



Lions Sight Program at the University of Minnesota

In 1925, when Lions International was only seven years old, the legendary Helen Keller spoke to the members at their annual convention and challenged them to become “knights of the blind in the crusade against darkness.” That speech set the Lions' course. Since then, millions of Lions members worldwide have devoted their service careers to helping people with visual impairments.

Minnesota's Knights of the Blind have built a Lions Sight Program at the University of Minnesota that includes:

- Lions Gift of Sight (Minnesota Lions Eye Bank)
- Lions Children's Eye Clinic
- Minnesota Lions Macular Degeneration Research and Rehabilitation Center
- Ophthalmology Research Support
- Minneapolis Ambassadors Lions Club

Lions Gift of Sight

The Lions in Minnesota began their partnership with the University of Minnesota's Department of Ophthalmology (now Ophthalmology and Visual Neurosciences) by establishing the Minnesota Lions Eye Bank, now Lions Gift of Sight. The eye bank obtains, evaluates, and distributes donated eye tissue for use in corneal transplants, research, and education. Lions Gift of Sight opened its doors in 1960, and it is now one of the most successful eye banks in the country, having provided more than 29,000 corneas for transplant.

In 2007, the eye bank moved into a new space in University Enterprise Laboratories, a non-profit bioscience “incubator” in Saint Paul. That year also saw the eye bank begin offering corneal tissue pre-cut for endothelial keratoplasty (EK) surgeries. EK is a specialized type of corneal transplant in which only the inner layer of the cornea is transplanted. EK surgery eliminates the need for multiple sutures on the cornea and offers a more conservative surgical approach for patients whose corneal disease involves only the endothelial cells—about 40% of corneal patients. Lions helped fund the move and the EK program start up.

Lions Children's Eye Clinic

Back in the mid-1960's, the board of directors of the young Minnesota Lions Eye Bank asked the chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology for an additional project. The answer was the Lions Children's Eye Clinic, which opened in 1978. The clinic is the second largest and best-staffed clinic of its kind in the country. More than 8,000 children are seen in the clinic each year. In 2011, the clinic moved to a beautiful space adjacent to the Amplatz Children's hospital in Minneapolis. The Lions helped move and equip the clinic.

Ophthalmology Research

In 1993 the Lions Research Building opened on the University of Minnesota's Minneapolis campus. The state-of-the-art laboratory building houses investigators working with the departments of ophthalmology, otolaryngology, and neurology, and collaboration among these departments is important to many research projects. The Lions of Minnesota made a gift of three million dollars to begin the project and continue to support ophthalmology research.

Minnesota Lions Macular Degeneration Research and Rehabilitation Center

1998 saw another tremendous effort by the Lions of Minnesota when they pledged 2.5 million to the Minnesota Lions Macular Degeneration Research and Rehabilitation Center (The MAC). Macular degeneration is a disease that causes permanent loss to the central vision and is the leading cause of blindness in the United States. By age 75, nearly one-third of all Americans will experience macular degeneration. The Macular Degeneration Center is an invaluable collaboration of organizations, people, and resources with the aim of finding treatments and a cure for macular degeneration.

In 2012, the Lions helped establish the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Neurosciences' Minnesota Lions Retinal Imaging Facility.

Minneapolis Ambassadors Lions Club

In 2004 the Minneapolis Ambassadors Lions Club was chartered at the University of Minnesota. The Minneapolis Ambassadors Lions Club is composed of faculty and staff of the departments of ophthalmology and otolaryngology at the University of Minnesota; staff of the University of Minnesota Medical Center-Fairview; and friends of the Minnesota Lions Eye Bank and the Lions 5M Hearing Center. The purpose of the club is to make known the accomplishments of Lions-funded programs at the University, raise funds to ensure the continued excellence of these programs, and inform the public about the exceptional services available.

Minnesota Lions Eye Surgery Center

In March 2015, the Minnesota Lions Vision Foundation pledged to raise \$4 million to establish the Minnesota Lions Eye Surgery Center. This gift will make it possible for University of Minnesota eye surgeons to perform common surgeries, including sight-saving cornea, glaucoma, retina, and cataract surgeries on the U of M campus. Lions Eye Surgery Center will: allow for easier scheduling and better clinic flow for patients; make the University competitive with other academic health centers across the country and around the world; enhance the U's ability to recruit top researchers, residents, fellows, and other clinicians; and improve patient experience.

Lions Eye Institute

Minnesota Lions Vision Foundation has signed a memorandum of Understanding with the University to raise \$21.5 million to create the Lions Eye Institute! Fundraising has begun.

For more information about the Minnesota Lions Vision Foundation, please visit:
www.MnLionsVisionFoundation.org