



Where We Started

It all started in November of 1978 when Lion Alfred Johnson from the Muskegon Host Lions Club approached John Riecki to start a Lions Club on the Northside of Muskegon. On many cold, wintry nights, Lion Bud Goodwin from the Lions of Michigan State Office in Lansing, drove to Muskegon to tell a group of potential Lions what we might be in for. We gathered in the library of the Reeths-Puffer Junior High School to hear the Lions' story and how we just might be able to make a difference to those in need in our community. Little did we know then just what impact we would have?

We started out with thirty eight Charter Members. Our Charter Night ceremonies were held on March 24, 1979 at the Doo Drop Inn. Our International President that year was Ralph Lynam from St. Johns, Michigan. Our District Governor was Bernard "Bernie" Gilliland who was in attendance. The Toastmaster for the evening was Past District Governor Alfred "Al" Johnson who was to be our Guiding Lion. There were more than 200 Lions and guests that night and a great time was had by all. The members of the Muskegon Lions Club, our sponsors, gave us a most memorable send off to a life of service.

Sadly, we lost Lion Johnson on April 15, 2009 at the age of 97.

Our first regular meeting was held on April 3, 1979 at the old Red Vest Restaurant on Ottawa Street. Our Charter President was John Riecki who did an outstanding job of leading us until June 30 of 1980. Like many Lions Clubs, our membership had its ups and downs. For various reasons, members came and went. It was not until 1989, when we started to do pre-induction orientation, prior to the formal acceptance, that our membership started to grow without the previous fluctuation. Our first fund raiser was White Cane Awareness Week which was held on April 27 & 28. That was later changed to the first weekend in May as not to interfere with the last opening of trout season. Today we still do White Cane along with many pancake breakfasts, Candy Days and our raffle calendar sales. In the beginning of Lions' year 1980-81, our club got involved in the Leader Dogs for the Blind Puppy Program. We located Lions members and others in the community interested in raising a puppy to become a Leader Dog. We also made our first community service donation of a large print typewriter for visually impaired students at North Muskegon High School. Of course, all that is now done with computers. We brought in the Sightmobile to do free sight screenings at the North Muskegon Art Fair. It was in 1980 we moved our meeting place to Aron's Restaurant in Laketon Township. In 1987 our mascot "Dandy" came to life. Dandy is our lion costume we purchased with the generosity of Northsider Mary Dobben who operated a costume shop. Dandy got a real workout being involved in the N. Muskegon Centennial Parade and the U. S. Coast Guard Festival Parade in Grand Haven, Michigan that year. Since then, he has brought joy to many, especially children, in area parades as well as his annual visits to area hospitals and a children's shelter at Christmas

time. Be assured that the Lion inside the costume enjoys the occasions the most.

Our community involvement has continued. We provided some of the initial leadership for the Northside Summer Spectacular (a community festival in August). Later on we started our own festival the Northside Lions' Spring Fling. We refurbished dugouts for the North Muskegon School's baseball field. We built two dugouts at Sodini Field at Fruitland Township Park. We built a picnic shelter at Laketon Township's Mullally Memorial Park. Our members joined together to replace bleacher boards at Reeths-Puffer School's Bolthouse Football Stadium and at North Muskegon's Fred Jacks Stadium. Our members built and erected a community sign at the entrance to North Muskegon. We have provided visual aids to many severely visually impaired persons. We have provided eye exams and eye glasses for more than eight hundred men, women and children who could not afford to do so themselves. We helped the North Muskegon and Muskegon Township Fire Departments purchase the "Jaws of Life" for their rescue units. In 2017, we purchased Automatic External Defibrillators to be placed in the Walker Memorial Library and North Muskegon City Hall. We continue to sponsor Little League teams. Each year we support the efforts of Reeths-Puffer High School's Post Grad Nite Committee. One of our most notable activities is the Lions of Michigan Vision Missions which is detailed elsewhere on this site. After 25 years, in 2016 this project was turned over to the Grand Rapids Lions Club.

Our members have provided our club and our district with quality leaders. Our sixth secretary was inducted in 2012 (our second one served for 18 years) and we have had just three treasurers. That shows stability. We have provided quality leaders for our district as Zone Chairmen (Dr. Dennis Cobler, John Emrich, Bob Schalow, Cheryl Schneider and Doug Schneider), Region Chairmen (Dr. Dennis Cobler, John Emrich, Bob Schalow, Cheryl Schneider and Doug Schneider), Cabinet Secretary/ Treasurers (Ed Weessies, Marie Emrich and Frank DiPiazza), four District Governors (Dr. Dennis Cobler, John Emrich, Bob Schalow and Doug Schneider) and even an International Director (Dr. Dennis Cobler) to our great Association. In 2004, we celebrated 25 years of Lionism. Our speaker was Past International Director John Walker and our president that year was Charter Member Lion Ed Weessies.

Our club joined with the Fruitport, Holton/Twin Lake, Mona Shores, Muskegon Host, Muskegon Eastside, Ravenna and Whitehall/Montague Lions Clubs of Muskegon County to help administer a special fund that currently (01/01/2018) has in excess of \$900,000.00 in it. This money came from a former resident of Muskegon who wanted the Lions to provide vision and hearing programs for residents of Muskegon County. From the interest earned, grants are made to sight and hearing projects for Muskegon County residents. What an awesome responsibility. Yet the clubs and the advisory committee have a sense of pride for what these funds have and can do for those in need. In 2005, our club made a \$50,000 commitment to Lions Clubs International

Fund - Campaign Sight First II. The money from this effort comes from our raffle calendar sales. Another \$38,000 member pledges and other community sources.

On May 5, 2009, Past International Director William Hansen visited our club and presented six Melvin Jones Fellowships and seven Progressive Melvin Jones Fellowships. In addition, there were two other Melvin Jones Fellowships awarded. As of May 1, 2018, our club has 56 members who have received a Melvin Jones Fellowship of which 17 members are Progressive Melvin Jones Fellows. Our current membership stands at 78.

2017-2018 was a sad year. Three of our long time Muskegon County Lions Clubs ceased operation – The Holton -Twin Lake Lions, Muskegon East Side Lions and the Muskegon Southside. Our club was most fortunate to gain four former members of Holton-Twin Lake.

In 2016, members of our club sought out grants to refurbish the Veterans' Memorial Park Causeway from Michigan Department of Transportation and West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Corp. Partnerships with the County of Muskegon, City of North Muskegon, City of Muskegon, Community Foundation for Muskegon County, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A total of 3.6 million dollars was raised. The two bridges joining the island with the main part of the park were sand blasted and repainted by members of our club with the assistance of a member of Muskegon Rotary. We also replaced all the wood on both bridges. We continue to decorate at Christmas time and during certain holidays and special events, place 3' by 5' foot flags around the park, truly a labor of love as many of our members are veterans.

In 2017, we assisted Laketon Township in erecting new playground equipment in Mullally Memorial Park. We also provide the labor to put in walkways and handicap viewing pads at the Lang baseball complex. We did the same behind Reeths-Puffer Central Elementary School.

For many years now our "ramp crew" has been, in cooperation with Love, INC., building ramps for the handicapped. Normally they do eight a year but as of this writing (5-2-2018) they have built four ramps with more to come.

Once again in June, representatives from our club will be presenting a \$1,000.00 scholarship to a graduating student from North Muskegon High School and Reeths-Puffer High School. A most worthwhile project.