

Legacy in Motion: The Wheaton Lions Club's Century of Service and Impact

By Ellie Withall, Publicity Committee



In the heart of DuPage County, where civic pride runs deep and service is a way of life, the Wheaton Lions Club has stood as a beacon of compassion and leadership for over 100 years.

Founded in 1923, the club has weathered wars, cultural shifts, and generational change—not by standing still, but by evolving with purpose. Today, the Wheaton Lions Club is more than a service organization. It's a legacy in motion.

From a modest group of volunteers united by the Lions International motto "We Serve," the club has grown to over 100 active members committed to six core causes: sight, hearing, hunger, diabetes, the environment, and pediatric cancer. Over the decades, the Lions have launched vision screenings, supported hearing aid programs, and

funded children's health initiatives—always adapting to meet new needs while honoring their founding values.

The club's centennial year was marked by meaningful tributes. The Wheaton City Council issued a proclamation recognizing the club's century of service. "Our hundredth year wasn't just a milestone—it was a reminder of what community looks like when service leads the way. We're building forward, together," said Club President Dave Olson.

One of the club's largest fundraisers, the annual Charity Golf Outing at Cantigny, brought together sponsors, business leaders, and longtime Lions. Proceeds helped award \$82,000 in grants to 22 nonprofits. "The Golf Outing is a cornerstone of our fundraising efforts," said Vice President Ryan Rau. "It's a day of

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connection, generosity, and purpose—and the impact ripples through every nonprofit we support."

Each May, Candy Day brings service to the sidewalks. Lions in bright yellow vests greet passersby with Tootsie Roll Pops and a smile, collecting contributions for local screenings and care. "Candy Day is more than a fundraiser—it's our signature," said longtime Lion Charlie McKenna. "For generations, Wheaton Lions have stood on corners with Tootsie Pops and purpose, reminding this town that service is visible, personal, and unwavering."

The Reindeer Run 5K, now in its 14th year, blends holiday cheer with charitable impact. Hosted with the Wheaton Park District, last year's race drew over 1,300 runners. It's become a signature event where festive spirit meets community giving.

Fighting hunger remains central to the club's mission. In partnership with the People's Resource Center, Lions helped raise and deliver over 15,000 pounds of food. "Fifteen thousand pounds of food isn't just a number—it's thousands of lives touched," said Hunger Chair Sharon Sifnotis.

The club's impact is amplified through partnerships with mission-driven organizations like Doodlebug Workshop, which empowers individuals with special needs through hands-on vocational training. "The Wheaton Lions help champion nonprofits and their purpose," said Executive Director Sarah Starke. "Their support lifts our mission and the people we serve."

"The Wheaton Lions have always been more than a service group—we're a thread in the fabric of this town," said Past President RC Compton. "Our strength comes from showing up, year after year, for the people who need us most."

"Everything we do is intentional," said Elle Withall of the Publicity Committee. "We're not just showing up—we're shaping impact, building legacy, and making sure service is felt, not just seen."

RC Compton adds, "We are more than a club. We are a legacy in motion."

For more information about the Wheaton Lions visit their website at wheatonlions.org



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