

On June 26, 1917, the Denver Lions Club became one of the world's first Lions Clubs. Later that year, the Denver Club sent delegates to the first convention in Dallas formally establish Lions Clubs International. Melvin Jones, the Chicago businessperson who had the idea of converting business clubs into community service clubs, led the International Association for over 40 years. The hope was to attract a diverse range of men of all occupations and backgrounds interested in civic betterment.

The Lions Clubs continues to grow rapidly across the United States and internationally and continues to do so, reaching an all-time peak in 2016 of 1,410,605 members in 46,912 clubs in 205 countries. After the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, communities in many Soviet Republics established Lions Clubs. The inclusion of women as full members by the International Association in 1987 also pumped up the numbers -- and the looks and behavior of many clubs. Earlier the Denver Den had a Woman's Auxiliary, and the International Lions Club created a Lioness Program in 1975. In 1957, the establishment of Leo Clubs for high school and college aged youth.

The International Association chose as a motto "**We Serve.**" Denver charter member Joseph Schwartz designed the Lions lapel pin now worn by members all over the globe. The Club held its Tuesday meetings in the now gone Albany Hotel at the corner of 17th and Stout Streets, five blocks from the Denver Den's current meeting place. Members receive the Lions Magazine, a monthly launched in 1918, and now published in print and digitally in 20 languages worldwide. The Denver Den began publishing its own newsletter in 1923. After trying out *The Mile High Roar*, *the Den-Ver-Den* and *The Roarer*, the Denver Club settled on the current name – *Roarings* for the weekly bulletin.

Lions found their major cause at their 1925 International Convention when Helen Keller, the famous blind champion of the blind, gave an unforgettable speech challenging the Lions to become "the knights of the blind in the crusade against darkness." Inspired Lions Clubs thereafter made sight conservation and service to the blind their main community service.

As Helen Keller had urged, sight conservation remains the main mission of the Denver Den. The Lions Clubs in Colorado and Wyoming raised six million dollars for the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Institute on the Anschutz Medical Campus of the University of Colorado. Today that Institute, with a faculty and research staff of 76 professionals, serves more than 100,000 patients a year, and conducts state-of-the-art eye research.

The Lions commitment to internationalism led them to collaborate. In 1945 with the newly formed United Nations on worldwide eye health programs such as SightFirst. On the home front, Lions crusaded, beginning in 1930, to get white canes to the blind after one Lion noted that blind folks had trouble crossing streets. By 1956, every state had passed white cane laws. Lions launched White Cane Day to educate the world about blindness and how the vision impaired can live and work independently and become community assets.

In 1952, the Denver Den created the non-profit Denver Lions Foundation to facilitate fund raising and charitable giving. Since its creation, the Foundation has given away an estimated

\$2.5 million. Expanding its missions beyond eye care, the Denver Den added three more priorities: Social Services, Youth Services, Hearing Conservation, and Diabetes research.

The Eye Institute is grateful for the generous partnership of the Lions Club for its significant and ongoing support over the past 15 years. Most recently, the Lions helped to build exam rooms thus enabling the treatment of more patients. We look forward to continuing and building upon this important partnership.

Helen Keller was the keynote speaker at the international convention of Lions Clubs International in 1925. She challenged the Lions to become "Knights of the Blind", and Lions responded by making eyesight issues their keystone service focus. The natural progression of this challenge eventually led to the idea of the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Institute (RMLEI).

In October 1987, Austin Jennings, then First Vice President of Lions Clubs International, spoke at the 70th anniversary celebration of the Lions Club of Denver. He spoke of activities of other Lions who were developing eye institutes and vision centers throughout the United States and the world. That speech sparked a keen interest for an eye institute among several members of that Club.

A medical institute of any kind must have three essential components to qualify as an institute: research, education, and patient care. This mandates that an institute be associated with a medical school or a teaching hospital.

Dr. Bernard Nelson, Chancellor of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, was approached with the idea of establishing a major eye institute at the Health Sciences Center. The University of Colorado had explored such a possibility with other potential partners, but without success. Thus the University was enthusiastic about the possibility of partnering with Lions given their history of leadership in eyesight projects. The University of Colorado Foundation was approached and agreed to invest seed money to explore the feasibility of the University of Colorado and the Lions establishing such an institute, as partners.

The Lions Club of Denver had this exciting idea for an eye institute but they recognized that one Lions Club could not go it alone. They found Lions of vision and stature in both Colorado and Wyoming who became enthusiastic about the eye institute project. Lions throughout Colorado and Wyoming understood the impact that an eye institute could have on the vision health of people in this area, and they were supportive.

In 1991 the partnership of Colorado and Wyoming Lions Clubs formed the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Institute and, in October of that year, the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Institute Foundation. The Foundation entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the CU Health Sciences Center through which the Lions committed to raise \$6 million to help build the Institute, and the University committed to finish, furnish, equip and administer the Institute. The total cost of the institute when finished was approximately \$12 million, half of which was provided by the RMLEI Foundation. The project has been a true partnership between the Lions and the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

It took approximately 12 years for the Lions to complete the \$6 million campaign during which time the U.S. Army Fitzsimons Hospital property became available. This presented an opportunity to place a major medical facility of the 21st century, a brand-new Health Sciences Center, at the site of a nationally renowned army hospital which had treated the sick and wounded in the wars of the 20th century and had a reputation for excellence in health care. This site provided the space needed to accommodate the expansion plans of the Health Sciences Center. The RMLEI Foundation was instrumental in facilitating the decision to move the entire Health Sciences Center campus to the Fitzsimons site by accelerating the initial donation of \$2 million toward our \$6 million pledge.

The Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Institute, one of the first occupants of the new UCHSC campus location, opened its doors in May 2001. Since then, it has offered Lions the opportunity to provide the highest quality vision-saving services to the people of the Rocky Mountain region. Today, the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Institute has some 100,000 patient visits each year and the miracle of saving and preserving eyesight is a regular occurrence.

In 2015 the Lions Eye Institute was expanded to meet the increasing need for patient services. Ten of the thirty new clinical treatment units were furnished and equipped by the Foundation at a cost of \$ 1.300,000. This expansion of facilities necessitated the purchase of specialized diagnostic equipment for these new treatment units. These new clinical lanes and equipment are located on the fourth floor.