

The Wheaton Lions Club: A Century of Service and Community

Bob Goldsborough
Wheaton Lions Club
October 26, 2023



Looking Back at the Past 100 Years....

The Club looks pretty good for her age!

- The Wheaton Lions Club has performed immeasurable acts of service for the Wheaton area — and has built wonderful camaraderie and community along the way
- The Club expanded from ad hoc service acts to the six pillars of service shown below
- This centennial is an appropriate time to look back and consider the Club's faithfulness and history to its community — and it will help us understand how the Club got to where it is today!



Wheaton in the Early 1920s...

In 1923, Wheaton was coming up on 100 years of people living here!

- But Wheaton was still relatively small
- Can anyone guess what Wheaton's population was in the 1920 census?



Wheaton in the Early 1920s...

The town was coming up on 100 years of people living here!

- It had about **4,100** residents - up from 3,400 or so in 1910, and about 2,350 in 1900
- Wheaton was an agricultural center with a rail line, but it also was a county seat and the home of a college. The town appeared to be going places!



Meanwhile, on a National Level...

Something big happened in Evansville, Indiana, starting in 1916.

- With the advent of the new century (1900!), America was becoming something of a nation of “joiners” — people joined clubs of all kinds
- Organically, lions clubs (note the small “l” and the small “c”) had begun springing up around the country
- In October 1916, Evansville, Indiana physician Dr. William Woods below filed to incorporate the International Association of Lions Clubs, which would become Lions Clubs International



Then, in Chicago in 1917...

...Chicago insurance man Melvin Jones made an impact

- Meanwhile, Melvin Jones (1879-1961) also had a vision for what Lions Clubs International could be. Jones (below) *also* is credited with founding the organization
- Jones didn't like the "business-only" aspect of Lions; he famously said: "I'm finding out that you don't get very far until you start doing something for somebody else."
- The international organization held a national organizational meeting in Chicago in June 1917



And the Name?

It wasn't chosen at random.

- A 1931 issue of THE LION magazine explained that *“from time immemorial, the lion has been the symbol of all that was good, and because of the symbolism that name was chosen. Four outstanding qualities — Courage, Strength, Activity and Fidelity — had largely to do with the adoption of the name....Fidelity has a deep and peculiar significance for all Lions. The lion symbol...stands for loyalty to a friend, loyalty to a principal, loyalty to a duty, loyalty to a trust.”*



Back in Wheaton...

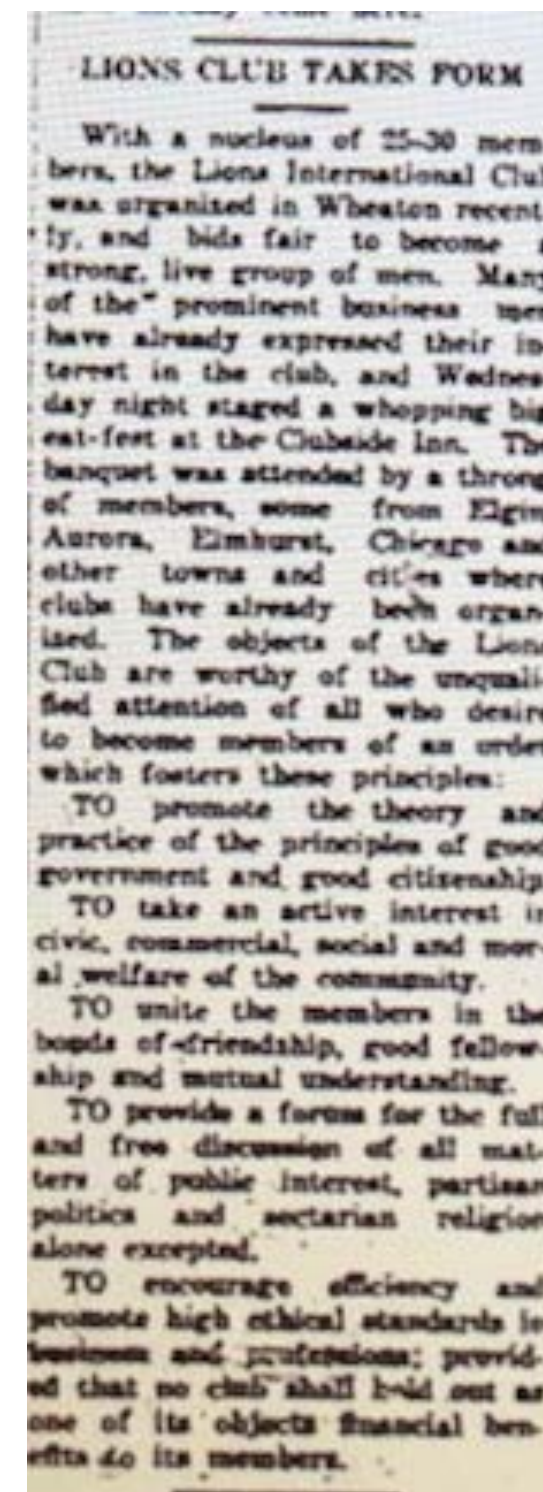
...organizing was taking place!

- On September 19, 1923, the Wheaton Lions Club organized at a meeting at the Clubside Inn, according to a local newspaper. The Wheaton Illinoian newspaper called the event “a whopping big eat-fest,” with attendees from other Lions Clubs, including Elmhurst, Aurora, Elgin and Chicago. About 100 attended.
- Carlson was asked to join because he was a businessman in Wheaton and his name was on a list of outstanding businessmen being recruited to join Lions. George Allmart was named temporary chairman.
- Things came together fast. On October 2, 1923, there was a permanent organizational meeting.

Back in Wheaton...

...organizing was taking place!

- On October 23, the club officially was chartered with 58 charter members and the first president being Dr. George B. Dyche, who is below (and yes, his brother is the former namesake of Northwestern University's football stadium)
- Wheaton Illinoian, 9/21/1923 (center) and Wheaton Progressive, 9/21/1923 (right)



A Very Early Guest of the Wheaton Lions Club

Hint: It's a big name.

- On December 27, 1923 — just two months after the Wheaton Lions Club was formed, the Club gave a dinner at the Clubside Inn for a very famous Wheaton resident
- The guest of honor? Football legend and Wheaton favorite son Harold “Red” Grange, who then was still an All-American halfback at the University of Illinois



The Early Years: 1923-1945

A club getting its footing

- In its earliest years, the Club started getting its footing, meeting in the Gary-Wheaton Bank building — first upstairs, and then in rooms in the basement. Mrs. R.C. Adams was the Club cook and “mother”
- Much of the Club’s activities weren’t not dissimilar from what takes place today. Such as....
- **Club presidents mostly served for just one year.** After George Dyche’s inaugural term as president, William E. Gary was the next one, followed by William Renton (for two years) and then George A. Carlson, Daniel Garrity, O.C. Gettinger and Robert Salisbury
- **Golf mattered. A lot.** The Club held annual golf outings at the Green Valley Country Club in the late 1930s and 1940s; golf course manager “Uncle Ed” Kelly was a Club member
- **Speakers held court at Club meetings about local goings-on, past and present.** For example, on February 4, 1936, elderly railroad retiree Jesse Fox spoke to the Club about working as a lad for Washington Wheaton for \$4 a month, about onetime log cabins in town and when the “dirty third ward” (south side) largely was a slough (a swamp)!
- **Members ate, mostly at lunch meetings!** Even before the Wheaton Club was official, the Club met at 12 p.m. on Tuesdays. An October 19, 1923 Wheaton Illinoian article tells us that the Club had met for a “banquet and business meeting and Central block hall Tuesday noon.” And yes, there was a Tail Twister.

The Early Years: 1923-1945

“We serve”

- The Club’s first major civic service was for the benefit of the children at a home for disabled children at Prince Crossing. Movies were provided for each week for an entire year for the boys and girls.
- The Club held an annual Christmas party at the Wheaton Theater for those children, with admission being a can of food for that home
- Club “fines” (for arriving late, wearing too loud a tie, etc.) went to provide glasses for needy boys and girls and for Braille systems for adults

The Early Years: 1923-1945

Getting political! (Sort of.)

- During the 1930s, the Club weighed in on civic issues, including lobbying for the construction of a never-built “West Side Highway” to parallel the railroad from Chicago’s West Side out to Wheaton
- One of the Club’s most interesting advocacy projects took place in 1934, when it sponsored a project to show what could be done with a Federal Housing Administration loan to rebuild and modernize a home. Under the leadership of Club President Duke S. Durfee, the Club paid to move a dilapidated real estate office from a subdivision in town to where the Front Street/French Market canopy is today. A demonstration project, showing the transformation into an Early American cottage



An old subdivision office, shown on the left, has been moved to a conspicuous corner in Wheaton and is to be transformed into a four room early American cottage, shown on the right. This is the first Chicago suburban demonstration project to visualize what can be done with a loan secured under the provisions of the national housing act. The Wheaton modernization program is sponsored by the Wheaton Lions' club and is managed by B. H. Arnold and W. S. Graham, of that suburb. Robert H. Salisbury, G. H. Mathews, and C. McKinley Olson, all of Wheaton, are architects of the above project.

The Early Years: 1923-1945

Lots of lunches, and then, honoring the Club's "Mother"

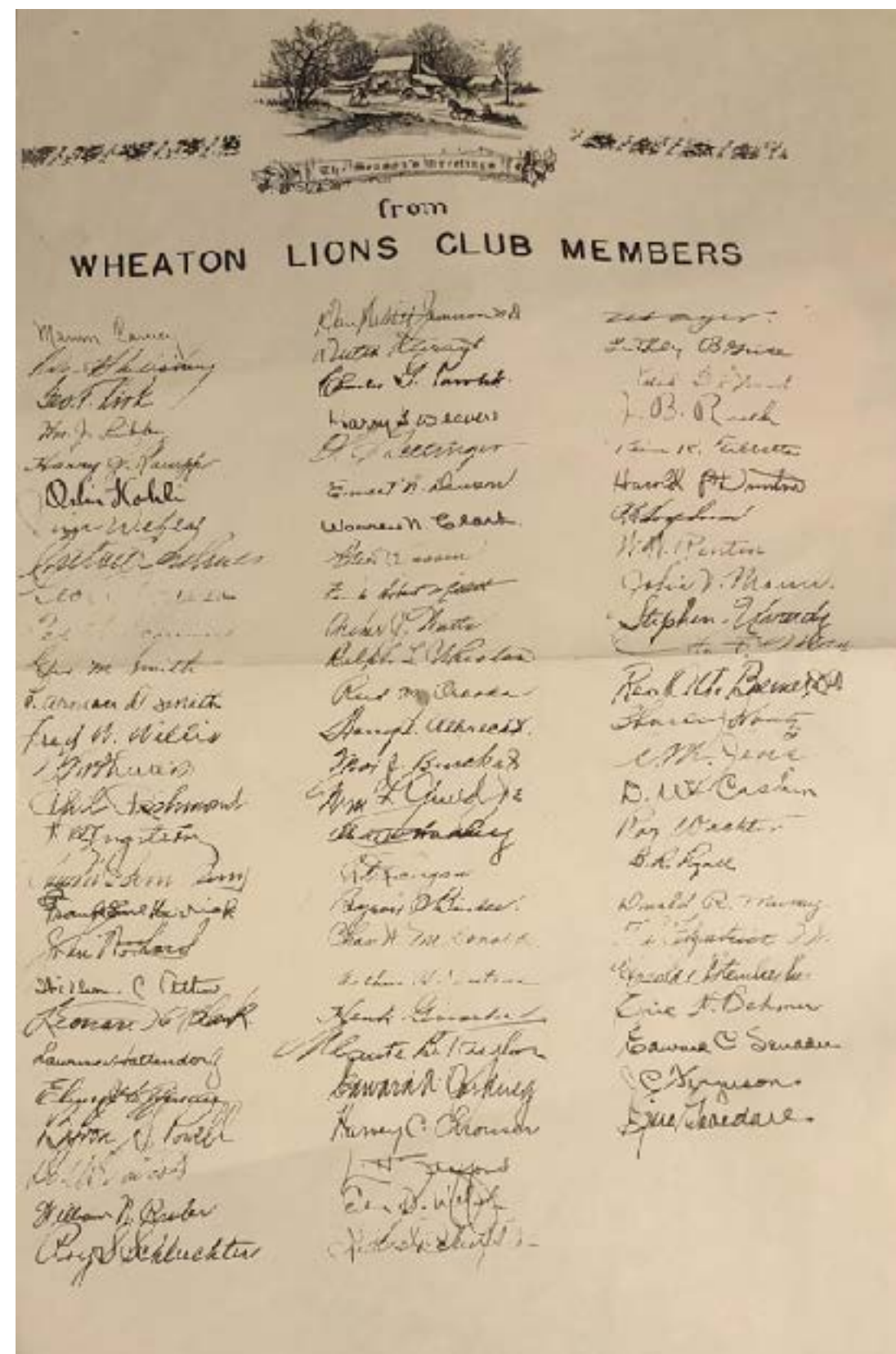
- On October 18, 1938, the Club held an evening dinner to honor Mrs. Marie Adams for serving luncheons to the Club for its first 15 years. Five charter members — Anton Carlson, Ralph L. Wheaton, William W. Renton, Frank Sauer and George M. Smith — were in attendance. Frank Herrick composed and recited a poem about Mrs. Adams



The Early Years: 1923-1945

An effort to support a local lieutenant

- One of the most unusual things ever to happen to the Wheaton Lions Club began in 1941. Club members signed a letter and sent it to a serviceman from Wheaton, Lt. William Tibbett. The letter never made it to him - instead it was found in 2003 (yes, 2003) and returned to the Club. Merry Christmas — from everyone from Marvin Carney to B.R. Ryall!



The Early Years: 1923-1945

A creative project during World War II

- After Katherine Adams Wells died in 1942 and her mansion was demolished to make way for what's now Adams Park, the Wheaton Lions Club and the Wheaton Garden Club teamed up in the summer of 1943 to turn the former Adams mansion's kitchen garden into a demonstration war garden

retreat.
John Quincy Adams has given permission for the former kitchen garden of the estate to be used this summer by the Wheaton Lions club and the Wheaton Garden club for a demonstration war garden.
The two garden houses will be

The Early Years: 1923-1945

Scrap drives, fairs and more

- In 1943, the Chicago Tribune reported that on a ratio to population, the Wheaton Lions Club had the largest membership of any Lions Club in the Chicago area
- Then-Club President Rudy Scheffler (below) told that he favored proceeding with an old-fashioned county fair in the fall, with other civic groups. Rudy is “with” the Club at every lunch, as his name is engraved on the wooden lion at the head table at lunch



Rudolph Scheffler,



RUDOLPH SCHEFFLER
Florist



The Early Years: 1923-1945

Scrap drives, fairs and more

- Scheffler also told the Tribune that the Club's initiatives included a scrap drive the previous year that brought in 170 tons of metal, with the proceeds being used to fund Christmas greetings to Wheatonites in the military



The Postwar Years: 1945-1971

The Club matures, and the city's population grows a lot

- Wheaton's population quadrupled between 1940 and 1970 - from 7,389 to 31,138
- A larger city meant more ways to serve, and the Club stepped up, in numerous ways
- One initiative: Co-sponsoring (with Wheaton College) a visit to Wheaton from U.S. Sen. C. Wayland Brooks in 1946 to discuss the Bill of Rights
- Another project: Assisting pilots by funding the placement in 1947 of a 240-foot-long air marker spelling out the word "Wheaton" and a north arrow atop three adjoining flat-roofed garages at the southeast corner of Front Street and Wheaton Avenue



Airplane view of marker painted on roofs of Wheaton buildings. Larger arrow points north and legend gives latitude and longitude; smaller one gives direction and distance in miles to York township airport.

The Postwar Years: 1945-1971

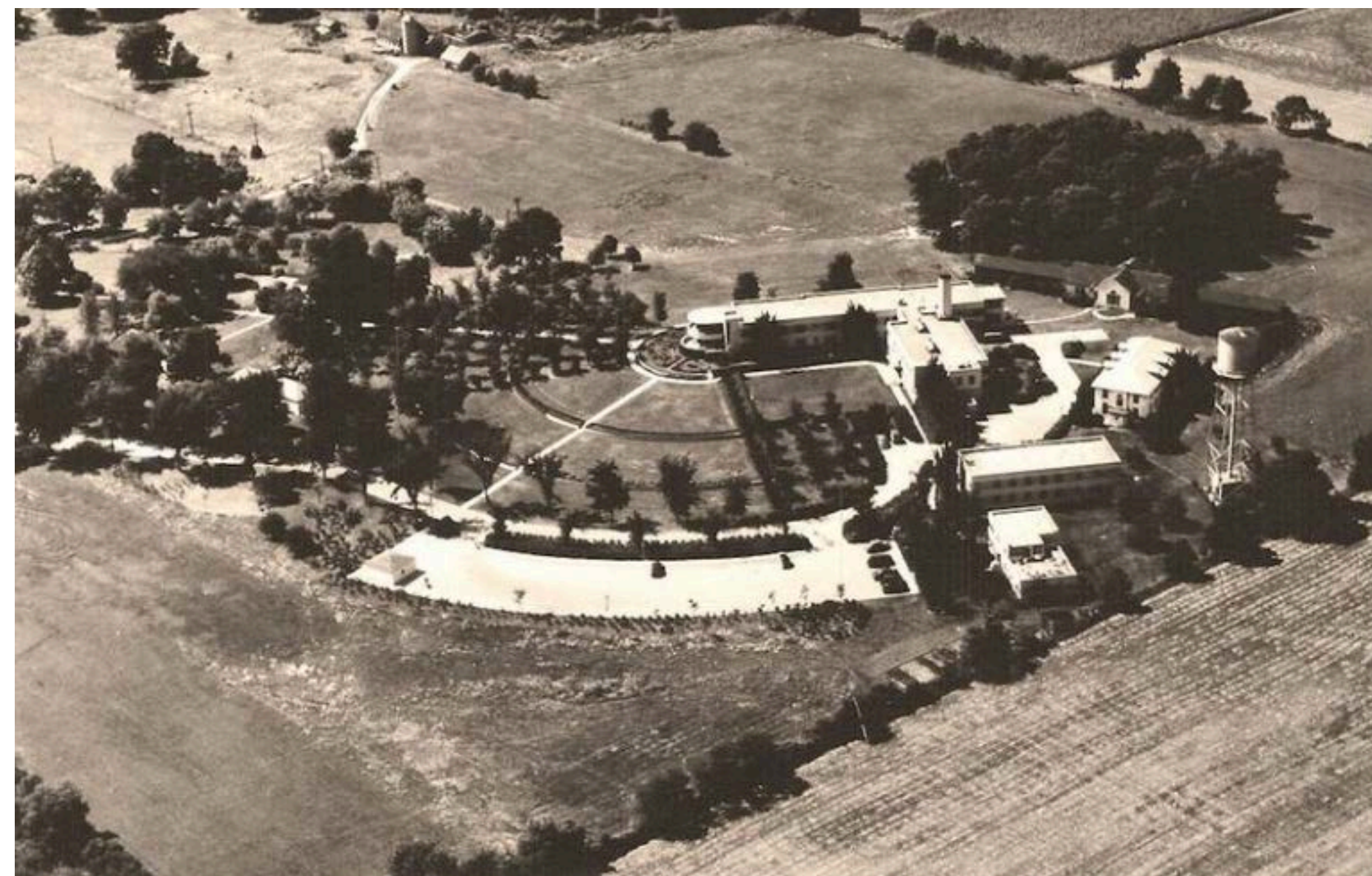
Other postwar initiatives

- In 1951, the Club began sponsoring a circus to benefit Wheaton's Little League baseball programs
- Four years later, the Club sponsored a visit by the University of Paris' basketball team to come to Wheaton to play Wheaton College, with the proceeds going to the Club's charity program
- In 1956, the Club stepped in to offer a suggestion to Wheaton officials battling the devastating Dutch elm disease. The suggestion? Dividing Wheaton into 29 "tree protection regions" with 29 local organizations assuming unofficial titles of forester
- The Club also started providing scholarships to local students as far back as the late 1950s, although the program was cancelled in 1972

The Postwar Years: 1945-1971

Supporting CDH

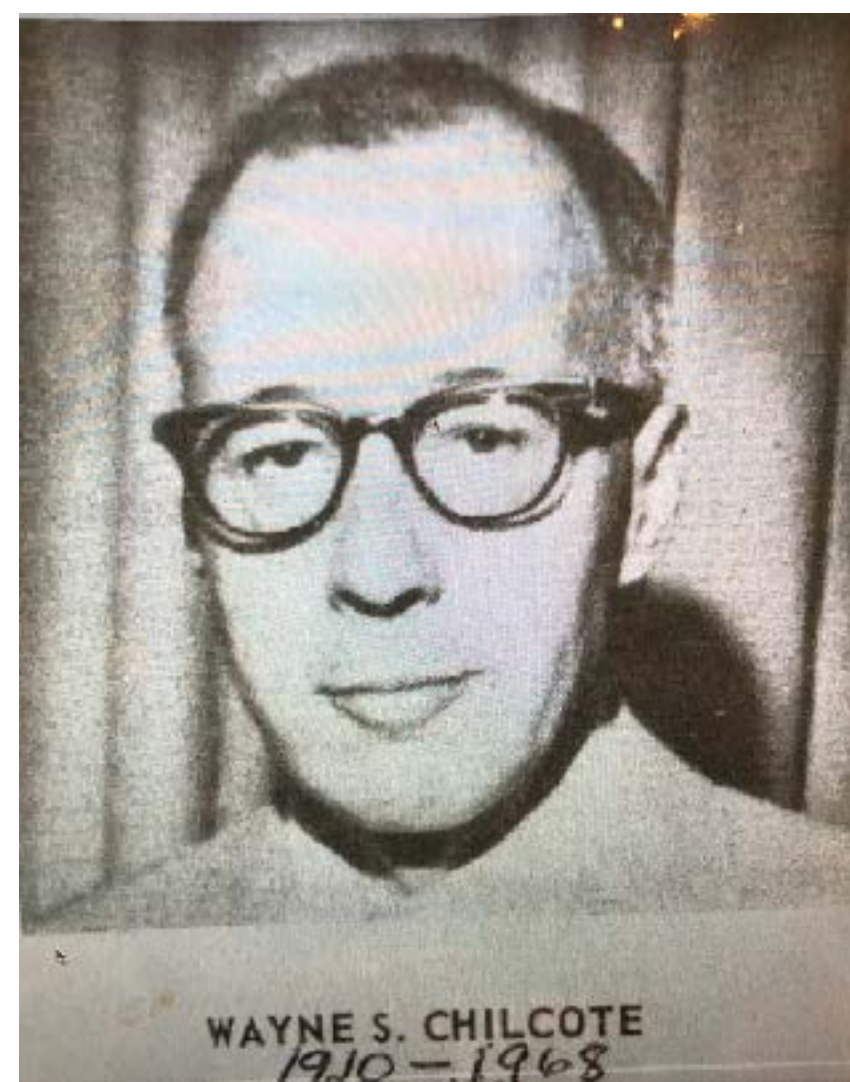
- In the late 1950s, the Club raised and donated \$25,000 to help create Central DuPage Hospital in Winfield (1962 photo of the hospital shown below)
- Many Club members were active with time and money in building the hospital, including Edwin Deicke, Jim Anderson (CDH's first president), Jack Burt, Jim Knippen and others



The Postwar Years: 1945-1971

“Sight Program”

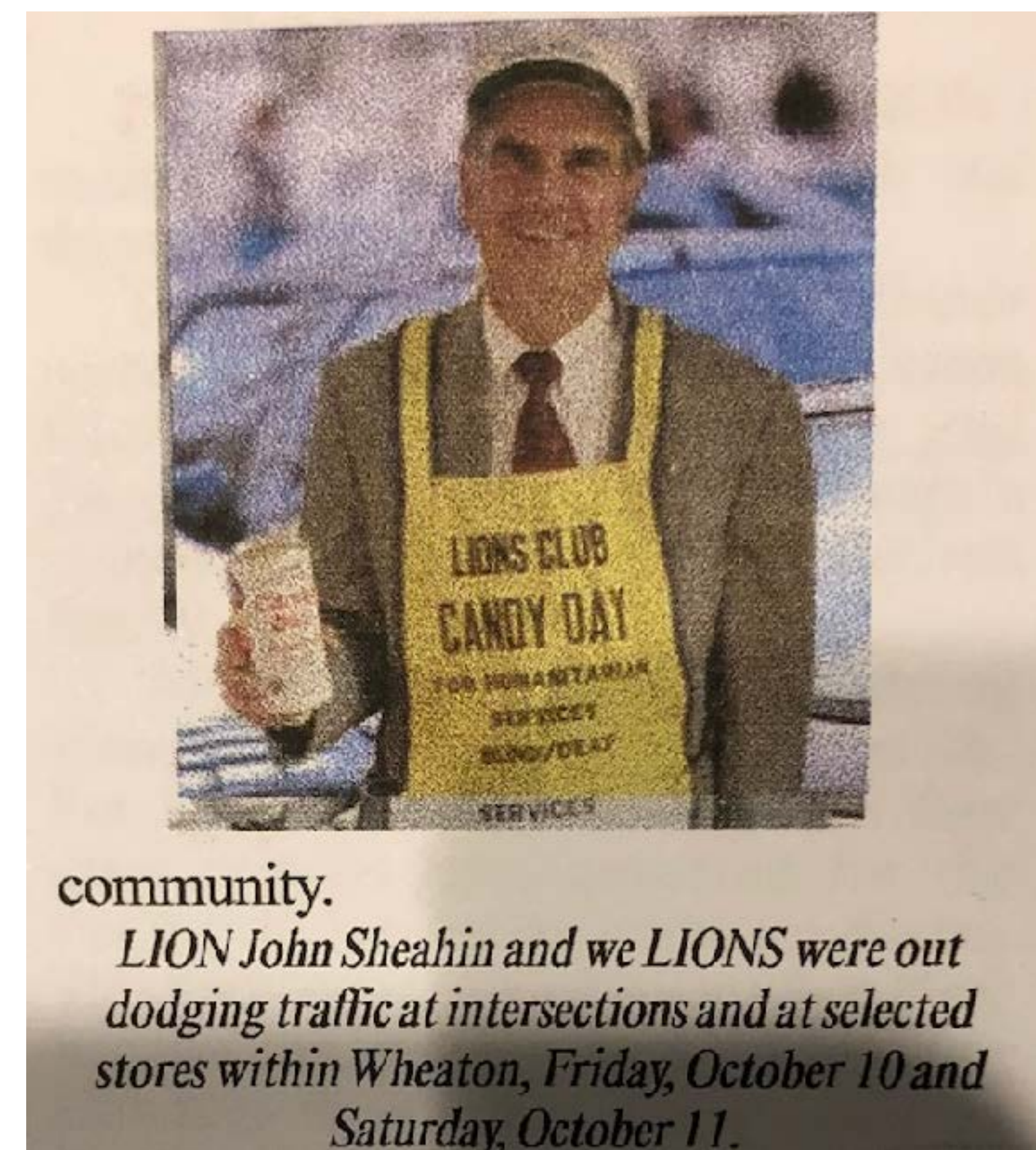
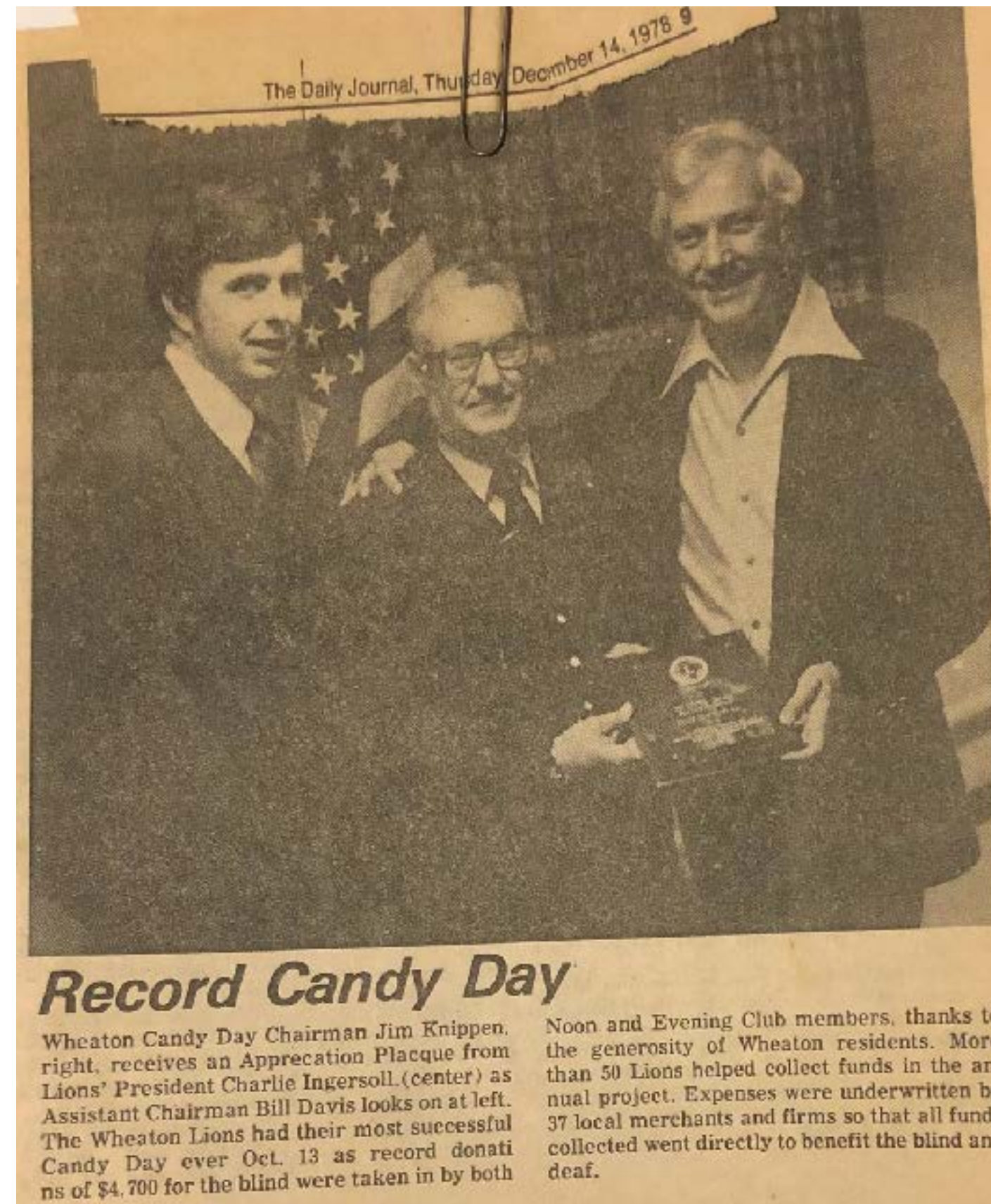
- After WWII, the Wheaton Lions Club established a “Sight Program” with the guidance of the late Lion member Dr. Wayne S. Chilcote (below), offering eye exams and glasses to Wheaton school system students in need
- In the 1990s, the Club established a more elaborate screening process for accepting applications, with a wider source for referrals. By the late 1990s, the Club was accepting applications from District 200, the DuPage Convalescent Center, Family Shelter Services, Canticle Place and DuPage PADS



The Postwar Years: 1945-1971

Candy Days starts nationally in 1952, and here in Wheaton as well

- One of the Wheaton Lions Club's finest and most longstanding traditions (dating back decades) is Candy Days, which raises funds to help the visually and hearing impaired. About a decade ago, the date was changed from October to May



The Postwar Years: 1945-1971

A clean sweep?

- A Wheaton Lions Club fundraiser in late 1960s and early 1970s involved selling brooms and light bulbs, believe it or not
- It was a bright idea!



A Changing Wheaton Lions Club: 1971-2000

Trying something new: the Wheaton (Evening) Lions Club

- In January 1972, during the presidency of James H. Knippen, the Club formed the Wheaton (Evening) Lions Club as an offshoot, headed by Robert C. Jungknecht. The group met at 7 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at the late, great Tally Ho Inn (below) at 27W103 North Avenue, West Chicago. The Wheaton Evening Lions Club lasted until November 1980, ending just a year or two before the Tally Ho closed



The International Association of Lions Clubs
Organization Report

Club of: WHEATON (EVENING), ILLINOIS U.S.A.
City State Country

Specific boundary lines of the area covered by this club are as follows:
North: CENEA ROAD
East: LORRAINE ROAD
South: BUTTERFIELD ROAD
West: COUNTY FAIR ROAD

District: 1-1 Region: SOUTHEASTERN Zone Number: 2

Date Organized: JAN 17, 72 Wheaton (Evening) C. Arthur Hammer, D.D.G., 1-3
19 72 Secretary: Ted A. Walsh, State Secretary

President: ROBERT C. JUNGKNECHT, 518 South Erie, Wheaton, Illinois 60187
(Name) (Complete Mailing Address)

Secretary: DENNIS BRENNAN, 412 South Erie, Wheaton, Illinois 60187
(Name) (Complete Mailing Address)

Treasurer: WILLIAM WALSH, 412 South Beverly, Wheaton, Illinois 60187
(Name) (Complete Mailing Address)

NOTE: Names of officers must be listed in full, because of computer limitations.

Meeting Day: 2 - 4 - Tuesday Time: 7:00 P.M. Place: Tally-Ho Rest.
(Nightly, 64 - W. Chicago)

Charter Presentation Date: 2-26-72 (Must be within 90 days of organization date)

Charter Night Chairman: TO BE APPOINTED John Fararo, 1420 Chicago
(Name) (Complete Mailing Address)

President of SPONSORING Club: James H. Knippen, 135 N. Main St., Wheaton, Illinois 60187
(Name) (Complete Mailing Address)

This is to certify that the Lions Club of WHEATON (EVENING), located at WHEATON, ILLINOIS, has been satisfactorily organized and application for charter is hereby approved.

It is understood that the amount per capita to be paid for the remaining months of the term shall begin on the first day of the month following the month that the name is reported to the International Office. The per capita dues will be 10¢ per month, plus the not-yet-paid dues for the International Convention Fund.

Representative of F. C. A. V. A. T. T. E. S. T. Secretary: Robert C. Jungknecht
(Name) (Name)

Number on shipping notice for club supplies: 15,9559 Date: 11-30-72

8-30-A 5M 1070 OFFICIAL PUBLISHED BY THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LIONS CLUBS



A Changing Wheaton Lions Club: 1971-2000

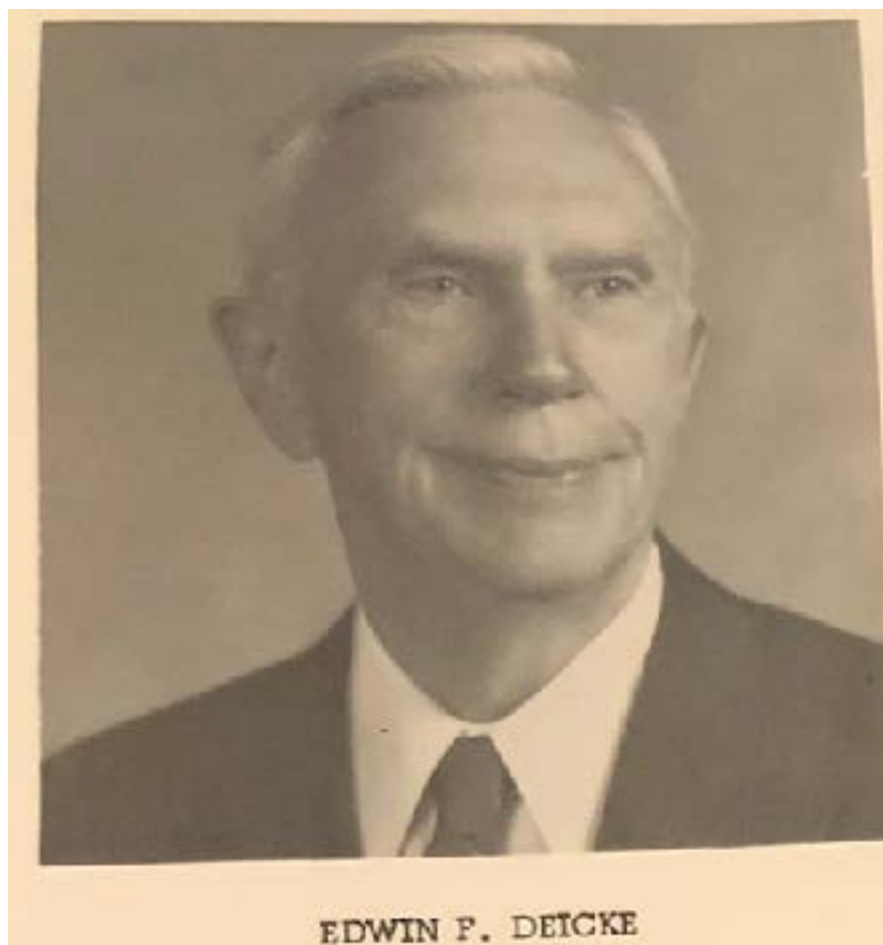
Strong Club leadership from several presidents who still are in the Club

- Jim Atten became president in 1976, Conrad Stoll became president in 1982, Mike Gresk became president in 1989, Jim Mathieson became president in 1996 and Bill Davis became president in 1999
- The Wheaton Lions Club admitted women for the first time starting in 1987. The Club's first female member? Ellie Heston, the proprietor of the late, departed Ellie's Emporium at 118 N. Main Street
- In 1998, Diana Soltess became the Club's first female president

A Changing Wheaton Lions Club: 1971-2000

Helping to organize the Spectrios Institute for Low Vision

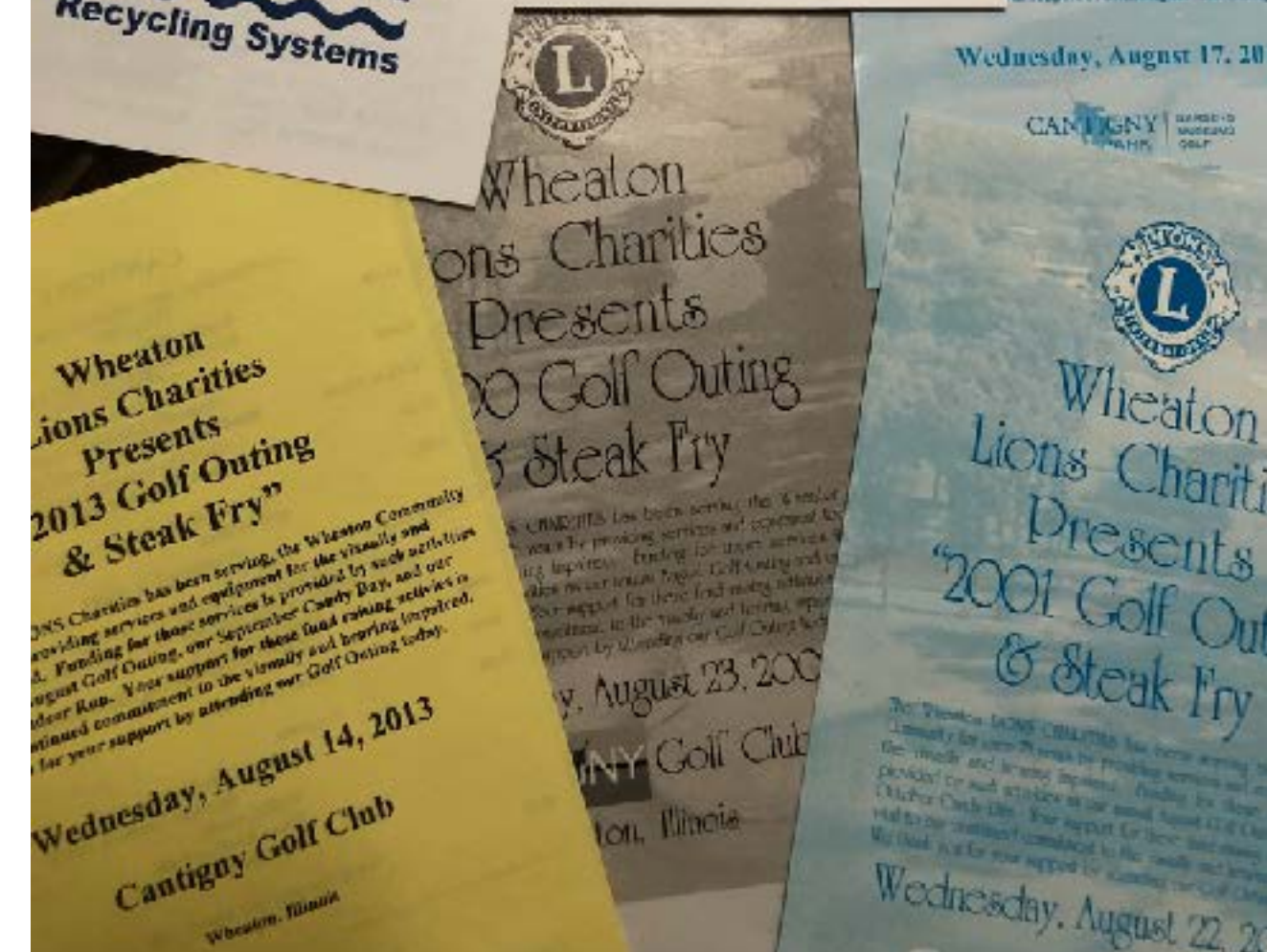
- Consistent with its commitment to improve people's vision regardless of income, the Club assisted in organizing the nonprofit Deicke Center for Visual Rehabilitation in 1986 — dedicated to helping individuals with low vision lead full, productive lives. Members helping to organize it included Edwin Deicke (who had suffered macular degeneration), Kenneth Gieser (who also suffered macular degeneration), Jim Anderson, Ralph Barger, George Newitt, Jim Gates and Bud Knoedler. Club member Tracy Williams has been Spectrios' executive director since the beginning.
- The Club continues to sponsor Spectrios with grants and event sponsorships, and in 2000, Lions Clubs International granted Spectrios \$75,000



A Changing Wheaton Lions Club: 1971-2000

The Club's Annual Golf Outing

- The annual golf outing is held every August at Cantigny, after previously having been held at St. Andrews. It dates to the 1950s & 1960s, when it was called Lions Play Day
- It solely benefits Wheaton Lions Club Charities. Spot your favorite Lion below!



A Changing Wheaton Lions Club: 1971-2000

Health screenings, in conjunction with other groups

- In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Wheaton Lions Club ran a health screening in conjunction with the Kiwanis Club's pancake breakfast — doing vision screening, hearing tests, glaucoma testing, blood donations and diabetes screening
- The DuPage County Health Department and Dist. 200 did most of the testing

The New Millennium: 2000-present

A Lion is born!

- In January 2000, Wheaton Lions Club member Karen Lellios gave birth to Brice Amber Lellios. Karen (shown below, with the Club's then-President Bill Davis) became the first Wheaton Lion to give birth while a member of the Club



The New Millennium: 2000-present

Scholarships return...

- The Club reestablished a more formal scholarship program in 2001 for Dist. 200 students with a financial need who are challenged by visual or hearing-related problems. The Club added Type 1 diabetes to that list in 2003. Initially, scholarships were funded from excess funds on Club cash. Later, scholarships were funded from money raised at annual events as well.



The New Millennium: 2000-present

...and new service traditions emerge

- An idea of Club member Ogden “Clip” Kniffin with early help from Club members Ron Austin and Brad Pihl, the Reindeer Run 5K was started by the Club in partnership with the Park District in 2012. The race had 505 runners in 2012, and has averaged 1,000-plus runners each of the past 5 years. It had a record 1,346 runners in 2017.
- Early on, the Reindeer Run raised money for CDH’s Ronald McDonald House; today, it raises money for Wheaton Lions Club programs



The New Millennium: 2000-present

Helping to eliminate “river blindness”

- So-called “river blindness” is a disease caused by infection from a parasitic worm; it’s the second-most common cause of blindness due to infection. It occurs almost exclusively in Africa.
- Medication costs about \$1 per person for a cure
- Around 2005, the Club committed to raise \$10,000 a year for three years to combat river blindness
- This has been a key initiative nationally, with major progress made to eliminate river blindness in Colombia and halting the spread of trachoma in Ethiopia

The New Millennium: 2000-present

A continued focus on vision and hearing

- Sight and hearing remain key areas of focus for the Wheaton Lions Club
- The Club continues to provide vision and hearing screening using mobile vision and hearing testing vehicles (like the mobile hearing screening bus below, shown at the Taste of Wheaton) and collect used eyeglasses (Dr. Conrad Stoll shown below, with an eyeglasses collection box) for use around the world
- Any individual Lions Club can reserve the Lions Club of Illinois' vision screening bus. Over the past five years, the Club has almost exclusively given vision screening tests to grade school-aged children at the Wheaton Public Library, a minimum of once every three months. The Wheaton Public Library has been a great partner to the Club.



The New Millennium: 2000-present

Lions Terrace created, in Memorial Park

- When the Wheaton Park District decided to revitalize Memorial Park — including its bandshell — the Club stepped up, to help support the funding of what became Lions Terrace, which is adjacent to the Mary Lubko Center building and which provides elevated VIP seating during special events, raised planter beds and a direct view of the new band shell. It was finished in 2020.



The New Millennium: 2000-present

Speaking of Lions Terrace....

- Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the Club was able to continue operating, through pandemic-era lunches at the Memorial Park bandshell



The New Millennium: 2000-present

Melvin Jones Awards

- Club members have been honored over the years with the Melvin Jones Award (technically, the Melvin Jones Fellowship), which are made in the name of certain Lions Club members and come after at least a \$1,000 donation to the Lions Clubs International Foundation
- Below, Club members Bill Davis, Bob Clavel and Cleve Carney receiving the award



Lions Bill Davis and Bob Clavel receiving the Melvin Jones Award at the Installation Dinner.



The New Millennium: 2000-present

The annual Christmas auction

- Years ago, the Christmas auction began as a “white elephant” gift exchange
- The current auction has become a very successful fundraiser



That's LION Keith Carlson and his committee who auctioned off some mighty nice prizes to raise funds for our sight and hearing impaired in Wheaton. L-R, LIONS Bruce Schurman, Keith Carlson, Harold Gaede, Mike Gresk and Neil Pollock

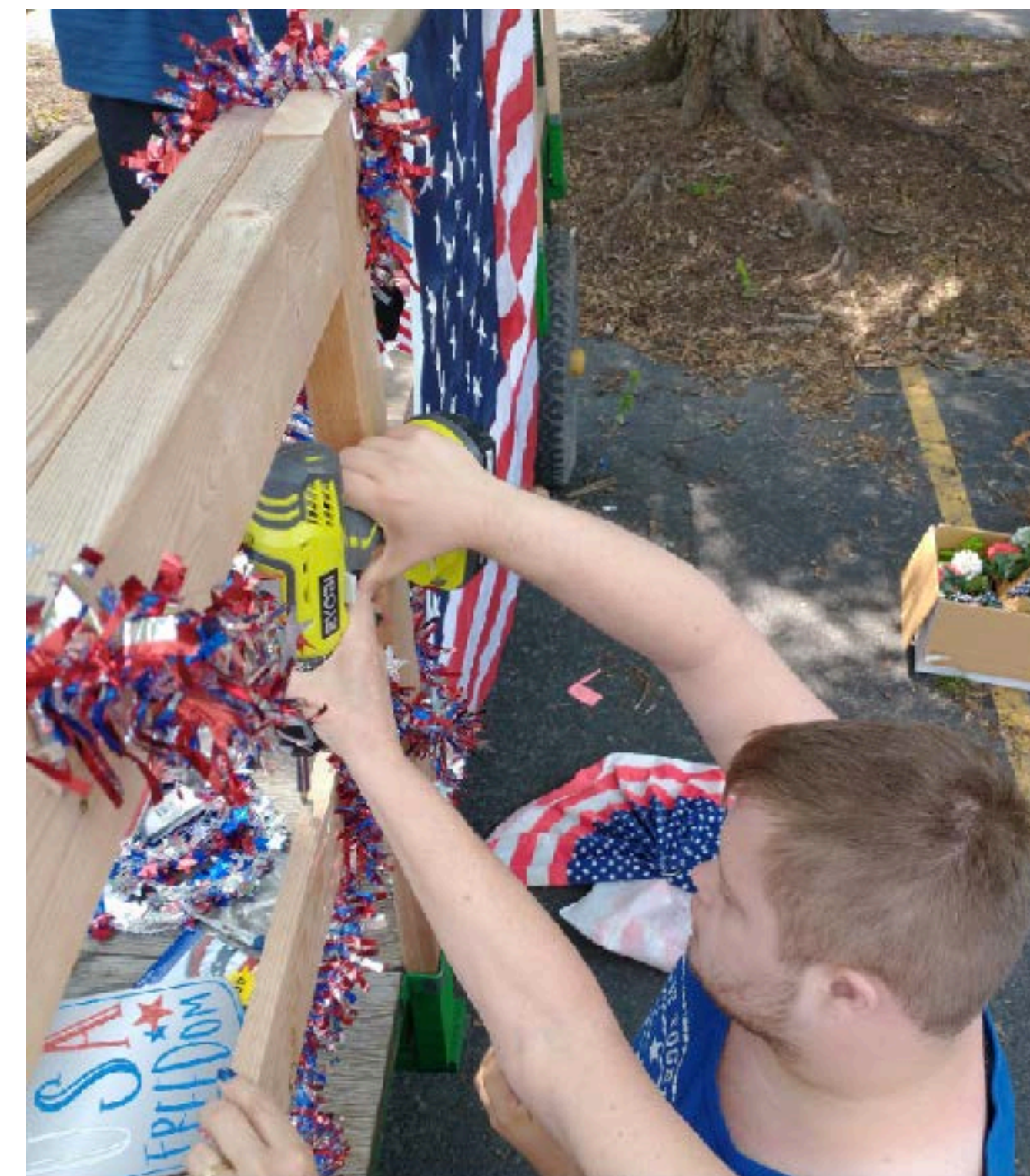


That's Santa LION Keith Carlson getting ready to auction off some mighty nice prizes to raise funds for our sight and hearing impaired in Wheaton.

The New Millennium: 2000-present

Don't forget the Fourth of July parade...

- The Club has had a regular presence in the city's Independence Day parade
- Pictured below, Lion and Wheaton Mayor Phil Suess, Lion Sarah Starke, and her Doodlebug Workshop students, all working to build the Club's 2021 parade float



The New Millennium: 2000-present

...or the meals! (Who can forget the meals!)

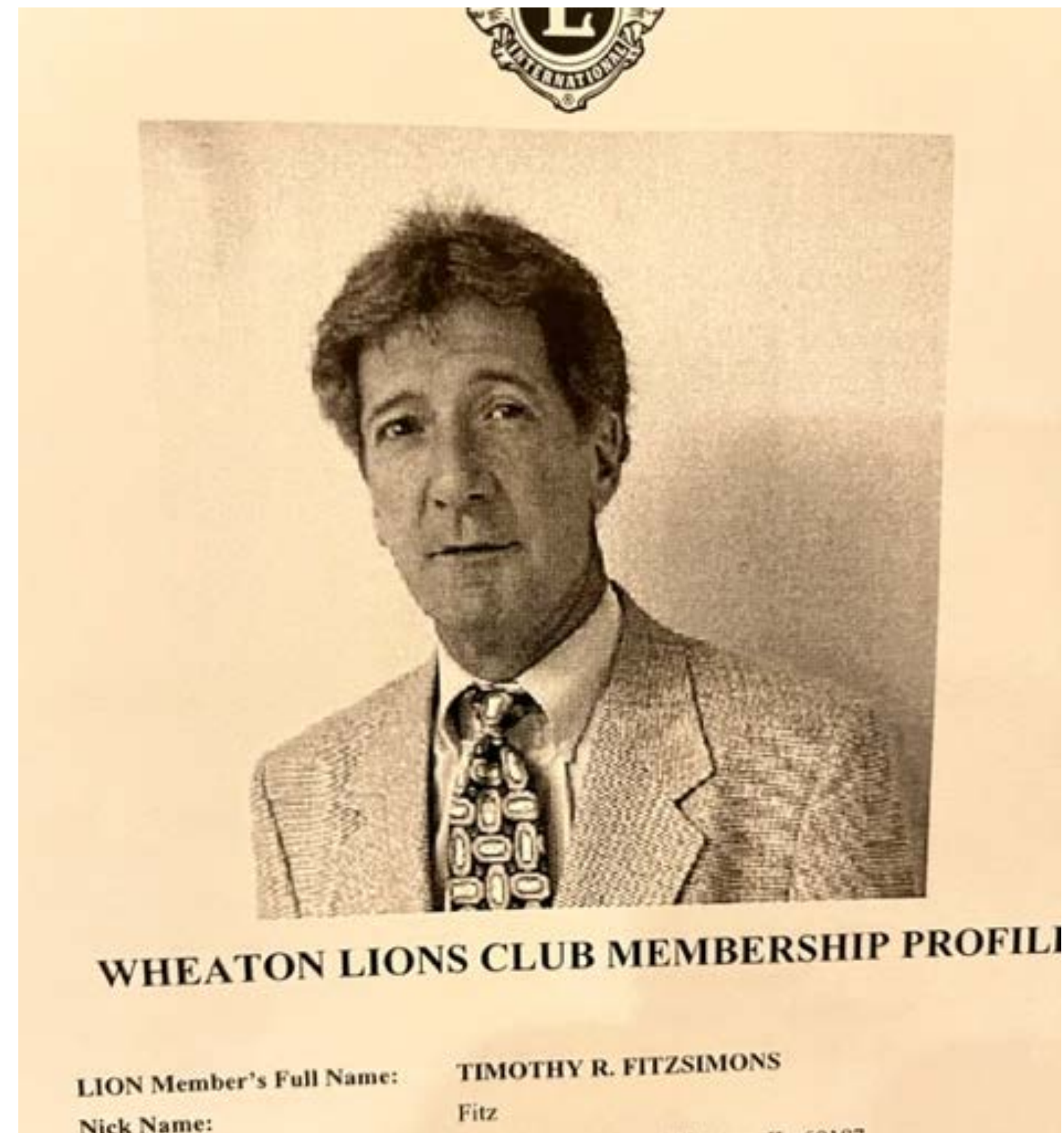
- Lions have been well fed over the years!
- After Mrs. Adams, those who have prepared such terrific meals for the club have included Jean Hahn (below left), Delores Anderson and the current Club caterer, Emily Jovancic (below right). Many thanks to all of the Club's fine caterers for their hard work!



The New Millennium: 2000-present

...or the club finances!

- For many years, the Club was well-served by Tim FitzSimons as its treasurer — a terrific steward of Club resources!



The New Millennium: 2000-present

Finally, celebrating the Club's centennial!

- Club President Joel Riley and other Club members, appearing before the City Council just last week, to receive the City Council's proclamation on the centennial



To Conclude — and, to Look Ahead....

- ...with 92 members strong at present, the Wheaton Lions Club has been a tremendous contributor to the fabric of Wheaton for 100 years now
- The Club also has made incredibly wide-ranging contributions aimed at bettering the lives of people here locally, and also around the globe

To Conclude — and, to Look Ahead....

- As the Club begins its second century, there's no question that its community contributions will continue, as will the Club's fellowship and camaraderie
- Thank you!**



- **Special thanks to: Ruth Carlson, RC Crompton, Bill Davis, Mike Gresk, Jim Mathieson and Conrad Stoll for their help in preparing this presentation