fire departments, schools, libraries, and CREMS. They have also participated in community health fairs



in Valdez and Glennallen and the annual cemetery clean up before Memorial Day. The club organizes and hosts the Fourth of July salmon bake which typically feeds over 500 people and they provide the insurance so the local parade can use the highway. Members help families who experience house fires and provided support to the flood victims near Tonsina several years ago.

Lions Clubs work together to make things happen. Often local clubs, through the District 49A Foundation, help with projects too big for one club. The local Copper Basin Club received help when raising money to fund the ambulance and they give support to projects like the summer camp for the sight impaired, the new dining hall in Anchorage for the Salvation Army, and a sight trailer to do eye screening at events around the District. Our local club also supports the Alaska Center for the Blind, the Alaska Diabetes Association and International projects like Sight First and Leader Dogs for the Blind.

The Copper River Basin Lions Club members are always looking to fill a need in the community or to get involved with projects that are important to members. The group is

currently shifting focus to Parks and Recreation related projects. They are working to improve the Pineo Ball Park in Glennallen and are hoping to build a community park to fulfill the final wishes of long-time Valley resident Florence Clayton, who left property for this purpose when she passed.

Member Billy Williams, Jr. said although membership in the Lions Club is by invitation only, anyone can become a member of a local club. They need only get sponsorship from an existing member. They are always looking for new members. They believe the more hands to serve, the more service they are able to provide to the community. The club is flexible and has several types of membership including regular members, associate members, and members at large. They try to accommodate everyone and give them an opportunity to serve in a way that suits their lifestyle.

The club even has opportunities to start new clubs or branch clubs. The Copper River Basin Club would like to sponsor a club in Valdez. Only ten members are required to sign up and pay their dues and the Copper River Basin Club will work with the

Left: Leos Club members from Copper Basin, Kodiak, and Bear Mountain, learning to do vision screening at the District Conference. Top Left: Club members helping with 4th of July Salmon Bake. Top Right: Lions Club members during clean up day. Above: Lions Club booth at the 2009 Valdez Health Fair. Photos courtesy of Copper River Lions Club

District to provide training and organization to get the club under way. They have resources and fundraising capabilities to help members identify needs in Valdez and work together to help the community.

When asked about some of the club's biggest successes, Mr. Williams says, "It's hard to pick just one when we consider every act of service, big or small, to be equally important". He truly believes the biggest success is simply the fact that the club has been in the Copper River Basin since April 1978 serving the needs of the community.

For more information on the Lions Club, contact Billy Williams, Jr., Lions Club Membership Chairperson, at 822-3828 or visit www.lionsclubs.org.